

Rigveda

The **Rigveda** (Sanskrit: ऋग्वेद *ṛgveda*, from *ṛc* "praise, shine"^[1] and *veda* "knowledge") is an ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns. It is one of the four canonical sacred texts (*śruti*) of Hinduism known as the Vedas.^{[2][3]} The text is a collection of 1,028 hymns and 10,600 verses, organized into ten books (*Mandalas*).^[4] A good deal of the language is still obscure and many hymns as a consequence are unintelligible.^{[5][6][7]}

The hymns are dedicated to Rigvedic deities.^[4] For each deity series the hymns progress from longer to shorter ones; and the number of hymns per book increases.^[2] In the eight books that were composed the earliest, the hymns predominantly discuss cosmology and praise deities.^{[8][9]} Books 1 and 10, which were added last, deal with philosophical or speculative^[9] questions about the origin of the universe and the nature of god,^[10] the virtue of dāna (charity) in society,^[11] and other metaphysical issues in its hymns.^[12]

Rigveda is one of the oldest extant texts in any Indo-European language.^[13] Philological and linguistic evidence indicate that the Rigveda was composed in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent, most likely between c. 1500 and 1200 BC —^{[14][15][16]} though a wider approximation of c. 1700–1100 BC has also been given.^{[17][18][note 1]} The initial codification of the *Rigveda* took place during the early Kuru kingdom (c. 1200 – c. 900 BCE).

Some of its verses continue to be recited during Hindu rites of passage celebrations such as weddings and religious prayers, making it probably the world's oldest religious text in continued use.^{[23][24]}

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Text

Organization

Mandala

The text is organized in 10 books, known as Mandalas, of varying age and length.^[26]

The "family books", mandalas 2–7, are the oldest part of the Rigveda and the shortest books; they are arranged by length (decreasing^[27]^[28] length of hymns per book) and account for 38% of the text. Within each book, the hymns are arranged in collections each dealing with a particular deity: *Agni* comes first, *Indra* comes second, and so on. They are attributed and dedicated to a rishi (sage) and his family of students.^[29] Within each collection, the hymns are arranged in descending order of the number of stanzas per hymn. If two hymns in the same collection have equal numbers of stanzas then they are arranged so that the number of syllables in the metre are in descending order.^[30]^[31] The second to seventh mandalas have a uniform format.^[27]

The eighth and ninth mandalas, comprising hymns of mixed age, account for 15% and 9%, respectively. The first and the tenth mandalas are the youngest; they are also the longest books, of 191 suktas each, accounting for 37% of the text. However, adds Witzel, some hymns in Mandala 8, 1 and 10 may be as old as the earlier Mandalas.^[32] The first mandala has a unique arrangement not found in the other nine mandalas. The ninth mandala is arranged by both its prosody (chanda) structure and hymn length, while the first eighty four hymns of the tenth mandala have a structure different than the remaining hymns in it.^[27]

Sukta, ṛca, and pada

Each mandala consists of hymns called *sūkta* (*su-ukta*, literally, "well recited, eulogy") intended for various rituals. The *sūktas* in turn consist of individual stanzas called *ṛc* ("praise", *pl. ṛcas*), which are further analysed into units of verse called *pada* ("foot" or step). The meters most used in the *ṛcas* are the gayatri (3 verses of 8 syllables), anushtubh (4x8), trishtubh (4x11) and jagati (4x12). The trishtubh meter (40%) and gayatri meter (25%) dominate in the Rigveda.^[33]^[34]^[35]

For pedagogical convenience, each mandala is synthetically divided into roughly equal sections of several *sūktas*, called *anuvāka* ("recitation"), which modern publishers often omit. Another scheme divides the entire text over the 10 mandalas into *aṣṭaka* ("eighth"), *adhyāya* ("chapter") and *varga* ("class"). Some publishers give both classifications in a single edition.

The most common numbering scheme is by book, hymn and stanza (and *pada*, *b*, *c* ..., if required). E.g., the first *pada* is

- 1.1.1a *agnīm īle puróhitam* "Agni I invoke, the housepriest"

and the final *pada* is

- 10.191.4d *yáthā vah súsahāsati*

The Rigveda is not a book,
but a library and a literature.

—*E Vernon Arnold*, Cambridge University^[25]

Composers

Tradition associates a rishi (the composer) with each *ṛc* of the Rigveda.^[36] Most sūktas are attributed to single composers. The "family books" (2–7) are so-called because they have hymns by members of the same clan in each book; but other clans are also represented in the Rigveda. In all, 10 families of rishis account for more than 95% of the *ṛcs*; for each of them the Rigveda includes a lineage-specific āprī hymn (a special sūkta of rigidly formulaic structure, used for rituals).

Family	Āprī	Rcas ^[37]
Angiras	I.142	3619 (especially <u>Mandala 6</u>)
Kanva	I.13	1315 (especially <u>Mandala 8</u>)
Vasishtha	VII.2	1276 (<u>Mandala 7</u>)
Vishvamitra	III.4	983 (<u>Mandala 3</u>)
Atri	V.5	885 (<u>Mandala 5</u>)
Bhrgu	X.110	473
Kashyapa	IX.5	415 (part of <u>Mandala 9</u>)
Grtsamada	II.3	401 (<u>Mandala 2</u>)
Agastya	I.188	316
Bharata	X.70	170

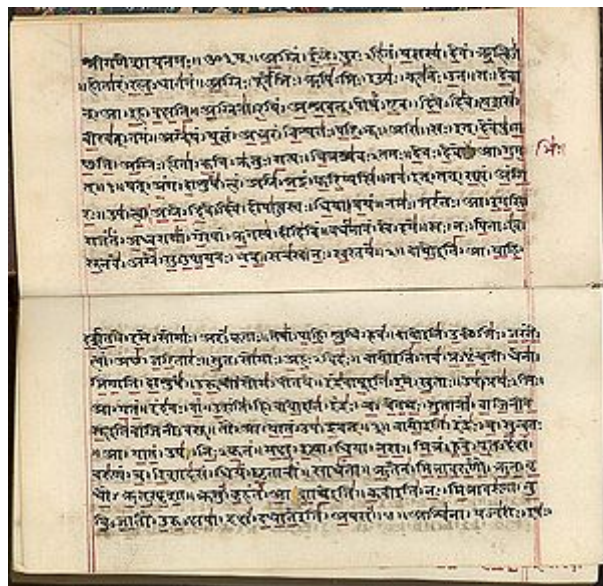
Transmission

The original text (as authored by the Rishis) is close to but not identical to the extant Samhitapatha, but metrical and other observations allow reconstruction (in part at least) of the original text from the extant one, as printed in the Harvard Oriental Series vol. 50 (1994).^[38]

