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Veda*

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'Veda' in the Veda

The terms 'Rgveda', 'Yajurveda' and 'Sāmaveda' do not occur in the oldest parts of Vedic literature. They occur nowhere in the Saṃhitās,¹ nor in the earliest parts of the Brāhmaṇas. This can be seen as follows.

The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa can be divided into an earlier and a later part on the basis of the fact "that in the first twenty-four Adhyāyas (i - v.25) the only tense of narration is the imperfect, and that perfects are extremely rare in any narrative sense. On the contrary, from v.26 to the end the proportion of perfects grows steadily ..." (Keith, 1920: 34). From this and other² evidence Keith concludes that "the last sixteen Adhyāyas can be safely ascribed to a later period than the first twenty-four" (id.). The terms 'Rgveda', 'Yajurveda' and 'Sāmaveda' occur in only one section of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, viz., 5.32 (25.7), i.e., in the younger part of the Brāhmana.

Also the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is known to consist of parts that derive from different times. Books 11-14 are younger than the books preceding them, and indeed our three Vedas are mentioned by name only there, viz. at 11.5.8.3-6; 12.3.4.9; 14.4.3.12 [= BAU 1.5.5]; 14.5.4.10 [= BAU 2.4.10]; 14.6.10.6 [= BAU 4.1.2] and 14.7.3.11 [= BAU 4.5.11].

The Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa and Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa of the Sāmaveda belong together, as their names indicate, and the latter is, not surprisingly, younger than the former (Eelsingh, 1908: xxx f.). Rgveda, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda are mentioned by name in the Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (1.5.8; 4.1.2), not in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa.

The above three Vedas are also mentioned by name in a number of other relatively young Vedic texts. We find them e.g., included in the following enumeration of literary compositions in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (2.4.10; 4.1.2; 4.5.11 [= ŚB 14.5.4.10; 14.6.10.6; 14.7.3.11]) and Maitrāyaṇi Upaniṣad (6.32): ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo 'tharvāṅgirasa itihāsaḥ purāṇaṃ vidyā upaniṣadaḥ ślokāḥ sūtrāṇy anuvyākhyānāni

^{*} I thank Dr. Harry Falk for critical comments. After this paper had been written I found that similar conclusions regarding the meaning of *veda* have been reached by Yudhisthira Mīmāmsaka in the introduction to his edition, translation and explanation of the Śābarabhāsya (Mīmāmsaka, 1987: 80-81).

^{1 &#}x27;Rgveda' occurs in the Khilas of the Rgveda, at 4.2.6.

² See Keith, 1920: 28-36.

vyākhyānāni. GB 1.1.17-21 enumerates our three Vedas also with the Atharvaveda, itihāsapurāṇa, vākovākya, gāthā, nārāśaṃsī, upaniṣad and anuśāsana.

It seems that the youngest Vedic texts use the terms 'Rgveda', 'Yajurveda' and 'Sāmaveda' — which are used in the singular, as in the above quotations — more or less in the same way as we use them, i.e., to denote what is nowadays also known by the names 'Rgveda-Saṃhitā', 'Yajurveda-Saṃhitā' and 'Sāmaveda-Saṃhitā'.³ And even if this is not the case, it seems clear that these terms refer to bodies of literature that include the Saṃhitās. ChU 3.1-3 contains a simile which seems to support the interpretation that the Rgveda is a collection of Rces, and similarly for the other two Vedas. The Rces are here compared to bees, the Rgveda to a flower: similarly for the Yajuses and the Sāmans vis-àvis the Yajurveda and Sāmaveda respectively. The Rgveda clearly appears at the place where all the Rces meet, and therefore seems to be their collection; so for the Yajurveda and Sāmaveda. (ChU 3.4 relates in a similar manner the *atharvāṅgirasa*s and *itihāsapurāṇa*, as if there were no Atharvaveda. The significance of this peculiarity is discussed elsewhere.⁴) And GB 1.1.29 mentions the four Vedas (i.e., our three plus the Atharvaveda) and gives their beginnings as we know them.⁵

It is clear that the word 'Veda', alone or in compounds, cannot be expected to give rise to difficulties in the younger Vedic texts. But how is the word used in the older texts, especially in those which do not know, or use, the terms 'Rgveda', 'Yajurveda' and 'Sāmaveda'?

