

## Samudra and Sarasvati in the *Rgveda*.

N. Kazanas, Omilos Meleton, Athens, October 2004.

### Introduction

*The Hindu* printed in several issues (18th, 25th June, etc, 2002) letters from Dr D. Frawley and Prof M. Witzel amounting to a controversy whether the rigvedic people had towns/forts and knew the ocean; also whether the river Sarasvatī flowed down to the ocean. I sent a letter to that newspaper in mid-September 2002 giving my own views, but for unknown reasons my letter was not published. I have since revised the whole piece. Here I show that *samudra* does denote the ocean/sea and that Sarasvatī did flow to the ocean prior to 3200 BC.<sup>1</sup>

#### a) *samudra* : ocean or what?

With regard to *samudra* Frawley presented some very good evidence (I 71, 7; V 55, 5; IX 84, 4 etc) and some very dubious examples (I 130, 5; I 190, 7; VII 33, 8 etc: July 16, pp 4-6, 20-3). Witzel ignored all the sound evidence and digressed on some weak points and obvious generalities, such as – “Varuṇa is not just a god of *samudra* but ... of Rta ...” (as if Frawley doesn’t know this).

The important point here is whether the Rigvedic people knew the ocean/sea (in our modern sense of the words) or not. If they did, then obviously *samudra* can mean ocean/sea. If they did not, then *samudra* cannot mean ocean/sea. How do we find out?

To say that *samudra* means ‘ocean’ and that therefore the *RV* knows the ocean (so Frawley) is circuitous and really begs the question. Similarly, to say that in one verse it means ‘a terminal lake’, in another ‘heavenly waters’, in a third ‘confluence’ etc, and that therefore the *RV* does not know the ocean (so Witzel), is no better.

Since the *RV* is an absolutely primary text, *philology can be of limited help to settle this issue*. When Witzel claims that philology is necessary (true of course in many ways) and dizzyingly refers to various sources (all distant from, and some later than, the *RV*), to recent scholarly authorities (often irrelevant), protolanguages (all conjectural and hardly admissible in a court of law) and so on, and when Frawley falls into the trap and argues against all this, they both labour under a fallacy. The word *samudra* means literally ‘all-together’ *sam* and ‘water’ *udrā* (cf *anudrā* = waterless). That *udr-a* is connected to the hypothetical Proto-Indo-European *\*udn-*, (found nowhere except modern books!), to Gr *hudor*, Latin *unda*, Goth *watō* etc, etc, does not help us in the slightest any more than Gr *polis* and Baltic *pilis*, *pils* and later uses of *pur-* in India help with rigvedic *pur*<sup>2</sup>. And this, because we don’t and can’t know if the original PIE word(s) had one meaning in all places, all tribes and all classes of the communities, and because the use of the cognates in many cases developed differently in the separate traditions according to different conditions of place and time. (Eg: Vedic *arṇa-/va* ‘surging, wave, flood’ is connected to Hittite *aruna* ‘sea’ and Gr *ernos* ‘branch, shoot’ and Norwegian *run(n)e* ‘branch’: thus, if the cognates are correct – and who can be certain? – we have two distinct lines of semantic development. Cf also  $\sqrt{nu}$  > *navate/nauti* ‘sound/praise’ and ‘go’ but Gr *nevō* ‘nod/wink’ and Latin *ad-nuo* ‘make a sign’; then  $\sqrt{man}$  > *manyate* ‘think’ but Gk *maino-mai* ‘be furious’, OE *mænan* ‘signify’ (also *mūnan* ‘remember’) and Goth *munan* ‘think’; also *manas* ‘mind’ but Gk *menos* ‘force/spirit’; again, *sar-īt* ‘stream’ or *sār-as* ‘lake, pond’ and Gr *hals-* ‘salt, sea’ or *helos* ‘swamp’, Latin *sal-/inus* ‘salt-/y’, Goth *sal-sus* ‘salt’. In all these examples the semantic development diverges considerably.) To say then that in *RV* VII 95, 2 *ā́ samudrā́t* the word means ‘a terminal lake’ in which the river Sarasvatī ends (Witzel 2001: 76) is not philology at all: it is a mere and arbitrary interpretation with the use of some reasoning or logical process which, however, here is defective because it is conditioned heavily by the AIT. That it is based on erudite studies of the past (eg K Klaus, et al) is not at all helpful since they too are arbitrary interpretations heavily conditioned by the AIT: moreover they have no

more information about *samudra* than I have or Geldner or the *Vedic Index*, since the *RV* is an absolutely primary text.