The surviving form of the Rigveda is based on an early Iron Age collection that established the core 'family books' (mandalas 2–7, ordered by author, deity and meter ^[39]) and a later redaction, co-eval with the redaction of the other Vedas, dating several centuries after the hymns were composed. This redaction also included some additions (contradicting the strict ordering scheme) and orthoepic changes to the Vedic Sanskrit such as the regularization of sandhi (termed *orthoepische Diaskeuase* by Oldenberg, 1888).

As with the other Vedas, the redacted text has been handed down in several versions, most importantly the Padapatha, in which each word is isolated in pausa form and is used for just one way of memorization; and the Samhitapatha, which combines words according to the rules of sandhi (the process being described in the Pratisakhya) and is the memorized text used for recitation.

The Padapatha and the Pratisakhya anchor the text's true meaning,^[40] and the fixed text was preserved with unparalleled fidelity for more than a millennium by oral tradition alone.^[41] In order to achieve this the oral tradition prescribed very structured enunciation, involving breaking down the Sanskrit compounds into stems and inflections, as well as certain permutations. This interplay with sounds gave rise to a scholarly tradition of morphology and



Rigveda (padapatha) manuscript in Devanagari, early 19th century. After a scribal benediction ("śrīgaṇēśāyanamaḥ ;; Aum(3) ;;"), the first line has the opening words of RV.1.1.1 (*agnim̐ ; iḷe ; puraḥ-hitaṃ ; yajñasya ; devaṃ ; rtvijam̐*). The Vedic accent is marked by underscores and vertical overscores in red.

phonetics. The Rigveda was probably not written down until the Gupta period (4th to 6th centuries AD), by which time the Brahmi script had become widespread (the oldest surviving manuscripts are from ~1040 AD, discovered in Nepal).^{[2][42]} The oral tradition still continued into recent times.

Recensions

Several shakhas ("branches", i. e. recensions) of Rig Veda are known to have existed in the past. Of these, Śākalya is the only one to have survived in its entirety. Another shakha that may have survived is the Bāṣkala, although this is uncertain.^{[43][44][45]}

The surviving padapatha version of the Rigveda text is ascribed to Śākalya.^[46] The Śākala recension has 1,017 regular hymns, and an appendix of 11 vāṅkhyā hymns^[47] which are now customarily included in the 8th mandala (as 8.49–8.59), for a total of 1028 hymns.^[48] The Bāṣkala recension includes 8 of these vāṅkhyā hymns among its regular hymns, making a total of 1025 regular hymns for this śākhā.^[49] In addition, the Bāṣkala recension has its own appendix of 98 hymns, the Khilani.^[50]

In the 1877 edition of Aufrecht, the 1028 hymns of the Rigveda contain a total of 10,552 *ṛcs*, or 39,831 padas. The Shatapatha Brahmana gives the number of syllables to be 432,000,^[51] while the metrical text of van Nooten and Holland (1994) has a total of 395,563 syllables (or an average of 9.93 syllables per pada); counting the number of syllables is not straightforward because of issues with sandhi and the post-Rigvedic pronunciation of syllables like *súvar* as *svàr*.

Three other shakhas are mentioned in *Caraṇavyūha*, a pariśiṣṭa (supplement) of Yajurveda: Māṇḍūkāyana, Aśvalāyana and Śāṅkhāyana. The Atharvaveda lists two more shakhas. The differences between all these shakhas are very minor, limited to varying order of content and inclusion (or non-inclusion) of a few verses. The following information is known about the shakhas other than Śākalya and Bāṣkala:^[52]

- Māṇḍūkāyana: Perhaps the oldest of the Rigvedic shakhas.
- Aśvalāyana: Includes 212 verses, all of which are newer than the other Rigvedic hymns.
- Śāṅkhāyana: Very similar to Aśvalāyana
- Saisirīya: Mentioned in the Rigveda Pratisakhya. Very similar to Śākala, with a few additional verses; might have derived from or merged with it.

Manuscripts

Versions

There are, for example, 30 manuscripts of Rigveda at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, collected in the 19th century by Georg Bühler, Franz Kielhorn and others, originating from different parts of India, including Kashmir, Gujarat, the then Rajaputana, Central Provinces etc. They were transferred to Deccan College, Pune, in the late 19th century. They are in the Sharada and Devanagari scripts, written on birch bark and paper. The oldest of them is dated to 1464. The 30 manuscripts of Rigveda preserved at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Pune were added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2007.^{[53][54]}

Of these 30 manuscripts, 9 contain the samhita text, 5 have the padapatha in addition. 13 contain Sayana's commentary. At least 5 manuscripts (MS. no. 1/A1879-80, 1/A1881-82, 331/1883-84 and 5/Viś I) have preserved the complete text of the Rigveda. MS no. 5/1875-76, written on birch bark in bold Sharada, was only in part used by Max Müller for his edition of the Rigveda with Sayana's commentary.