These texts do indeed use the word 'Veda', be it not very frequently. A number of the occurrences of this word in the old texts support the view that 'Veda' is here more or less synonymous with *mantra*, and does not designate collections of mantras and the like. [127]

AB 1.22 (4.5) has rɨmayo yajurmayaḥ sāmamayo vedamayo brahmamayo 'mṛtamayaḥ saṃbhūya devatā apyeti ya evaṃ veda yaś caivaṃ vidvān etena yajñakratunā yajate "Having come into existence as composed of the Rc, the Yajus, and the Sāman, and of the Veda, and of the brahman, and of the immortal, he attains to the deities who knows thus and who knowing thus sacrifices with this sacrificial rite" (tr. Keith, modified). There is no reason to translate brahman in the passage as 'holy power', as Keith does. It rather has the meaning 'sacred utterance', and thus is partially synonymous with the four terms preceding it. 'Veda' here can in this way be interpreted as one more name for the sacred utterances also known as Rc, Yajus, Sāman and Brahman. This same conclusion can be upheld if we understand vedamayo as an explanation of the three preceding terms and

³ Note that these expressions are totally unknown to the Vedic texts.

⁴ See Bronkhorst, 1991: § 4.4.

⁵ They are the same as those quoted in Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya (ed. Kielhorn I, p. 11, lines 4-5), but the order is different. It is particularly remarkable that Patañjali puts AV(P) śaṃ no devīr abhiṣṭave first, while GB puts it last.

translate: "... i.e., as composed of the Veda". The proximity of *brahmamayo* would still favour the interpretation 'sacred utterance'.

Also AV 15.3.6-8 brings 'Veda' in connection with 'Brahman' while describing a settle ($\bar{a}sand\bar{a}$): "The verses (rc) [were its] forward cords (tantu), the sacrificial formulas (yajus) the cross ones. **The Veda the cushion** ($\bar{a}staraṇa$), the brahman the pillow (upabarhaṇa). The chant ($s\bar{a}man$) the seat, the $udg\bar{\imath}tha$ the support (?)." (rcaḥ $pra\bar{\imath}ncas$ tantavo $yajuṃṣi tiryañcaḥ/ veda <math>\bar{a}staraṇaṃ$ brahmopabarhaṇam/ samasada $udg\bar{\imath}thopaśravaḥ/$ tr. Whitney). The two phrases brahmaṇa kṣatraṃ vyapibat and vedena rupe vyapibat in one and the same section (MS 3.11.6, VSM 19.75 & 78, VSK 21.5.2 & 5, KS 38.1; slightly different at TB 2.6.2.2-3) show again the close relationship between Veda and Brahman.

TS 7.5.11.2 (= KS 45.2), similarly, lists 'the Vedas' in an enumeration of sacred and less sacred utterances: <code>rgbhyaḥ svāhā yajurbhyaḥ svāhā 'rigirobhyaḥ svāhā vedebhyaḥ svāhā gāthābhyaḥ svāhā nārāśaṃsībhyaḥ svāhā raibhibhyaḥ svāhā sarvasmai svāhā. It is hard to believe that the Vedas here referred to are the Rgveda, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda, since these are never mentioned in the oldest literature; nor does the context seem to allow of the mention of collections at this place.</code>

ŚB 5.5.5.5 appears to identify 'Veda' with Rc, Yajus and Sāman: tasmād apy etarhy evam evaitair vedair yajñaṃ tanvate yajurbhir evāgre 'thargbhir atha sāmabhir' "Therefore they spread the sacrifice even to this day in the same way with those Vedas, first with the Yajus-formulas, then with the Rk-verses, and then with the Sāman-hymns" (tr. Eggeling). AV 7.57.1 may make the same identification: rcaṃ sāma yad aprākṣaṃ havir ojo yajur balam/ eṣa mā tasmān mā hiṃsīd vedaḥ pṛṣṭaḥ śacīpate/"When I have asked verse (rc) [and] chant (sāman) [respectively] for oblation [and][128] force, [and] sacrificial formula (yajus) for strength, let not therefore this Veda, asked, injure me, O lord of might" (tr. Whitney).