So how do we find out? Any mass of water more than one drop could be *sam-udra*: water in a jar, a small pool, a large lake or the sea. When we say it is a confluence or a river, we have introduced the element of movement – moving, not stationary water. Now, such is also water-from-a-spring, a cataract or heavy torrential rain. Perhaps *sam-udra* denotes these moving water-masses also?... Let us try a different approach – a common sense one.

For the sake of the argument, I assume that the AIT is correct. So at about 1500 BC the Aryans come from Afghanistan, they do manage to climb up the north-western mountains with their carts (*anas-*, *vāhana-*) and their *rathavāhana-* upon which rest the war-chariots (*ratha-*), then roll down into the valleys of Saptasindhu and with peaceful and/or violent means eventually take control of the natives. I also assume that the Sarasvatī does not flow into the Indian/Arabian ocean; only the Indus does so. Meanwhile the Harappan culture is collapsing and many natives move to the east and south followed by the newcomers. The Aryans come from a landlocked place and know nothing of the ocean – only lakes, rivers and confluences. Then they begin to compose their religious hymns and a few hundred years later they arrange and produce, say c 1200-1000, the *RV* collection – in which there is no knowledge of the ocean. This has been the mainstream AIT scenario with minor variations.

With regard to the knowledge of the ocean, this scenario contains a fatal flaw. At their arrival the Aryans may (in this scenario) have known no ocean, but is it at all likely that they continued to be ignorant of it in the next 300 or even 3 years? Of course not. *They would have learnt about it from the natives, at least.*

To begin with, it is well established that the Harappans knew the ocean and had maritime trade with Mesopotamia since the late third millennium if not earlier (Saggs 1989: 130; Crawford 1994: 148; Lal 1997: 182-8). They had large ports like Lothal and perhaps Dholavira (on an island) and Dvaraka (later) and obviously large ocean-faring ships and smaller craft, sailing up and down the Indus, the “terminal lakes” and the other rivers. Surely it is not likely in all those decades and centuries that the Aryans never heard from the natives about the expanse of the ocean in the south and the former trade. Then, the Aryans themselves were intrepid adventurers who had trekked 100s of miles over rough and dangerous regions and had conquered the Saptasindhu. Surely it is not likely that nobody thought of travelling by chariot to the south, or by boat down the Indus (see example 5, below) and so gain first-hand knowledge of the ocean. And if a few did this, then more would follow and, in any case, knowledge of the ocean would spread among the Indoaryans, including some of the composers of the hymns.

Thus common sense compels us to accept that the Indoaryans had knowledge of the ocean/sea even in the AIT scenario. With its customary caution the *Vedic Index*, which does not at all promote indigenism or an early *Rgveda*, but adheres to the AIT, states “knowledge of the ocean... was almost inevitable to people who knew the Indus” (vol 2, 432). Why modern scholars abandon common sense in favour of a mis-applied “philology” is a mystery.

Consequently we must accept that there may well be references to the ocean in the *RV*. Common sense again dictates that out of the many words that denote ‘water-mass/flood’ a very likely one is the frequent *samudra* because this is so used commonly and consistently in post-rigvedic literature.

Are there such instances in the *RV*? Yes, many.

We should first note that the recent claims about *samudra* denoting various water-masses

other than the ocean are not new nor more "scientific". The *Vedic Index* (1912) mentions some scholars who rejected totally the meaning 'ocean', others who accepted it in few and others in many cases. It cites Zimmer who thought *samudra* "denotes the river Indus when it receives all its Panjab tributaries" and gives numerous references (see example no 10, end). But it adds "even Zimmer who is inclined to restrict [the Vedic Indians'] knowledge of the sea as far as possible admits it in one passage of the Rigveda and of course later" (*Vedic Index II 431*). Zimmer's one exception is VII 95, 2, (*Vedic Index II 432*), Sarasvatī flowing *girībhya ā́ samudrāt* 'from the mountains to the ocean' (which Witzel takes as 'terminal lake')! K. Klaus (1989: 365) also in his study agrees with Zimmer and accepts that in this passage *samudra* may denote *Meer* 'sea'. On the other hand, in some instances *samudra* can denote 'confluence' (RV III 33, 2) and in others primeval celestial 'ocean' (X 190, 1-2), while in yet others earthly 'ocean/sea'. Let us now pass to some examples in the RV. And I start with one of Frawley's examples.