Müller used 24 manuscripts then available to him in Europe, while the Pune Edition used over five dozen manuscripts, but the editors of Pune Edition could not procure many manuscripts used by Müller and by the Bombay Edition, as well as from some other sources; hence the total number of extant manuscripts known then must surpass perhaps eighty at least.^[55]

Comparison

The various Rigveda manuscripts discovered so far show some differences. Broadly, the most studied Śākala recension has 1017 hymns, includes an appendix of eleven *valakhilya* hymns which are often counted with the 8th mandala, for a total of 1,028 metrical hymns. The Bāṣakala version of Rigveda includes eight of these *vālakhilya* hymns among its regular hymns, making a total of 1025 hymns in the main text for this śākhā. The Bāṣakala text also has an appendix of 98 hymns, called the *Khilani*, bringing the total to 1,123 hymns. The manuscripts of Śākala recension of the Rigveda have about 10,600 verses, organized into ten Books (*Mandalas*).^{[4][56]} Books 2 through 7 are internally homogeneous in style, while Books 1, 8 and 10 are compilation of verses of internally different styles suggesting that these books are likely a collection of compositions by many authors.^[56]

The first mandala is the largest, with 191 hymns and 2,006 verses, and it was added to the text after Books 2 through 9. The last, or the 10th Book, also has 191 hymns but 1,754 verses, making it the second largest. The language analytics suggest the 10th Book, chronologically, was composed and added last.^[56] The content of the 10th Book also suggest that the authors knew and relied on the contents of the first nine books.^[56]

The Rigveda is the largest of the four Vedas, and many of its verses appear in the other Vedas.^[57] Almost all of the 1,875 verses found in *Samaveda* are taken from different parts of the Rigveda, either once or as repetition, and rewritten in a chant song form. The Books 8 and 9 of the Rigveda are by far the largest source of verses for Sama Veda. The Book 10 contributes the largest number of the 1,350 verses of Rigveda found in *Atharvaveda*, or about one fifth of the 5,987 verses in the Atharvaveda text.^[56] A bulk of 1,875 ritual-focussed verses of *Yajurveda*, in its numerous versions, also borrow and build upon the foundation of verses in Rigveda.^{[57][58]}

Contents

Altogether the Rig Veda consists of:

- Hymns to the deities, the oldest part of the Rig Veda
- *Brahmanas*, commentaries on the hymns
- *Aranyaka* or "forest books"
- *Upanishads*

Hymns

The Rigvedic hymns are dedicated to various deities, chief of whom are *Indra*, a heroic god praised for having slain his enemy *Vrtra*; *Agni*, the sacrificial fire; and *Soma*, the sacred potion or the plant it is made from. Equally prominent gods are the *Adityas* or Asura gods *Mitra-Varuna* and *Ushas* (the dawn). Also invoked are *Savitṛ*, *Vishnu*, *Rudra*, *Pushan*, *Brihaspati* or *Brahmanaspati*, as well as deified natural phenomena such as *Dyaus Pita* (the shining sky, Father Heaven), *Prithivi* (the earth, Mother Earth), *Surya* (the sun god), *Vayu* or *Vata* (the wind), *Apas* (the waters), *Parjanya* (the thunder and rain), *Vac* (the word), many *rivers* (notably the *Sapta Sindhu*, and the *Sarasvati River*). The *Adityas*, *Vasus*, *Rudras*, *Sadhyas*, *Ashvins*, *Maruts*, *Rbhus*, and the *Vishvadevas* ("all-gods") as well as the "thirty-three gods" are the groups of deities mentioned.

The hymns mention various further minor gods, persons, phenomena and items, and contain fragmentary references to possible historical events,

Nasadiya Sukta (Hymn of non-Eternity, origin of universe):

There was neither non-existence nor existence then;
Neither the realm of space, nor the sky which is beyond;
What stirred? Where? In whose protection?

There was neither death nor immortality then;
No distinguishing sign of night nor of day;
That One breathed, windless, by its own impulse;
Other than that there was nothing beyond.

Darkness there was at first, by darkness hidden;
Without distinctive marks, this all was water;
That which, becoming, by the void was covered;
That One by force of heat came into being;

Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it?
Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation?
Gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe.
Who then knows whence it has arisen?

notably the struggle between the early Vedic people (known as Vedic Aryans, a subgroup of the Indo-Aryans) and their enemies, the Dasa or Dasyu and their mythical prototypes, the Pāṇi (the Bactrian Parna).

Whether God's will created it, or whether He was mute;
Perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not;
Only He who is its overseer in highest heaven knows,
Only He knows, or perhaps He does not know.

—*Rigveda* 10.129 (Abridged, Tr: Kramer / Christian)^[10] This hymn is one of the roots of Hindu philosophy.^[59]

- Mandala 1 comprises 191 hymns. Hymn 1.1 is addressed to Agni, and his name is the first word of the *Rigveda*. The remaining hymns are mainly addressed to Agni and Indra, as well as Varuna, Mitra, the Ashvins, the Maruts, Usas, Surya, Rbhus, Rudra, Vayu, Brhaspati, Visnu, Heaven and Earth, and all the Gods. This Mandala is dated to have been added to *Rigveda* after Mandala 2 through 9, and includes the philosophical Riddle Hymn 1.164, which inspires chapters in later Upanishad such as the Mundaka.^{[9][60][61]}
- Mandala 2 comprises 43 hymns, mainly to Agni and Indra. It is chiefly attributed to the Rishigṛtsamada śaunahotra
- Mandala 3 comprises 62 hymns, mainly to Agni and Indra and the Vishvedevas. The verse 3.62.10 has great importance in Hinduism as the Gayatri Mantra. Most hymns in this book are attributed to viśvāmitra gāthindṛ.
- Mandala 4 comprises 58 hymns, mainly to Agni and Indra as well as the Rbhus, Ashvins, Brhaspati, Vayu, Usas, etc. Most hymns in this book are attributed to āmadeva gautama
- Mandala 5 comprises 87 hymns, mainly to Agni and Indra, the Visvedevas ("all the gods"), the Maruts, the twin-deity Mitra-Varuna and the Asvins. Two hymns each are dedicated to Ushas (the dawn) and to Savitṛ. Most hymns in this book are attributed to the atri clan.
- Mandala 6 comprises 75 hymns, mainly to Agni and Indra, all the gods, Pusan, Ashvin, Usas, etc. Most hymns in this book are attributed to the bārhaspatya family of Angirasas.
- Mandala 7 comprises 104 hymns, to Agni, Indra, the Visvadevas, the Maruts, Mitra-Varuna, the Asvins, Ushas, Indra-Varuna, Varuna, Vayu (the wind), two each to Sarasvatī (ancient river/goddess of learning) and Vishnu, and to others. Most hymns in this book are attributed to vasiṣṭha maitravaruṇi.
- Mandala 8 comprises 103 hymns to various gods. Hymns 8.49 to 8.59 are the apocryphal ālakhilya. Hymns 1–48 and 60–66 are attributed to the kāṇva clan, the rest to other (Angirasa) poets.
- Mandala 9 comprises 114 hymns, entirely devoted to Soma Pavamana, the cleansing of the sacred potion of the Vedic religion.
- Mandala 10 comprises additional 191 hymns, frequently in later language, addressed to Agni, Indra and various other deities. It contains the Nadistuti sukta which is in praise of rivers and is important for the reconstruction of the geography of the Vedic civilization and the Purusha sukta which has been important in studies of Vedic sociology.^[62] It also contains the Nasadiya sukta (10.129), probably the most celebrated hymn in the west, which deals with creation.^[10] The marriage hymns (10.85) and the death hymns (10.10–18) still are of great importance in the performance of the corresponding Grhya rituals.