TB 3.10.11.3-4 tells the story of Bharadvāja who spent three lifetimes (Sāyaṇa explains: three hundred years) studying the Veda. Indra offers him a fourth lifetime and asks what Bharadvāja wants to do with it. When Bharadvāja makes known his intention to continue his Vedic studies, Indra shows him three mountains, takes a handful from each, and says:

These, indeed, are the Vedas. Infinite indeed are the Vedas. This (i.e., the three handfuls) is what you have studied in these three lifetimes. The rest you have not studied at all yet.⁶

It is hard to see how the Samhitās as we know them can be said to be 'infinite', even if we add the Brāhmanas to them. Countless numbers of Brahmins have managed to learn one,

⁶ TB 3.10.11.4: vedā vā ete/ anantā vai vedāḥ/ etad vā etais tribhir āyurbhir anvavocathāḥ/ atha ta itarad ananūktam eva/

sometimes more than one, Veda by heart, so it looks odd that Bharadvāja had not yet mastered even a single 'mountain' after three lifetimes. The three 'mountains' must rather be considered to consist of non-collected, or only partially collected Rees, Yajuses and Sāmans. The meaning of "infinite indeed are the Vedas" seems to be: the number of Rees, Yajuses and Sāmans, i.e. of sacred utterances, is infinite.

The interpretation 'sacred utterance' for 'Veda' in the earlier texts, rather than 'collection of sacred utterances', also fits the occurrence of this word in RV 8.19.5 (= KS 39.15) *yaḥ samidhā ya āhuti yo vedena dadāśa marto agnaya* "the mortal who has served Agni with firewood, oblations and 'sacred utterances'".

If indeed 'Veda' did not have its later sense yet in the earlier Vedic texts, it is not impossible that the same is true of the earliest occurrences of 'Rgveda', 'Yajurveda' and 'Sāmaveda'. In a large number of cases the context does not allow us to determine the exact significance of these terms. Yet at least one context is suggestive.

A number of passages deal with the creation of the three Vedas.⁷ Common to most versions is that the Rgveda is born from Agni, the Yajur[129]veda from Vāyu, the Sāmaveda from Āditya.⁸ These three Vedas, in their turn, give rise to *bhūḥ*, *bhuvaḥ* and *svar* respectively.⁹

From this point onward some of the texts start using the terms 'Rc' and 'Rgveda', 'Yajus' and 'Yajurveda', 'Sāman' and 'Sāmaveda' rather indiscriminately. AB 5.33 (25.8) has tad āhur mahāvadāh, yad rcaiva hautram kriyate yajusādhvaryavam sāmnodgītham vyārabdhā trayī vidyā bhavaty atha kena brahmatvam kriyata iti trayyā vidyayeti brūyāt "Important sages say 'Since the Hotr's office is performed with the Rc, the Adhvaryu's with the Yajus, the Udgātr's with the Sāman, the threefold knowledge is taken up; how then is the Brahman's office performed?' 'With the threefold knowledge', he should say." (tr. Keith). JB 1.358 asks the same question in the form tad āhur yad rcā hotrtvam kriyate yajusādhvaryavam sāmnodgītho 'tha kena brahmatvam kriyata iti/ anayā trayyā vidyayeti ha brūyāt/. But ŚB 11.5.8.4 conveys the same information in the words rgvedenaiva hotram akurvata yajurvedenādhvaryavam sāmavedenodgītham yad eva trayyai vidyāyai śukram tena brahmatvam athoccakrāma. JB 1.358, moreover, seems to use the expression trayo vedah 'threefold Veda' interchangeably with trayī vidyā 'threefold knowledge'. In view of the fact that *trayī vidyā* primarily refers to the knowledge of Rc, Yajus and Sāman, rather than to the three Vedas named after them, these two passages suggest that they, too, used 'Veda' for 'sacred utterance', rather than for the collections known to us by that name.