**1) V 55, 5** *úd irayathā marutaḥ samudrató yūyám vṛṣṭim varṣayathā* 'O Maruts, you raise up rain from the *samudra* [and] cause-to-rain'. Here there is plainly an upward (*ud*) movement of water/moisture/vapour and then rain caused by the Stormgods. The upward movement excludes an atmospheric or heavenly water-mass since the waters would not go even higher before they fall as rain; so it must be a water-mass on earth. The *samudra* here is singular. So it cannot be one river or confluence since there are many of these; moreover, these are in motion and even the rigvedic people would know that vapour would rise more easily from stationary waters. Nor can it be one "terminal lake" since there are other small and large lakes. Consequently *samudra* must here denote either the sum-total of waters, stationary and moving, or a single very large watermass which is the ocean/sea. Again, the rigvedic people must have known that evaporation occurs more in hot conditions rather than in cold; so they would not refer to *all* waters. They must also have known that it is hotter further south of Saptasindhu. Now, even in the AIT scenario, as we saw, they must have known that, further south where it is hotter, there is a very large, almost limitless watermass and that most evaporation would take place there. So here *samudra* must refer to the ocean/sea. Klaus (1989: 370) takes this as a possible reference to the Indus, but this ignores the facts given here.

The next example mentions an upper but also a lower *samudra*. I trust I shall be excused hereafter if I don't indulge in such ludicrously detailed analyses to demonstrate the obvious.

**2) VII 6, 7:** Agni Vaiśvānara received treasures in the rising of the sun *ā́ samudrād ávarād ā́ parasmād... divā ā́ pṛthiviāḥ* 'from the *samudra* lower and upper, from sky/heaven and earth'. Here we have a lower and an upper ocean and sky and earth: so we take the lower ocean to be earthly and the upper one atmospheric or heavenly. Or we may also have a chiasmus figure (od-bc: *avara-samudra* with *pṛthivi* and *para-samudra* with *dyu-*) which amounts to the same. But here the lower water-mass cannot be the heavenly one as well, nor a terminal lake nor a confluence of two rivers. Nor could the poet have in mind the sun rising from a lake or river, however wide: there was no large watermass in the east of Saptasindhu to account for such a phenomenon. So *samudra* must be 'sea/ocean' here.

We find another differentiation and contrast in a hymn to the Maruts who knew the ocean.

**3) VIII 20, 25:** Whatever medicinal balm is in the Indus and Asiknī rivers... *samudréṣu... párvateṣu* 'in the oceans... on the mountains'. Here now we have (two) rivers and their drinkable waters, then oceans/seas with salt-water and mountains – a totally earthly area. Thus we can exclude the heavenly ocean, lakes (with sweet water) and confluences (also sweet water).

Whatever other philologists and other experts may say about these passages, I have not

the slightest doubt that they reveal knowledge of ocean/sea.

Then there is the tale of Bhujyu who is rescued by the Aśvins from the middle of the *samudra* in numerous hymns. This is all we know and post-rigvedic literature says nothing at all about this incident.

**4) I 116, 4:** For three nights and three days (*tisráḥ kṣápas trír áha-*), o Aśvins, you carried Bhujyu... *samudrásya dhánvan ādrásya pāré* 'to the distant dry-shore of the watery ocean'. Here the key is the 3 nights and days. Obviously, no lake or river is so wide that the Aśvins would need so long to ferry Bhujyu across. Only an ocean will do here. Klaus refers only to the aspect of moisture (*feucht*) ignoring all else (1989: 366, n 12).