Rigveda Brahmanas

Of the Brahmanas that were handed down in the schools of the *Bahvṛcas* (i.e. "possessed of many verses"), as the followers of the *Rigveda* are called, two have come down to us, namely those of the Aitareyins and the Kaushitakins. The *Aitareya-brahmana*^[63] and the *Kaushitaki-* (or *Sankhayana-*) *brahmana* evidently have for their groundwork the same stock of traditional exegetic matter. They differ, however, considerably as regards both the arrangement of this matter and their stylistic handling of it, with the exception of the numerous legends common to both, in which the discrepancy is comparatively slight. There is also a certain amount of material peculiar to each of them.

The *Kaushitaka* is, upon the whole, far more concise in its style and more systematic in its arrangement features which would lead one to infer that it is probably the more modern work of the two. It consists of thirty chapters (*adhyaya*); while the *Aitareya* has forty, divided into eight books (or pentads, *pancaka*), of five chapters each. The last ten *adhyayas* of the latter work are, however, clearly a later addition though they must have already formed part of it at the time of Pāṇini (c. 5th century BC), if, as seems probable, one of his grammatical sutras, regulating the formation of the names of Brahmanas, consisting of thirty and forty *adhyayas*, refers to these two works. In this last portion occurs the well-known legend (also found in the *Shankhayana-sutra*, but not in the *Kaushitaki-brahmana*) of Shunahshepa, whom his father Ajigarta sells and offers to slay, the recital of which formed part of the inauguration of kings.

While the Aitareya deals almost exclusively with the Soma sacrifice, the Kaushitaka, in its first six chapters, treats of the several kinds of *haviryajna*, or offerings of rice, milk, ghee, etc., whereupon follows the Soma sacrifice in this way, that chapters 7–10 contain the practical ceremonial and 1–30 the recitations (*shastra*) of the hotar. Sayana, in the introduction to his commentary on the work, ascribes the Aitareya to the sage Mahidasa Aitareya (i.e. son of Itara), also mentioned elsewhere as a philosopher; and it seems likely enough that this person arranged the Brahmana and founded the school of the Aitareyins. Regarding the authorship of the sister work we have no information, except that the opinion of the sage Kaushitaki is frequently referred to in it as authoritative, and generally in opposition to the Paingya—the Brahmana, it would seem, of a rival school, the Paingins. Probably, therefore, it is just what one of the manuscripts calls it—the Brahmana of Sankhayana (composed) in accordance with the views of Kaushitaki.

Rigveda Aranyakas and Upanishads

Each of these two Brahmanas is supplemented by a "forest book", or Aranyaka. The *Aitareyaranyaka* is not a uniform production. It consists of five books (*aranyaka*), three of which, the first and the last two, are of a liturgical nature, treating of the ceremony called *mahavrata*, or great vow. The last of these books, composed in sutra form, is, however, doubtless of later origin, and is, indeed, ascribed by Hindu authorities either to Shaunaka or to Ashvalayana. The second and third books, on the other hand, are purely speculative, and are also styled the *Bahvrca-brahmana-upanishad*. Again, the last four chapters of the second book are usually singled out as the *Aitareya Upanishad*^[64] ascribed, like its Brahmana (and the first book), to Mahidasa Aitareya; and the third book is also referred to as the *Samhita-upanishad*. As regards the *Kaushitaki-aranyaka*, this work consists of 15 adhyayas, the first two (treating of the mahavrata ceremony) and the 7th and 8th of which correspond to the 1st, 5th, and 3rd books of the Aitareyaranyaka, respectively, whilst the four adhyayas usually inserted between them constitute the highly interesting *Kaushitaki (Brahmana-) Upanishad*^[65] of which we possess two different recensions. The remaining portions (9–15) of the Aranyaka treat of the vital airs, the internal Agnihotra, etc., ending with the *amsha*, or succession of teachers.

Dating and historical context

Composition

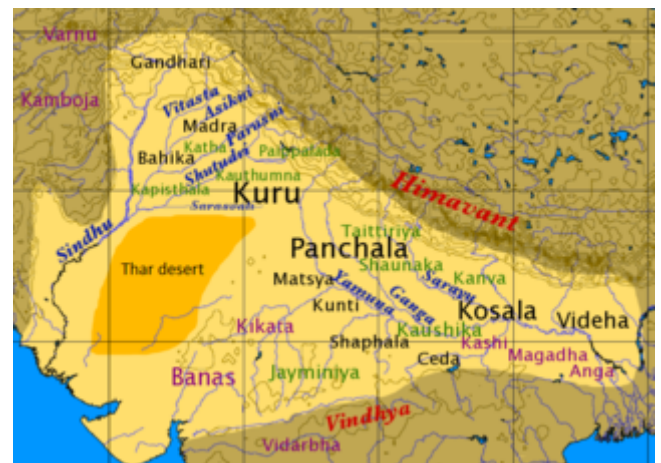
The earliest text were composed in greater Punjab (northwest India and Pakistan), and the more philosophical later texts were most likely composed in or around the region that is the modern era state of Haryana.^[66]

Philological estimates tend to date the bulk of the text to the second half of the second millennium.^[note 2]

Being composed in an early Indo-Aryan language, the hymns must post-date the Indo-Iranian separation, dated to roughly 2000 BC.^[68] A reasonable date close to that of the composition of the core of the Rigveda is that of the Mitanni documents of c. 1400 BC, which contain Indo-Aryan nomenclature.^[69] Other evidence also points to a composition close to 1400 BC.^{[70][71]}