⁷ AB 5.32 (25.7), ŚB 11.5.8.3 f., ṢaḍB 4.1.2, JB 1.357, GB 1.1.6.

 $^{^{8}}$ SadB 4.1.2 has the Rgveda born from the earth, the Yajurveda from the intermediate space (*antarikṣa*), the Sāmaveda from heaven.

⁹ SadB 4.1.2 is again the exception. The story takes here an altogether different turn.

How many Vedas?

There is a tradition of five (rather than three or four) Vedas which is attested both in Vedic and non-Vedic texts. The Buddhist canon preserves it in a form which does not mention the Atharvaveda, and may therefore be oldest in origin. There is the oft-recurring phrase in Pali:

 \dots tiṇṇaṃ vedānaṃ pāragū sanighaṇḍukeṭubhānaṃ sākkharappabhedānaṃ itihāsapañcamānam padako veyyākarano \dots^{10}

The same phrase occurs in Sanskrit with minor variations:

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... tryāṇām vedānām pāragaḥ sanighāṇṭakaiṭabhānām sākṣaraprabhedānām itihāsapañcamānām padaśo vyākaraṇaḥ ...<sup>11</sup>
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[130] ... trayāṇām vedānām pārago sākṣaraprabhedānām itihāsapañcamānām sanighaṇṭakaiṭabhānām¹²

... trayāṇāṃ vedānāṃ pārago sanirghaṇṭhakaiṭabhānām itihāsapaṃcamānām akṣarapadavyākaraṇe analpako ... 13

... trayāṇām vedānām pārago akṣaraprabhedānām itihāsapaṃcamānām sanighaṇtukaiṭabhānām anupadakavyākaraṇakuśalo ...¹⁴

An echo of this phrase is found in Avadāna 33 of the Divyāvadāna:

... vedān samanusmarati sma sāṅgopāṅgān sarahasyān sanighaṇṭukaiṭabhān sākṣaraprabhedān itihāsapañcamān ...¹⁵

It seems clear that all these phrases agree in enumerating five Vedas. The reason to think so is that *itihāsapañcamānām* (or its equivalent in Pali) is a Bahuvrīhi compound qualifying *vedānām*, and should therefore be translated: "with *itihāsa* as fifth [Veda]". We shall see that this interpretation fits other evidence which will be discussed presently.

The different phrases show some variation regarding the precise contents of Vedas number four and five. They all consider *itihāsa* 'legend' part (sometimes the whole) of the fifth Veda. Most of them agree that the fourth Veda encompasses *akṣara / akkhara* 'phonology (PED)' and *pra- / pabheda* 'etymology (PED), exegesis (Rhys Davids, 1899: 109)', or perhaps rather *akṣaraprabheda / akkharappabheda* 'philologische Technik (Franke,

¹⁰ DN I.88, 114, 138; MN II.133, 141, [146,] 147, 165, 168, 210; AN I.163, 166; III.223; Sn p. 105.

¹¹ Av II.19.

¹² My I.231.17-18.

¹³ Mv II.77.9-10; Mv II.89.16-17 has *kuśalo* for *analpako*.

¹⁴ Mv III.450.6-7.

¹⁵ Divy 619.21-23.

1913: 87)'; one however does not include them in any Veda. The items *nighaṇṭa / nirghaṇṭa / nighaṇṭu / lexicology / etymology (BHSD), synonymische Wortverzeichnisse (Franke, id.), explanation (PED), indices (Rhys Davids, id.), vocabularies (Horner, 1957: 317)' and <i>kaiṭabha / keṭubha* 'ritual science (BHSD), Hilfsbücher (Franke, id.), ritual (PED)' are usually part of the fourth Veda, in two cases of the fifth.