That the tale may be pure myth does not invalidate the duration of the Aśvins' flight to the dry *dhanva-* 'sandbank' (Mayrhofer KEWA vol 2) and the expanse of the *samudra*. Even if it is a hyperbole, it is used presumably to emphasize the expanse of waters. Consequently, in the many other references to the rescue of Bhujyu by the Aśvins *samudra* denotes ocean: eg I 118, 6; VI 62, 6; VII 69, 7; VIII 5, 22; etc. Perhaps it is not out of place here to note that this motif of the Aśvins as rescuers may be PIE since it appears in Greece where the two Dioskouroi 'the bright Skygod's sons' deliver men and ships from tempestuous seas (long *Hymn to Dioskouroi* 6-8, in White 1935) and in the Baltic countries where the Dievo Sunelai 'the [sky-]god's lads' save the Sunmaiden from the sea (Ward 1968).

With these examples in mind we can look at many more passages and find they indicate knowledge of the ocean – perhaps even maritime trade in the next one.

**5) I 56, 2:** To [Indra] go praises... *samudráṃ ná saṃcáraṇe saniṣyávaḥ* 'as to the samudra [go] in company those desiring gain'. *saṃcáraṇa* and the plural *saniṣyavaḥ* imply more than two going together. Yes, it could be to a lake or a large river, the only one according to the AIT being the Indus (for fish, shells, commerce?). But if they have a large enough boat to take 3 or more persons and merchandise, surely it could reach the ocean in the south. However, to me (and to the *Vedic Index* I, 461-2, under **nau**) this suggests the ocean/sea.

**6) I 32, 1-2:** Indra killed the dragon, opened outlets for the waters splitting the breasts of mountains (1cd) then ... *syándamānā āñjaḥ samudráṃ áva jagmur ápaḥ* (2cd) 'flowing directly to the ocean down rushed the waters'. Here the "mountains" may be a metaphor for clouds but even so the rainwaters would not end up in one terminal lake, or one river or one confluence (*samudra* is singular), but in the ocean. Only strong prejudice under the AIT would insist otherwise. Geldner who is obviously aware of the earlier dispute about *samudra* here translates: *eilend liefern die Gewässer stracks zum Meere*, the only difference from mine being *Meer* 'the sea'. I'll settle for "the sea" quite happily.

In fact Geldner uses in his translation *Meer* 'sea' and *Ozean* 'ocean' very frequently – and even in places where I would hesitate. Here are some examples.

**7) V 78, 8:** *yáthā vátō yáthā vánaṃ yáthā samudrá éjati*. Geldner renders: *Wie die Wind, wie der Wald, wie das Meer bewegt* 'as the wind, as the wood, as the **sea** stirs'. Here *samudra* could well be a lake, but Geldner is unhesitant.

**8) II 35, 3:** *sám anyā yanty úpa yanty anyāḥ, samānám ūrvám nadíah pṛṇanti*: literally 'while some flow together, others flow towards; the rivers fill the common receptacle'. In Mayrhofer (KEWA vol 1) *ūrva* = 'dungeon', but also *Meer* 'sea'. 'Flow together' probably means flow one into the other. Geldner gives much the same but also makes an insertion in the first part: *...münden andere (ins Meer)* 'others flow (into the sea)'. And the last part he renders freely as *den gemeinsamen Ozean* 'the common ocean'.

**9) III 33, 2:** Impelled by Indra ... you-two [rivers] *samudráṃ rathýeva yáthah* 'like chariot-

horses go to the sea'. Geldner gives the same – *geht ihr zum Meere*. Here we could perhaps have 'you go to your confluence' since the two rivers are thought to join together; yet, even here, the simile of the chariot-horses (or, loosely 'chariots') would seem most inapt since a confluence for them would be a disastrous collision. Nor can it be said that here is meant the confluence with the Indus because this would come later, after the two rivers have joined. So we have an unclear situation.

Now Geldner not only is aware of the disputes regarding ambiguous words, phrases or passages, but also has translated all *RV* and so should know the text better than most. His numerous references to parallel passages in *other Vedic texts* shows that he knows the entire spectrum of the Vedic literature. This does not mean that he is free of errors, but these are due mostly to the limitations of the AIT which he also held but with far better reasons in his time than modern vedicists.