The Rigveda's core is accepted to date to the late Bronze Age, making it one of the few examples with an unbroken tradition. Its composition is usually dated to roughly between c. 1500–1200 BC.^{[14][15][16][note 3]}

Codification



Geographical distribution of the Vedic era texts. Each of major regions had their own recension of Rig Veda (*Sakhas*), and the versions varied. The Kuru versions were more orthodox, but evidence suggests Vedic era people of other parts of Northern India had challenged the Kuru orthodoxy.^[2]

There is a widely accepted timeframe for the initial codification of the *Rigveda* by compiling the hymns very late in the Rigvedic or rather in the early post-Rigvedic period, including the arrangement of the individual hymns in ten books, coeval with the composition of the younger Veda Samhitas. This time coincides with the early Kuru kingdom, shifting the center of Vedic culture east from the Punjab into what is now Uttar Pradesh. The fixing of the samhitapatha (by keeping Sandhi) intact and of the padapatha (by dissolving Sandhi out of the earlier metrical text), occurred during the later Brahmana period.

Manuscripts

Writing appears in India around the 3rd century BC in the form of the Brāhmī script, but texts of the length of the Rigveda were likely not written down until much later,^[note 4] and the oldest extant manuscripts date to AD ~1040, discovered in Nepal.^[2] While written manuscripts were used for teaching in medieval times, they were written on birch bark or palm leaves, which decompose and therefore were routinely copied over the generations to help preserve the text. Some Rigveda commentaries may date from the second half of the first millennium AD. The hymns were thus composed and preserved by oral tradition for several^[75] millennia from the time of their composition until the redaction of the Rigveda, and the entire Rigveda was preserved in shakhas for another 2,500 years from the time of its redaction until the *editio princeps* by Rosen, Aufrecht and Max Müller

Historical context

The *Rigveda* is far more archaic than any other Indo-Aryan text. For this reason, it was in the center of attention of western scholarship from the times of Max Müller and Rudolf Roth onwards. The *Rigveda* records an early stage of Vedic religion. There are strong linguistic and cultural similarities with the early Iranian Avesta,^{[76][77]} deriving from the Proto-Indo-Iranian times,^[78] often associated with the early Andronovo culture (or rather, the Sintashta culture within the early Andronovo horizon) of c. 2000 BC.^[79]

The Rigveda offers no direct evidence of social or political system in Vedic era, whether ordinary or elite.^[62] Only hints such as cattle raising and horse racing are discernible, and the text offers very general ideas about the ancient Indian society. There is no evidence, state Jamison and Brereton, of any elaborate, pervasive or structured caste system.^[62] Social stratification seems embryonic, then and later a social ideal rather than a social reality.^[62] The society was pastoral with evidence of agriculture since hymns mention plow and celebrate agricultural divinities.^[80] There was division of labor, and complementary relationship between kings and poet-priests but no discussion of relative status of social classes.^[62] Women in Rigveda appear disproportionately as speakers in dialogue hymns, both as mythical or divine Indrani, Apsaras Urvasi, or Yami, as well as Apāla Ātreya (RV 8.91), Godhā (RV 10.134.6), Ghoshā Kākṣīvatī (RV 10.39.40), Romaśā (RV 1.126.7), Lopāmudrā (RV 1.179.1-2), Viśvavārā Ātreya (RV 5.28), Śacī Paulomī (RV 10.159), Śasvatī Āṅgirasī (RV 8.1.34). The women of Rigveda are quite outspoken and appear more sexually confident than men, in the text.^[62] Elaborate and esthetic hymns on wedding suggest rites of passage had developed during the Rigvedic period.^[62] There is little evidence of dowry and no evidence of sati in it or related Vedic texts.^[81]

The Rigvedic hymns mention rice and porridge, in hymns such as 8.83, 8.70, 8.77 and 1.61 in some versions of the text,^[82] however there is no discussion of rice cultivation.^[80] The term "ayas" (metal) occurs in the Rigveda, but it is unclear which metal it was.^[83] Iron is not mentioned in Rigveda, something scholars have used to help date Rigveda to have been composed before 1000 BC.^[66] Hymn 5.63 mentions "metal cloaked in gold", suggesting metal working had progressed in the Vedic culture.^[84]

Some of the names of gods and goddesses found in the *Rigveda* are found amongst other belief systems based on Proto-Indo-European religion, while words used share common roots with words from other Indo-European languages.^[85]

The horse (ashva), cattle, sheep and goat play an important role in the Rigveda. There are also references to the elephant (Hastin, Varana), camel (Ustra, especially in Mandala 8), ass (khara, rasabha), buffalo (Mahisa), wolf, hyena, lion (Simha), mountain goat (sarabha) and to the gaur in the Rigveda.^[86] The peafowl (mayura), the goose (hamsa) and the chakravaka (*Tadorna ferruginea*) are some birds mentioned in the Rigveda.

Atheism, Monotheism, Monism, Polytheism debate

The Rigveda along with other Vedic texts, states Michael Ruse,^[87] contains a "strong traditional streak that (by Western standards) would undoubtedly be thought atheistic". He states that hymn 10.130 of Rigveda can be read to be in "an atheistic spirit"^[87]

Rigveda, however, contains numerous hymns with a diversity of ideas. The initial impression one gets, states Jeaneane Fowler, is that the text is polytheistic because it praises many gods.^[88] Yet, adds Fowler, the text does not fit the "neat classifications of western thought or linear thinking".^[88] The deities are praised depending on the context, and the hymns include an expression of monotheism.^[88] For example, hymn 1.164.46 of Rigveda states,

They call him Indra, Mitra, Vṛuna, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman.
To what is One, sages give many a title they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.