Some passages of the Madhyamāgama preserved in Chinese mention five Vedas, but specify the contents of the fifth one in an altogether different way:

[He] has crossed the four classical texts, with the correct literature of profound intelligence on causes and conditions as fifth. 16

[131]

Here the Atharvaveda seems, implicitly, to have made its way into the list, which may indicate its relative lateness.

The five Vedas are again, this time explicitly, referred to in an otherwise obscure verse of the Samyutta Nikāya (I.29):

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pañcaveda (v.l. -vedā) satam samam/
tapassī brāhmaṇācaraṃ (v.l. caraṃti)//
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(Note that the prose portions of the Pali canon refer always to five Vedas; only in verse the three Vedas are referred to a few times,¹⁷ and this may be an abbreviation dictated by the demands of metre.)

The five Vedas are enumerated, finally, in the Dīpavaṃsa (V.62): ... iruvedaṃ yajuvedaṃ sāmavedam pi nighaṇduṃ itihāsañ ca pañcamam.

In the Veda itself we find the five Vedas enumerated at ChU 7.1.2, 7.1.4, 7.2.1 and 7.7.1. ChU 7.1.4 reads: <code>rgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmaveda ātharvaṇaś caturtha itihāsapurāṇaḥ pañcamo vedāṇāṃ vedaḥ pitryo rāśir daivo nidhir vākovākyam ekāyanaṃ devavidyā brahmavidyā bhūtavidyā kṣatravidyā nakṣatravidyā sarpadevajanavidyā. Most of the terms of this list are unknown (see Horsch, 1966: 33). Here it is clear that <code>caturtha</code> 'the fourth' refers to a Veda, viz., the Atharvaveda: the same must therefore be true of 'the fifth'. (We may follow Horsch, and thus indirectly W. Rau, in taking <code>itihāsapurāṇaḥ pañcamo vedāṇāṃ vedaḥ</code> together, translating '<code>itihāsa</code> and <code>purāṇa</code>, which constitute the fifth Veda among the Vedas'. This does not however affect our main argument.) [Śaṅkara's comments on ChU 7.1.2 are intriguing (cf. Horsch, 1966: 36). <code>Vedāṇāṃ vedaḥ</code> is taken as a new item after the fifth Veda, meaning <code>vyākaraṇa</code>, because by means of <code>vyākaraṇa</code> the Rgveda etc. are known in their division into <code>pada</code> etc. (<code>vyākaraṇena hi padādivibhāgaśo ṛgvedādayo</code>)</code>

¹⁶ T. 26 (vol. 1) p. 663c line 8, p. 680b lines 28-29, p. 685a lines 11-12.

¹⁷ Thag 1171; SN IV.118; J VI.214.

jñāyante). The result is so close to the enumerations in Avadānaśataka and Mahāvastu presented above that it seems likely that Śaṅkara was influenced from Buddhist side.]

The Buddhist enumerations of five Vedas have no place for the Atharvaveda. The Jaina canonical scriptures contain an enumeration which seems clearly derived from the one used by the Buddhists, **with** the Atharvaveda. Unlike the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, it does not simply drop the 'original' fourth Veda, but moves it to the sixth place. *Itihāsa* keeps its traditional fifth place. The result is an enumeration of six Vedas:¹⁸

[132]

riuvveda-jajuvveda-sāmaveda-athavvaṇaveda-itihāsapaṃcamāṇaṃ nighaṃṭachaṭṭhāṇaṃ caüṇhaṃ vedāṇaṃ saṃgovaṃgāṇaṃ sarahassāṇaṃ sārae vārae pārae ...

A very clear enumeration of five Vedas is provided by the Arthaśāstra (i.3.1-2): sāmargyajurvedās trayas trayī/ atharvavedetihāsavedau ca vedāh/.

