

Linguistics 051:
Proto-Indo-European Language and Society
Indo-Iranian

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Indo-Iranian

- Ancient Indo-Iranian languages
 - **Iranian:** Avestan, Old Persian
 - **Indic:** Vedic Sanskrit, classical Sanskrit
- Three important early records from Indo-Iranian languages
 - Vedic Sanskrit: **Vedas** (hymns and religious poems)
 - Avesta: The **Avesta** (Zoroastrian scripture)
 - Old Persian: **Cuneiform Inscriptions** from Persian Empire (600-300)
- In addition there are some names and terms in an Indic dialect preserved from Mitanni, c. 1500

Veda

- Veda = ‘(sacred) knowledge’ < * uoid- ‘to know’ (perfect/stative stem)
- Two categories:
 - a. *Śruti* < * klu-tí- (< * kleu ‘to hear’)
knowledge directly ‘heard/seen/experienced’ by the ṛṣis (priest-poets)
 - b. *Smṛti* < * smṛ-tí- (< * smer ‘to remember’)
traditional sacred knowledge not considered as specifically ‘revealed’

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Parts of the Veda

- Organized into several parts in approximate order of composition
 1. Verse ‘collections’ called *Samhitā* < * $\text{somH-d}^{\text{hi}}\text{-tó-}$ ‘put into one’
 2. Prose commentaries on the *Samhitā* called *Brāhmaṇa*
 3. *Āraṇyaka*: ‘forest texts’
esoteric texts to be read in secret away from the public
 4. *Upaniṣads*: esoteric teaching texts (part prose, part verse)
(< * upo ‘near’ + * ni ‘down’ + * sed ‘sit’)
 5. *Vedāṅga*: auxiliary texts: grammatical and astronomical treatises, etc. (*smṛti*)

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Samhitā

- The Samhitas are the most important works for linguistics since they are the oldest. There are four:
 1. **Ṛg Veda (Rig Veda, Riksamhitā)**: Verses to be recited at sacrifices
 2. **Yajur Veda (Yajusamhitā)**: Sacrificial formulas
 3. **Sāma Veda (Sāmasamhitā)**: Texts set to melodies
 4. **Atharva Veda (Atharvasamhitā)**: Mostly magical formulas
- The Ṛg Veda is clearly the oldest and is remarkably archaic
- The Atharva Veda is sometimes not included in ‘the three Vedas’ and is the most recent of the four

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Dating the texts

- The Veda was originally composed orally and preserved in this fashion for at least 500 years before being written down
- Dating the Ṛg Veda is difficult since it probably emerged as the result of a very long tradition of sacrificial hymns some of which go back to before the Indo-Iranian split, ca. 2000.
- The text we now possess was assembled and codified around 600 (BCE)
- It is probable that this version had been composed and orally transmitted as early as 1500 and probably no later than 1000

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Recensions of the Ṛg Veda

- We currently possess only one ‘version’ of the Ṛg Veda, and there are **no variants** in existence
- Traditionally there were said to be five **recensions** but only the most authoritative has survived
- The text was subjected to minute scrutiny
 - the text is accompanied by the **pada** text, in which every word is separated from every other word and given as if it were pronounced in isolation
 - the **kramapāṭha** and **jaṭāpāṭha** texts then arrange the words in different orders (*ab, ba, ab, bc, or ab, ba, abc, cba, abc, bc, cb ...*)

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Pada text examples

- Vedic (as well as classical Sanskrit) is complicated by phonological rules which change the pronunciation of sounds when words come together in phrases.
 - These rules are called **sandhi** (‘putting together’)
 - To avoid any mistakes, the **pada** text ‘undoes’ the rules
- ‘Mitra regards the settlements of the men without blinking’

Samhita: **mitráḥ** **kṛṣṭír** **ánimiṣābhí** **caṣṭe**

Pada: **mitráḥ** **kṛṣṭíḥ** **áni-miṣā abhí** **caṣṭe**

s → ḥ at the end of a word, but s → r before a vowel-initial word

ā + a → ā

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Oral preservation and arrangement

- The current organization of the Ṛg Veda
 - 1028 hymns (*sūkta* < *h₁su ‘good’ + *u(e)k- ‘say’), divided into
 - 10 books or ‘circles’ (*maṇḍala*)
- Books 2-7 are the oldest books, known as the **family books** because each one was preserved by a single family of priests: Gritsamada, Vishvamitra, Vamadeva, Atri, Bharadvaja, Vasishta
- Probably families of **priest-poets** were attached to princely families
- The priest-poet composed hymns for public recitation in praise of deities, but also to impress rulers and to obtain patronage and favors
- Quite possibly these hymns were **later** attached to specific sacrifices

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Vedic ritual

- The ‘Hinduism’ which characterizes later Indian civilization is a complex development from an earlier and quite different ‘Vedism’
- Ṛg-vedic hymns are extremely **allusive**: they refer obliquely to a huge body of mythology which must have been current in the society
- Main deities addressed are **Agni** (god of fire) and **Indra** (god of war)
- Sacrifices were of either animals (usually goats) or of plants, and officiating priests drank an intoxicating beverage called **soma**
- What **soma** was is unknown, but most now believe it was the stimulant **ephedra**, obtained from a plant grown in the Kashmir/Punjab region. It may have also contained hallucinogens, but this is unclear.