Allow me here to open a parenthesis on (mis-)translations and misconceptions under the influence of this wretched AIT. In this very hymn III 33, Viśvāmitra asks the rivers Vipāś and Śutudrī to stop flowing so that he and the Bharatas can cross; the rivers comply. Now in stanza 11 we find *gavyān grāmaḥ* and in 12 *bharatā gavyāvaḥ*. In both cases Geldner translates the words *gav-* with *Rinder(beute) ausziehend-* 'extracting/removing (ie stealing?) cattle' (KEWA vol 1). C Watkins translates (2001: 86-88) with the compound 'cattle-raiding' ('host' in 11 and 'Bharatas' in 12). It is possible that cattle-raids did occur in *rigvedic* times, as we find similar practices later in Greek and Irish texts also. But in this hymn there is no mention of any raid or cattle-stealing. The adjective *gavyu* means 'desirous-of-cattle' according to the MSD (also 'delighting-in-cattle') and Mayrhofer (*Rinder begehrend* 'desiring cattle'). The MSD gives the same meaning for *gavyat*. These meanings are not quite the same as cattle-rustling, which comes from AIT notions. *gavya(n)t-* is found in several hymn-prayers to Indra together with *aśvaya(n)t-* 'desirous-of/delighting-in horses': eg in IV 17, 6; VII 32, 23; etc. *gavyu* again is used also for Soma (eg VIII 46, 10; IX 97, 15) where the desire is presumably for the cows' milk. Surely a group of people on the move guided by a great seer need not be cattle-rustlers just because they are described as 'desirous-of/delighting-in cattle'. I would like to know if there is any clear reference to cattle-raiding in the *RV*. S A Dange examined in detail many passages about the alleged "battle for the gain of cows" (*gaviṣṭi/go-iṣṭhi*) but found no evidence at all for cattle-raids and the like (1967: 78-108); it is a pity this study has not become (better) known. End of parenthesis.

I do agree with the *Vedic Index* and Zimmer (therein) that in some verses *samudra* may denote the confluence of certain rivers/streams with the Indus. Eg, III 36, 7 ...*samudrēṇa śindhavo yādamanāḥ* '... streams uniting with the river' (not surely uniting with 'confluence'); VI 36, 3, ...*samudrām nā sindhavaḥ* 'like streams/rivers to their confluence; etc: here, yes, *samudra* could be a river or confluence. Another ambiguous passage follows.

**10) I 71, 7:** All offerings go to Agni *samudrām nā sravātaḥ saptā yāhvīḥ* 'like the seven swift-ones flowing to the ocean'. Here, since the Indus itself is one of the 7 rivers and flows down to the ocean, *samudra* must denote 'ocean', terrestrial and nothing else. It can be argued here that *yāhvī* means 'daughter' or 'she-young-one' (which is one of the two meanings given in MSD and Mayrhofer) and that the 7 rivers are "young" (ie smaller) tributaries flowing into the "elder" (ie larger) Indus. However, first, we don't know if the Indus was larger than the tributaries before it received them. Second, and more important, only a very confused mind would speak of tributaries as "young daughters". No daughters in any sense at all flow into an elder person (their mother?) the way tributaries stream into another river. Nor can it be said that several youngsters together grow into a single elder being. When Agni is described as

*sáhaso yahuḥ* (IX 60, 13; or *sáhasaḥ putrá-* in V 11, 6) 'son of might', might is conceived as the pre-existing parent from whom emerges the offspring, and no poet would suggest that the tributaries emerge from the river they feed. Consequently, such thinking is as worthless as Mayrhofer says is the attempted connection of *yahu* with *Jehovah*. Thus the 7 restless rivers flow with the Indus to the ocean.

Although from this we can see that the Vedic people probably had the wider (and not difficult, surely) concept of all streams/ivers eventually flowing into the ocean/sea in the south – and this is their only "terminal lake" – this is not explicit. Indeed, here *samudra* could also denote the confluence with the Indus, as we see in example 9 and other cases mentioned by Klaus (1989).