It is not without interest, yet hardly surprising, to see how the Mahābhārata, once it was written down sometime before the 5th century A.D., ¹⁹ appropriated to itself the title of 'fifth Veda'.²⁰ This however focuses attention on the fact that before that time the 'fifth Veda' was no collected whole. The same is true of the 'fourth Veda' in most of the Buddhist enumerations. Could it be that the first three Vedas were no collected wholes either at the time when the tradition of five Vedas came into existence? [We may have to make an exception for the Rgveda, whose Padapātha is old (Bronkhorst, 1982) and may be referred to by the Pali padaka in the phrase studied above: this word is derived by Pānini's rule 4.2.61 in the sense 'who studies or knows the Pada(-pātha)'.] The fact that the tradition of five Vedas soon passed out of existence might then be attributed to the circumstance that no more than three, or four, Vedas came to constitute tangible collections. Already the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad and the Maitrāyani Upanisad (cited above) enumerate partly the same items as ChU 7 without mentioning the five Vedas. The Milindapañha in its later portions, similarly, gives a clearly related enumeration without mentioning them (178.15-17): Irubbedam Yajubbedam Sāmavedam Athabbanavedam lakkhanam itihāsam purānam nighandu ketubham akkharappabhedam padam veyyākaranam

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¹⁸ Viy 2.1.12; 9.33.2; Aupapātika Sūtra (ed. Leumann) section 77, and elsewhere, see Charpentier, 1914: 28.

¹⁹ The evidence discussed by Bühler and Kirste (1892) shows that the Mahābhārata existed in something like its present form in the 5th cent. A.D.

²⁰ See Fitzgerald, 1985. Later authors like Madhva accept the Mahābhārata as fifth Veda but apply the term to other works as well, like the Pañcarātra; see Glasenapp, 1923: 5, 7. See further Rocher, 1986: 16 f. (Purāṇas), Keith, 1924: 12-13, Kuiper, 1979: 118-119 n. 42, 121 f. (Nāṭyaśāstra).

The above evidence suggests that the meaning of the word 'Veda' underwent a development. Before the 'Saṃhitās' had come into existence, it did not, indeed could not, designate these. 'Veda' appears to have been used in that period, and perhaps for some time afterwards, as an approximate synonym of *mantra* and *brahman* 'sacred utterance'. It was apparently used much like *vidyā* in *trayī vidyā*, which kept this sense when 'Veda' came to designate the Vedic collections including or consisting of the 'Saṃhitās'. Before the word 'Veda' obtained its final meaning, however, it may have been used in a far looser sense to refer to the 'five Vedas', at least some of which never were collections in the proper sense of the term.

[133]

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[134]

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Abbreviations

(all Pali texts PTS edition)

AB Aitareya Brāhmaṇa AN Aṅguttara Nikāya Av Avadānaśataka

AV Atharvaveda (Śaunakīya)

AV(P) Atharvaveda (Paippalāda)

BAU Brhadāranyaka Upanisad

BHSD Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary by F. Edgerton

ChU Chāndogya Upanisad CPD Critical Pali Dictionary

Divy Divyāvadāna DN Dīgha Nikāya GB Gopatha Brāhmana

J Jātaka

JB Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa KS Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā MN Majjhima Nikāya MS Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā

Mv Mahāvastu

PED Pali-English Dictionary (PTS)

PTS Pali Text Society

RV Rgveda

SadB Sadvimsa Brāhmaṇa ŚB Satapatha Brāhmana

Sn Suttanipāta SN Samyutta Nikāya

T. Taishō edition of the Tripitaka in Chinese

TB Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa Thag Theragāthā

TS Taittirīya Samhitā

Viy Viyāhapannatti (Jaina-Āgama-Series 4)

VSK Vājasaneyi Samhitā (Kānva)

VSM Vājasaneyi Samhitā (Mādhyandina)