

When the first attempt was made to translate the earliest poems of the Indo-Europeans into English, the explanations of medieval scholarship were still regarded as authoritative. Horace Hayman Wilson based his nineteenth-century version of the *Rigveda* on the work of the fourteenth-century Indian commentator Sāyaṇa. Sāyaṇa had let context dictate his interpretation of the large proportion of the vocabulary of which he was doubtful. He explains the Rigvedic word "kāra", for example, at its nine occurrences in the text in nine different ways: as "conch shell", "shout", "hymn", "solemn (rite)", "author of success", "servant", "battle", "sound" and "granting".

Manfred Mayrhofer has devoted a lifetime to the study of Old Indo-Aryan, traditionally known as Sanskrit. The first fascicle of his monumental *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen* appeared in 1986, and the work is now approaching completion in three volumes. In fact, there are two distinct dictionaries: the first two volumes, of ten fascicles each, cover the language of the Vedic texts, the third the Sanskrit of the epic and beyond. This is an important innovation. Sanskrit lexicography previously treated the language as one, a tradition which Professor Mayrhofer now likens to producing a combined dictionary of Mycenaean and modern Greek.

This is Mayrhofer's second work of this kind. His *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen* was published between 1953 and 1976. In both works, definitions and etymologies are supported by comprehensive referencing to a large body of scholarly literature, each entry constituting an indispensable bibliographical record. The vocabulary of the *Rigveda* is covered in the first two volumes of the *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*. What progress are we making in pinning down its obscurities?

The many *hapax legomena* are nearly all doubtful, and Mayrhofer wisely makes no attempt to guess at meanings, merely giving "ohne gesicherte Interpretation", "unklar", "problematisch" and so on. Setting these aside, comparison with Mayrhofer's previous dictionary reveals, more significantly, continuing scholarly disagreement about a large proportion of the vocabulary. Mayrhofer's review of scholarship on the complexities of the important word *ari* appears in the second fascicle. It occurs 103 times, and was given as "stranger" in the earlier work. Now his entry is much fuller (I translate): "In interpreting this disputed

An ancient jigsaw

KAREN THOMSON

Manfred Mayrhofer

ETYMOLOGISCHES WÖRTERBUCH
DES ALTINDOARISCHEN
Volume One: 812pp. 3 8253 3826 6
Volume Two: 837pp. 3 82534550 5
Carl Winter. DM844.
TLS £64.

Alexander Lubotsky

A RIGVEDIC WORD CONCORDANCE
1,667pp. American Oriental Society. \$125.
TLS £63.
0 940490 12 9

Vedic word the assumption of homonymy should be avoided where possible. The best definition offered continues to be 'stranger' . . . which is consonant with its use to mean 'guest', and, common in the later language, 'enemy' (like Latin *hostis*) . . . G. Dumézil is foremost in offering a contrary view." The equally significant word *vidātha*, occurring 112 times, was previously translated as "distribution", following the literature, but now Mayrhofer is less convinced: "Vedic word of disputed translation, perhaps belonging to the realm of (ceremonial) allotment." Between these two at either end of the dictionary, comparison of entries reveals not progress towards a consensus, but a tendency to the opposite. Definitions that before were given with assurance are now accompanied by words indicating increased uncertainty: "vielleicht", "etwa", "wahrscheinlich", "wohl", "diskutabel". The mass of scholarship, it appears, is not getting us any further forward.

Alexander Lubotsky's *Rigvedic Word Concordance* is the first word index to the *Rigveda* since that of Hermann Grassmann published in 1873. Although based on an electronic edition of the text, errors occurring in that edition have been corrected. Lubotsky is a careful editor, seeing his task as "to refrain as much as possible from idiosyncratic choices". Grassmann had analysed the text, distinguishing, for example,



Agni, god of fire in the Vedas, in his later role in Hindu art as one of the Dikpalas, the eight guardians of the directions of space; from *Hindu Art and Architecture* by George Michell (224pp. Thames and Husdon. Paperback, £8.95. 0 500 20337 7)

case forms that can be confused, such as the frequently homophonic genitive singular and nominative plural. Lubotsky makes no attempt to do this, and as a result many assumptions about semantic relations are shed.

Professor Lubotsky does, however, make several alterations to the readings of the text, which he lists at the beginning. The *Rigveda* has come down to us in two forms. The *Samhitā* ("put together") is a continuous text, applying sandhi rules which change the appearance of words. Many of these rules belong to a period later than that of the composition of the poems, as the metre makes clear. The Pada ("word") text, believed to be of similar antiquity, restores all the sandhi changes, providing a word-for-word version. It is our earliest linguistic analysis of the text, and was compiled to protect it from corruption. In making alterations to it, Lubotsky has, as he says, "opted for a conservative approach".