— Rigveda 1.164.46, Translated by Ralph Griffith^{[89][90]}

Max Muller and Stephen Phillips states that this "monotheism" is henotheism (one god, accept many manifest deities).^{[90][91]} Thomas Urumpackal and other scholars state that monistic tendencies (Brahman is everywhere, God inside everybody) are found in hymns of chapters 1.164, 8.36 and 10.31.^{[92][93]} Other scholars state that Rigveda includes an emerging diversity of thought, including monotheism, polytheism, henotheism and pantheism, the choice left to the preference of the worshipper^[94]

Interpretation

Changing Sanskrit

Although the text of the redacted version of the Rig Veda was transmitted unchanged, by 500 BC Sanskrit had changed so much that commentaries were necessary to make sense of the Rig Vedic hymns.^[95] The Brahmanas contain numerous misinterpretations, due to this linguistic change,^[95] some of which were characterised by Sri Aurobindo as "grotesque nonsense."^[95]

Medieval Hindu scholarship

According to Hindu tradition, the Rigvedic hymns were collected by Paila under the guidance of Vyāsa, who formed the Rigveda Samhita as we know it.^[96] According to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa the number of syllables in the *Rigveda* is 432,000, equalling the number of muhurtas (1 day = 30 muhurtas) in forty years. This statement stresses the underlying philosophy of the Vedic books that there is a connection (bandhu) between the astronomical, the physiological, and the spiritual.^[97]

The authors of the Brāhmaṇa literature discussed and interpreted the Vedic ritual. Yaska was an early commentator of the *Rigveda* by discussing the meanings of difficult words. In the 14th century, Sāyana wrote an exhaustive commentary on it.

A number of other commentaries (*bhāṣyas*) were written during the medieval period, including the commentaries by Skandasvamin (pre-Sayana, roughly of the Gupta period), Udgitha (pre-Sayana), Venkata-Madhava (pre-Sayana, c. 10th to 12th centuries) and Mudgala Purana (after Sayana, an abbreviated version of Sayana's commentary).^[98]

Arya Samaj and Aurobindo movements

In the 19th- and early 20th-centuries, some reformers like Swami Dayananda Saraswati – founder of the Arya Samaj, Sri Aurobindo – founder of Sri Aurobindo Ashram discussed the Vedas, including the Rig veda, for their philosophies. Dayananda, stated Reverend John Robson, was an iconoclast and willing to join with Christians to destroy all idols in India.^[99] According to Robson, Dayanand believed "there was no errors in the Vedas (including the Rigveda), and if anyone showed him an error, he would maintain that it was a corruption added later".^[99]

Dayananda and Aurobindo interpret the Vedic scholars had a monotheistic conception.^[100] Aurobindo attempted to interpret hymns to Agni in the *Rigveda* as mystical.^[100] Aurobindo states that the Vedic hymns were a quest after a higher truth, define the *Rta* (basis of Dharma), conceive life in terms of a struggle between the forces of light and darkness, and sought the ultimate reality^[100]

Contemporary Hinduism

Rigveda, in contemporary Hinduism, has been a reminder of the ancient cultural heritage and point of pride for Hindus, with some hymns still in use in major rites of passage ceremonies, but the literal acceptance of most of the textual essence is long gone.^{[102][103]} Louis Renou wrote that the text is a distant object, and "even in the most orthodox domains, the reverence to the Vedas has come to be a simple raising of the hat".^[102] Musicians and dance groups celebrate the text as a mark of Hindu heritage, through incorporating Rigvedic hymns in their compositions, such as in *Hamsadhvani* and *Subhapanthuvarali* of Carnatic music, and these have remained popular among the Hindus for decades.^[102] However, the contemporary Hindu beliefs are distant from the precepts in the ancient layer of Rigvedasamhitas:

He who studies understands,
not the one who sleeps.

—Rigveda 5.44.13, Tr: Frits Staal^[101]

The social history and context of the Vedic texts are extremely distant from contemporary Hindu religious beliefs and practice, a reverence for the Vedas as an exemplar of Hindu heritage continues to inform a contemporary understanding of Hinduism. Popular reverence for Vedic scripture is similarly focused on the abiding authority and prestige of the Vedas rather than on any particular exegesis or engagement with the subject matter of the text.

— Andrea Pinkney, Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia^[102]

"Indigenous Aryans" debate

Alternative theory for a much earlier composition date for the Rigveda, as well as the Indigenous Aryans theory have been suggested.^{[104][105]} These theories are controversial.^{[106][107]}

Translations

Mistranslations, misinterpretations debate

The Rig Veda is hard to translate accurately, because it is the oldest Indo-Aryan text, composed in the archaic Vedic Sanskrit.^{[108][109]} There are no closely contemporary extant texts, which makes it difficult to interpret.^[110]

Early missionaries and colonial administrators in India, used Western concepts and words in their attempts to translate and interpret the ancient texts of Indian religions. This, state postmodern scholars such as Frits Staal, led to mistranslations.^[111] Thus, Rigveda's *Mandala* are often translated to mean 'Book', when the word actually means 'Cycle', according to Staal.^{[111][112]} The Vedas were called 'sacred books', an appellation borrowed by orientalisists used for Bible, but there is no evidence of this. Staal states, "it is nowhere stated that the Veda was revealed", and *Sruti* simply means "that what is heard, in the sense that it is transmitted from father to son or from teacher to pupil".^[111] The Rigveda, or other Vedas, do not anywhere assert that they are Apauruṣeyā, and this reverential term appears centuries later in the texts of the Mimamsa school of Hindu philosophy.^{[111][113][114]} The text of Rigveda suggests it was "composed by poets, human individuals whose names were household words" in the Vedic age, states Staal.^[111]

The Rigveda is the earliest, the most venerable, obscure, distant and difficult for moderns to understand – hence is often misinterpreted or worse: used as a peg on which to hang an idea or a theory

— Frits Staal, Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights^[115]

Translations

The first published translation of any portion of the Rigveda in any European language was into Latin, by Friedrich August Rosen (*Rigvedae specimen*, London 1830). Predating Müller's *editio princeps* of the text by 19 years, Rosen was working from manuscripts brought back from India by Colebrooke. H. H. Wilson was the first to make a complete translation of the Rig Veda into English, published in six volumes during the period 1850–88.^[116] Wilson's version was based on the commentary of *Sāyaṇa*. Müller's Rig Veda Sanhita in 6 volumes Muller, Max, ed. (W. H. Allen and Co., London, 1849) has an English preface^[117] The birch bark from which Müller produced his translation is held at The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, India.^[118]

Some notable translations of the Rig Veda include:

Title	Translator	Year	Language	Notes
Rigvedae specimen	<u>Friedrich August Rosen</u>	1830	<u>Latin</u>	Partial translation with 121 hymns (London, 1830). Also known as <i>Rigveda Sanhita, Liber Primus, Sanskrite Et Latine</i> (ISBN 978-1275453234). Based on manuscripts brought back from India by <u>Henry Thomas Colebrooke</u>
<i>Rig-Veda, oder die heiligen Lieder der Brahmanen</i>	<u>Max Müller</u>	1856	<u>German</u>	Partial translation published by F.A. Brockhaus, Leipzig. In 1873, Müller published an <u>editio princeps</u> titled <i>The Hymns of the Rig-Veda in the Samhita Text</i> . He also translated a few hymns in English (<i>Nasadiya Sukta</i>).
<i>Rig-Veda-Sanhitā: A Collection of Ancient Hindu Hymns</i>	<u>H. H. Wilson</u>	1850-88	English	Published as 6 volumes, by N. Tübner & Co., London.
<i>Rig-véda, ou livre des hymnes</i>	<u>A. Langlois</u>	1870	<u>French</u>	Partial translation. Re-printed in Paris, 1948–51 (ISBN 2-7200-1029-4).
<u>Der Rigveda</u>	<u>Alfred Ludwig</u>	1876	German	Published by Verlag von F. Tempsky, Prague.
<i>Rig-Veda</i>	<u>Hermann Grassmann</u>	1876	German	Published by F.A. Brockhaus, Leipzig
<i>Rigved Bhashyam</i>	<u>Dayananda Saraswati</u>	1877-9	<u>Hindi</u>	Incomplete translation. Later translated into <u>English</u> by Dharma Deva Vdya Martanda (1974).
<i>The Hymns of the Rig Veda</i>	<u>Ralph T.H. Griffith</u>	1889-92	English	Revised as <i>The Rig Veda</i> in 1896. Revised by JL Shastri in 1973.
<i>Der Rigveda in Auswahl</i>	<u>Karl Friedrich Geldner</u>	1907	German	Published by W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart. Geldner's 1907 work was a partial translation; he completed a full translation in the 1920s, which was published after his death, in 1951. ^[119] This translation was titled <i>Der Rig-Veda: aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche Übersetzt</i> . Harvard Oriental Studies, vols. 33–37 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1951-7). Reprinted by Harvard University Press (2003) ISBN 0-674-01226-7.
<i>Hymns from the Rigveda</i>	<u>A. A. Macdonell</u>	1917	English	Partial translation (30 hymns). Published by Clarendon Press, Oxford.
Series of articles in Journal of the University of Bombay	<u>Hari Damodar Velankar</u>	1940s-1960s	English	Partial translation (Mandala 2, 5, 7 and 8). Later published as independent volumes.
<i>Rig Veda - Hymns to the Mystic Fire</i>	<u>Sri Aurobindo</u>	1946	English	Partial translation published by NK Gupta, Pondicherry. Later republished several times (ISBN 9780914955221)
<i>Rig Veda</i>	<u>Ramgovind Trivedi</u>	1954	Hindi	
<i>Études védiques et pāṇinéennes</i>	<u>Louis Renou</u>	1955-69	<u>French</u>	Appears in a series of publications, organized by the deities. Covers most of Rigveda, but leaves out significant hymns, including the ones dedicated to Indra and the Asvins.
<i>ऋग्वेद संहिता</i>	<u>Shriram Sharma</u>	1950s	Hindi	
<i>Hymns from the Rig-Veda</i>	<u>Naoshiro Tsuji</u>	1970	<u>Japanese</u>	Partial translation
<i>Rigveda: Izbrannye Gimny</i>	<u>Tatyana Elizarenkova</u>	1972	<u>Russian</u>	Partial translation, extended to a full translation published during 1989–1999.
<i>Rigveda Parichaya</i>	<u>Nag Sharan Singh</u>	1977	English / Hindi	Extension of Wilson's translation. Republished by Nag, Delhi in 1990 (ISBN 978-8170812173).

<i>Rig Veda</i>	M. R. Jambunathan	1978-80.	Tamil	Two volumes, both released posthumously
<i>Rigvéda – Teremtéshimnuszok (Creation Hymns of the Rig-Veda)</i>	Laszlo Forizs (hu)	1995	Hungarian	Partial translation published in Budapest (ISBN 963-85349-1-5)
<i>The Rig Veda</i>	Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty	1981	English	Partial translation (108 hymns), along with critical apparatus. Published by Penguin (ISBN 0-14-044989-2). A bibliography of translations of the Rig Veda appears as an Appendix.
<i>Pinnacles of India's Past: Selections from the Rgveda</i>	Walter H. Maurer	1986	English	Partial translation published by John Benjamins.
<i>The Rig Veda</i>	Bibek Debroy, Dipavali Debroy	1992	English	Partial translation published by B. R. Publishing (ISBN 9780836427783). The work is in verse form, without reference to the original hymns or mandalas. Part of <i>Great Epics of India: Veda</i> series, also published as <i>The Holy Vedas</i> .
<i>The Holy Vedas: A Golden Treasury</i>	Pandit Satyakam Vidyalkar	1983	English	
<i>R̥gveda Samhitā</i>	HH Wilson, Ravi Prakash Arya and K. L. Joshi	2001	English	4-volume set published by Parimal (ISBN 978-81-7110-138-2). Revised edition of Wilson's translation. Replaces obsolete English forms with more modern equivalents (e.g. "thou" with "you"). Includes the original Sanskrit text in Devanagari script, along with a critical apparatus.
<i>R̥gveda for the Layman</i>	Shyam Ghosh	2002	English	Partial translation (100 hymns). Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi.
<i>Rig-Veda</i>	Michael Witzel, Toshifumi Goto	2007	German	Partial translation (Mandala 1 and 2). The authors are working on a second volume. Published by Verlag der Weltreligionen (ISBN 978-3-458-70001-2).
ऋग्वेद	Govind Chandra Pande	2008	Hindi	Partial translation (Mandala 3 and 5). Published by Lokbharti, Allahabad
<i>The Hymns of Rig Veda</i>	Tulsi Ram	2013	English	Published by Vijaykumar Govindram Hasanand, Delhi
<i>The Rigveda</i>	Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton	2014	English	3-volume set published by Oxford University Press (ISBN 978-0-19-937018-4). Funded by the United States' National Endowment for the Humanities in 2004. ^[120]