Another and final example where the word means ocean/sea:

**11) X 66 11** *samudráḥ síndhū rájo antárikṣam ajá ékapāt tanayitnúr arṇaváh:* 'the *samudra*, the river Indus, the region/space, the midair/sky, the deity Aja Ekapād (=the one-footed Unborn or Goat), the thunder, the flood (should listen)'. In this sequence the midair/sky, Aja Ekapād and the thunder are definitely non-earthly but atmospheric or celestial phenomena; so "the flood" is most probably the atmospheric non-earthly ocean. Consequently *samudra* cannot refer to this domain but must be a terrestrial watermass, as is the river Indus; and *rajas* is the general earthly vicinity or space. This seems to follow naturally from the preceding stanza 10c which says that waters and plants should speed the songs forward. There is absolutely nothing before or after to suggest 'confluence' for *samudra* and a pond/lake would be much too specific for this context since there are more than one of them. It cannot be 'a terminal lake' since the Indus flowed to the ocean. So *samudra* must be the normal earthly ocean. The sequence moves from the ocean/sea to the river Indus, then upward to the atmosphere/sky and its phenomena.

Now, if one examines carefully Klaus's paper on *samudra* (1989), one will agree with some of his findings (as in the *Vedic Index*) but will also notice three methodological faults: a) he jumbles together *RV* and post-*RV* passages as if they are all of the same value; b) he refers to numerous *RV* passages and theorizes in generalities but analyses in detail very few; c) he omits several passages like those I use, eg examples 2 (VII 6, 7 yet cites VII 33, 8 etc), 3 (VIII 20, 5 yet he cites many others from Bk VIII), 6 (I 56, 2 yet cites I 52 and 55), 9 (II 35, 3 yet cites others) and 11 (X 66, 11 yet cites others). However, these latter examples show that *samudra* denotes 'ocean/sea'. As for Klaus's objection that the saltness (*Salzigkeit*) of sea-water is not mentioned, it is not serious, because there are contrasts between sweet-water streams and the ocean; no context demands anything else, nor is it anywhere stated that the river-water is drinkable. T Y Elizarenkova (1996: 21) contributed to this misunderstanding (and misrepresentation) when she wrote "it is a problem whether the Rigvedic Aryans really knew of the sea or the ocean"; in her article, which was about words denoting 'water', she did not examine any contexts for *samudra*, opted (blindly) for the meanings 'confluence, pond, spring, etc' (but not 'ocean/sea') and ignored Mayrhofer's lemma in EWA (or the KEWA Supplements) which does give 'sea' (but cited EWA for other cases). Surely, neither Geldner nor Mayrhofer are authorities to be ignored on this matter, even if one disagrees with them.

I think the evidence given above should be quite adequate. Mayrhofer in his EWA Dictionary (1996) admits now the meaning 'a large river formed by the confluence/combination (*Vereinigung*) of two or more rivers'; but he also gives (and for the *RV*) *Flut* 'flood' and *Meer* 'sea' (but no "terminal lake"), as he had done earlier in his KEWA (vol 3, 1980). I'll settle for "sea" happily. So the Indoaryans knew quite well the earthly ocean/sea.

By extension they had ocean-going ships *nāvāḥ samudrīyaḥ*: I 25, 7. This deserves a note. In this hymn, RV I, 25, Varuṇa, the god of *ṛta* 'natural order' and of the moral code, knows the paths of birds and winds, the changes of the moon, the dwellers on high, all kinds of marvels, the past and future – in stanzas 7-11; he knows also samudra-going ships. Now is it likely that the seer of the hymn puts in this last detail referring only to canoes floating on nearby, well-known streams, lakes and confluences(?) ? Is it not more likely that he has in mind ships travelling far and, like the other details, well out of the ordinary ken of the people? I think the latter and this means very distant sojourns. Evidently the seers of the hymns were more concerned with devotion and esoteric journeys than travel abroad, so they give no details about the latter. I now turn to the Sarasvatī issue.

### **b) The river Sarasvatī and Conclusion**

I feel amazement every time I deal with this subject, because to me the evidence is so clear and so decisive that I cannot understand why there is so much controversy, confusion and acrimony. I shall be brief.

There is no doubt that this river flowed down to the ocean certainly before 3200.

RV VII 95, 2 states that this river flows "pure in her course from the mountains to the ocean" *súcir yatī girībhya á samudrāt*. To say that here is meant some "terminal lake" is to ignore not only all the evidence presented above but also all human rationality; because in this instance the Rigvedic seer would have used different words specifically denoting a Rig terminal lake. Vedic has *saras* 'lake' (and *hrada*); so the poet would have said *ā sarobhyaḥ* 'to the terminal lakes' maintaining the metrical cadence – √ – – (and also indicating Witzel's hypothetical etymological connexion with the name *Saras-vatī* 'having terminal lakes'); but he wrote *ā samudrāt* 'to the ocean'. Besides, how could this *naditamā, ambitamā, devitamā* 'best-river, best-mother, best-goddess' (II 41, 16) end in a terminal lake and so be inferior to the Indus which does flow to the ocean? It simply couldn't.