None the less, the changes he makes could be questioned. At 10.95.12b and 13b, for instance, he follows a conjectural emendation to the Pada text first suggested in the 1950s, replacing the

unfamiliar word *cakrān* in both verses with the familiar *cakrām*, "wheel". It is a fundamental tenet of textual criticism that harder readings are better than easier ones – that the less obvious is more likely to be correct. Another tenet, that corruption breeds corruption, could also be cited here: Lubotsky gives the Pada text reading incorrectly as *cakrāt*. The Pada text has never been published in transliteration, and is not easily accessible to Western scholars.

Barend Van Nooten and Gary Holland's electronic edition, on which Lubotsky's concordance is based, was published as Volume Fifty of the *Harvard Oriental Series* in 1994. The previous edition of the text by Theodor Aufrecht (second edition 1877, reprinted 1955) had long been out of print. Van Nooten and Holland's is the first attempt to restore the *Rigveda* to its original metrical form. For the first time in its history, the *Rigveda* is clearly revealed, on the printed page, as poetry. Textual errors notwithstanding, this is by far the most exciting contribution that has been made to Rigvedic studies in recent years, although it too has now fallen out of print.

We have inherited the *Rigveda* with an accumulation of over two millennia of derivative texts and texts deriving from those derivative texts, of commentaries and commentaries upon those commentaries, culminating in the work of Sāyaṇa. Until we abandon inherited assumptions about meaning, the text will probably remain indecipherable. The prevailing dialect of the *Rigveda* is not the direct ancestor of classical Sanskrit. None the less, it has traditionally always been approached through that language. In giving us a separate dictionary of Vedic Sanskrit, Mayrhofer has prepared the way for the *Rigveda* to be studied independently of the later language and texts, and Lubotsky has provided a concordance from which previously held assumptions have been largely removed. Meanwhile, existing translations are left to juggle with meanings in the traditional way. The Penguin selection by Professor Wendy O'Flaherty is the only version readily available in English, reprinted many times in the past twenty years. For *ari* (see above) she usually offers the (?later) translation "enemy", but also gives at one point "band of friends"; she translates *vidātha* variously as "rite", "gathered people", "sacrifice" and "the wise". With so many Rigvedic words stubbornly refusing to fit where we want them to, it must be time to look again at the pieces of the jigsaw that we have had in place since we began.

CLASSIFIED

LECTURES & MEETINGS

University of London
Institute of English Studies
School of Advanced Study
Public Lecture
Thursday 22 February, 5.30pm
GILLIAN FELLOWS-JENSEN
'English Place-Names
and Settlement History:
Seen with the Benefit of Hindsight'
Entry Free Without Ticket
Followed by a glass of wine
Venue: Beveridge Hall, Senate House
Enquiries: 020 7862 8675,
ies@sas.ac.uk
WWW.SAS.AC.UK/IES
6215654(9845)

ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS

Looking for a book?
www.bibliophile.net
Over one million books for sale by
independent booksellers world wide.
Comprehensive search engine and
shopping basket. Orders direct to the
booksellers. No price markups.
6215669(9822)

PUBLISHING & RIGHTS

• The Edwin Mellen Press is a non subsidy
publisher of books which advance scholarly re-
search. For our free information brochure
please write or telephone: The Edwin Mellen
Press, Unit 17, Llambod Ind. Est, Lampeter,
Ceredigion, Wales, SA48 8LT. Tel: 01570 423
356.

BOOK FAIRS

KING'S LYNN
FICTION FESTIVAL 2001
9th-11th March at the Town Hall
Celebrating Year of the Artist 2000-2001
A weekend of readings and discussions with
Dame Beryl Bainbridge Raffaella Barker Louis
de Bernières Christopher Bigsby Candida
Clarke Geoff Dyer Bo Fowler Sophie Hannah
Liz Jensen Toby Litt William Rivière
Ahdaf Soueif Matt Thorne Christopher West
For information and tickets, call:
Anthony Ellis 01553 691661 (office hours)
01553 761919 (evenings and weekends)
Main sponsors: eastengland/arts
Borough Council of King's Lynn
and West Norfolk and The Macallan
6209765(9850)

BOOKS & PRINTS

• Arab World - Rare & Out-of-Print Books.
Lists on request. David Loman Ltd. 12 Suffolk
Road, London SW13 9NB.

ACCOMMODATION

• Hastings/Rye. Here lived Henry James'
friend, under one of the red roofs he admired.
Now there are 2 warm, comfortable self-
catering flats, £55-£90 per week, 1-6 persons:
++49 241 405207 or 797 226782.

• London, The Penn Club 21 Bedford
Place, WC1B 5JL. Friendly b&b with long estab-
lished Quaker connections. Situated historic
Bloomsbury, very close to British Museum, Di-
rect links with Heathrow. A secure, quiet base,
ideal for persons travelling alone. Tel: 020
7636 4718 Fax: 020 7636 5516 e-mail
office@pennclub.co.uk

• Driscoll House Hotel, 200 single rooms
£150 per week or £30 per day, partial board.
Apply 172 New Kent Road, London SE1 4YT.
Tel: 0171-703 4175. Children under 14 half
price.

TLS

Classified Advertising

Fax:

020 7782
3333