See also

- Keśin
- Mayabhedā

Notes

- It is certain that the hymns post-date Indo-Iranian separation of ca. 2000 BC and probably that of the relevant Mitanni documents of c. 1400 BC. The oldest mention of Rigveda in other sources dates from 600 BC, and the oldest available text from 1200 BC. Philological estimates tend to date the bulk of the text to the second half of the second millennium:

- Max Müller: "the hymns men of the Rig-Veda are said to date from 1500 B.C."^[19]

- Thomas Oberlies (*Die Religion des Rgveda* 1998, p. 158) based on 'cumulative evidence' sets wide range of 1700–1100.^[17] Oberlies (1998:155) gives an estimate of 1100 BC for the youngest hymns in book 10.^[20]
- The EIEC (s.v. Indo-Iranian languages p. 306) gives 1500–1000 BC.
- Flood and Witzel both mention c. 1500–1200 BC.^{[14][15]}
- Anthony mentions c. 1500–1300 BC.^[16]

Some have used astronomical references in the Rigveda, in order to date it to as early as 4000 BC^[21] while Lok Tilak dates back it to 6000BC^[22]

2. Compare Max Müller's statement "the hymns of the Rig-~~Vē~~da are said to date from 1500 BC"^[67]
3. Oberlies (1998:155) gives an estimate of 1100 BC for the youngest hymns in book 10. Estimates ~~for~~^{terminus post} *quem* of the earliest hymns are far more uncertain. Oberlies (p. 158) based on 'cumulative evidence' sets wide range of 1700–1100. The Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture (s.v. Indo-Iranian languages p. 306) gives 1500–1000 BC.
4. Al-Biruni, an 11th-century Persian scholar who visited northwest India, credited a Brahmin by the name of ~~as~~^{as}ukra, in Kashmir writing down the ~~Vē~~das in his memoirs.^[72] Modern scholarship states that the ~~Vē~~das were codified and written down for the first time in the 1st millennium BC.^{[73][74]}

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4. Avari 2007, p. 77.
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12. See: (a) Antonio de Nicholas (2003), *Meditations Through the Rig Veda: Four-Dimensional Man*, ISBN 978-0595269259, pages 64-69;
 Jan Gonda, A History of Indian Literature: Veda and Upanishads, Volume 1, Part 1, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, ISBN 978-3447016032, pages 134–135;
 Extracted examples from these sources:
Hymn 1.164.34 "What is the ultimate limit of the earth?", "What is the center of the universe?", "What is the semen of the cosmic horse?", "What is the ultimate source of human speech?"
Hymn 1.164.34 "Who gave blood, soul, spirit to the earth?", "How could the unstructured universe give origin to this structured world?"
Hymn 1.164.5 "Where does the sun hide in the night?", "Where do gods live?"
Hymn 1.164.6 "What, where is the unborn support for the born universe?";
Hymn 1.164.20 (a hymn that is widely cited in the Upanishads as the parable of the Body and the Soul): Two birds with fair wings, inseparable companions; Have found refuge in the same sheltering tree. One incessantly eats from the fig tree; the other, not eating, just looks on";
Rigveda Book 1, Hymn 164 Wikisource
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41. Witzel, Michael (2003). "Vedas and Upanisads". In Flood, Gavin. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* Blackwell Publishing Ltd. pp. 68–69. ISBN 0631215352 "The Vedic texts were orally composed and transmitted, without the use of script, in an unbroken line of transmission from teacher to student that was formalized early on. This ensured an impeccable textual transmission superior to the classical texts of other cultures; it is, in fact, something like a tape-recording of ca. 1500–500 BC. Not just the actual words, but even the long-lost musical (tonal) accent (as in old Greek or in Japanese) has been preserved up to the present. On the other hand, the Vedas have been written down only during the early second millennium ce.,..".
42. The oldest manuscript in the Pune collection dates to the 15th century. The Benares Sanskrit University has a Rigveda manuscript of the 14th century. Earlier manuscripts are extremely rare; the oldest known manuscript preserving a Vedic text was written in the 11th century in Nepal (catalogued by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, Hamburg).
43. Michael Witzel says that "The RV has been transmitted in one recension (the śākhā of Śākalya) while others (such as the Bāṣkala text) have been lost or are only rumored about so far. Michael Witzel, p. 69, "Vedas and Upaniṣads", in: *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Gavin Flood (ed.), Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005.
44. Maurice Winternitz (*History of Sanskrit Literature*, Revised English Translation Edition, 1926, vol. 1, p. 57) says that "Of the different recensions of this Saṃhitā, which once existed, only a single one has come down to us." He adds in a note (p. 57, note 1) that this refers to the "recension of the Śākalaka-School."
45. Sures Chandra Banerji (*A Companion To Sanskrit Literature*, Second Edition, 1989, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, pp. 300–301) says that "Of the 21 recensions of this Veda, that were known at one time, we have got only two, viz. Śākala and Vāṣkala."
46. Maurice Winternitz (*History of Sanskrit Literature*, Revised English Translation Edition, 1926, vol. 1, p. 283).
47. Mantras of "khila" hymns were called *khailika* and not *rcas* (*Khila* meant distinct "part" of Rgveda separate from regular hymns; all regular hymns make up the *akhila* or "the whole" recognised in a śākhā, although khila hymns have sanctified roles in rituals from ancient times).
48. Hermann Grassmann had numbered the hymns 1 through to 1028, putting the *vāṅkhilya* at the end. Griffith's translation has these 11 at the end of the 8th mandala, after 8.92 in the regular series.
49. cf. Preface to Khila section by C.G. Kāshikar in Volume-5 of Pune Edition of RV (in references).
50. These Khilani hymns have also been found in a manuscript of the Śākala recension of the Kashmir Rigveda (and are included in the Poone edition).
51. equalling 40 times 10,800, the number of bricks used for the *uttaravedi*; the number is motivated numerologically rather than based on an actual syllable count.
52. Stephanie W. Jamison & Joel P. Brereton 2014, p. 16.
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