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Purpose of ritual

- Ritual hymns serve multiple purposes
 - to accompany the sacrifice (*yajña*) and the consumption of **soma**
 - to **invite** and **welcome** the gods and make an **offering** to them of food and drink: part is thrown into the **sacred fire**, which carries the sacrifice to the god, and part is eaten by priests.
 - to **praise** the gods and **curse** their (or one's own) enemies
 - to obtain the favor of the gods for wealth, sons, good fortune
 - to **participate in the divine**
 - obtain payment or remuneration (the priest receives an honorary gift, the *dakṣina*, typically a cow)
 - more rarely, to thank the gods for past good fortune

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Elaboration and Ritual Exactitude

- each part of each ritual was accompanied by special uttered formulas
- sacrificial foods and soma had to be prepared in very specific ways by very specific people, who might themselves be chosen through other ritual processes
- the ritual had to be performed **without error**: an error could bring terrible misfortune
- this obsession with exactitude and correctness was enormously important in preserving the Vedic texts absolutely unchanged for centuries
- proper performance of the rituals was necessary to maintain the order of the universe

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Avesta

- The **Avesta** is the name given to Zoroastrian scripture which was first put into writing in the early 6th century CE.
- **Zoroastrianism** refers to a religion founded by **Zoroaster** or **Zarathustra**
- A version of Zoroastrianism was the state religion of the ancient Persian Empire and of the (non-Greek) dynasties that ruled Persia until the Islamic conquest in the 10th century CE.
- After Islam, Zoroastrianism was suppressed in Iran, but some Zoroastrians, later called **Parsis** ('Persians'), migrated to India where a small number still live today, largely in the area of Mumbai.

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Preservation of the Avesta

- Like the Veda, the Avesta was composed and preserved orally (between 1200 and 600 BCE?) and was not put into writing for many centuries
- The Avesta can be divided into two portions based on the language:
 - **Old Avestan** — a very archaic form occurring mostly in certain hymns called the **Gāthas**, said to be by Zoroaster himself
 - **Young Avestan** — a considerably later form of the language, contained in the remainder of the scriptures
- **All** the Avesta that we now have comes from manuscripts which date no earlier than 1300 CE. These in turn were copied from earlier mss. which were based on '**final performances**': authoritative oral renditions
- Thus the text shows considerable 'corruption' due to later changes

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Old Avestan and Sanskrit

- In many respects Old Avestan is **remarkably archaic**, especially considering that the texts were written down so late
- The Gāthas were written in a **syllable-counting** meter
- In a surprisingly large number of cases the meter shows that syllables which were separate in PIE (either before contraction or because of laryngeals) remain separate in Old Avestan

gen.pl. stems in -er	*-r-óHom	-rə'əm-	-r̥ṅnam
1sg subj.act.	*-o-o-h ₂	-a'a, -a'anī	-ā ~ -ānī
3pl subj.act.	*-o-o-nt-i	-ā'antī	-ān
1sg subj.mid.	*-o-o-h ₂ e-i	-a'ai	-āi
3sg subj.mid.	*-e-e-to-i	-a'aitē	-ātāi

Old Avestan example

Yasna 28. Holy Prayers (verses 13, 14)

Ahunwar

Yaθā ahū vairiīō

<i>yaθā ahū va'rii-ō</i>	.𐬵𐬀𐬯𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀
<i>aθā ratuš ašāt-cīt hacā</i>	.𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀
<i>vanh-ēuš da-z-dā mananḥō</i>	.𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀
<i>šiiəθ'n-anəm anḥēuš mazdāi,</i>	.𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀
<i>xšaθrəm-cā ahurāi ā</i>	.𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀
<i>yim drigubiiō dadaṭ vāstārəm!</i>	.𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀 .𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀

The will of the Lord is the law of righteousness.

The gifts of the Good Mind to the deeds done in this world for Mazda.

He who relieves the poor makes Ahura king.

ahu- m. ‘lord’, *ahura-* ‘lord’

va’riia- gerund of *var-* ‘to wish’

ratu- ‘heavenly model’

aša- ‘righteousness, order’

-cīt ‘even, actually’; *hacā* ‘from, in accordance with’

vaṅhu- ‘good’

dazdā < **da-d^h-ta* 3 sg middle injunctive (unaugmented imperfect) of *da* ‘give’

manaṅhō (< **manah-ah*) gsg. of *manah-* ‘thought’

šiiāoθnā- ‘deed’

aṅhu-/ahu- ‘life’

drigu- ‘poor’

xšaθra- ‘power, rule’

vāstar- ‘forager, pastor’