Various claims have been made that the Sarasvatī was a river in Afghanistan or Iran (Iranian *Haraxvaitī*) and that the Indoaryans brought the memory of it to Saptasindhu and foisted it onto one of the rivers here. However, in this case the linguistic evidence is crystal clear. The Iranian language has *vairi-* for 'lake'. It has no cognates at all for Vedic √*sr* > *sisarti/sarati* and derivatives *saras, sarit* etc; it has only *\*harah-* in *Haraxvaitī*! This indicates that the Iranians moved out of Saptasindhu (and the *Avesta* acknowledges that they had lived in a region called *Haptaḥṇdu*) taking with them the name of the river *Sarasvatī* and giving it to a river in their new habitat (but eventually losing the cognates *sr, sar-* etc which are genuinely Indo-European as Gk *hallo-/hiallo-* and Tocharian *salate* show)..

It is not only early hymns that laud Sarasvatī. Late hymns VIII 21, X 64 and 177 also describe **in the present tense** the river's greatness, say that many kings live along its banks and pray for sustenance and good fortune. Neither in these hymns nor anywhere else in the *RV* is there the slightest hint that the river has shrunk, ( as indeed, we find in later texts like *Manusmṛti* II 21 and scholiasts thereon). If it had shrunk, indeed, then the poets would have spoken of past glories, lamented the loss and prayed for the reappearance of the ample water; this evidently did not happen during the composition of the *RV* hymns.

The river dried up c 1900 BC (Rao 1991: 77-9; Allchins 1997: 117). G. Possehl (1998) and P-H Francfort (1992) argued that it stopped reaching the ocean before 3200, possibly before 3800! Consequently the (bulk of the) *RV* must be assigned to a date before 1900 and the Sarasvatī hymns must belong to a period well before 3200. (Here I simplify for brevity.)

The hymns evince no knowledge of large buildings, of brick-constructions, of fixed hearths/altars, of cotton, of rice and so many other elements of the Indus-Saraswati (or Harappan) Civilization, in contrast to post-rigvedic texts that do so. Consequently they must be assigned to a period before 3000. This is in harmony with the native tradition which says that the *RV* arrangement was made on the eve of the great Bharata war just before the onset of the Kali Yuga at 3102 S.H. Levitt (2003) arrived at a fairly similar conclusion, i.e. that the *RV* was composed c3000 or some hymns before, by comparing the religious developments in India and Mesopotamia.

Is this important? Does it matter whether the *RV* was composed in the 4th millennium or c 1000? whether the Indoaryans are indigenous or came to India c 1500? After all, life goes on irrespective of such notions.

Yes, it matters very much. First, the aim of scholarship is to establish and promote true knowledge in all spheres so that life may be regulated by this – not prejudices, partisan views (even patriotic but false) or pet theories. Second, Indian prehistory must be restored and revalued in a correct time-frame, as is done with all other countries and all areas of History. It is sad, indeed, as Frawley wrote (2002 *The Hindu* June 18), “to note how intellectuals in India are quick to denigrate the extent and antiquity of their history”. Third, the *RV* contains, apart from any historical data, ideas that are of great value to mankind and reveal, as do many other recent discoveries in prehistoric cultures (Rudgley 1998 *passim*), that many so-called “primitive” peoples had much and important knowledge that held them at a fairly high level of civilization enabling them to live in harmony with the natural processes of their environment. The *RV* preserves for us the idea of a Primal Unity that is the First Cause of the universe: not only in the *Puruṣa* or the *Nāśadiya* sūkta (X 90 and 129) but also in I 164, 6; III 55; VI 75,19; VIII 58; X 114, 5; and less obviously in others. This doctrine of the indescribable One, which exists before all things and is the cause of all manifestations of divine and mundane phenomena, is absent from all other IndoEuropean traditions (Hittite, Greek, Roman etc);<sup>3</sup> it may well have been an essential constituent of the PIE culture, lost by the other IE branches. Thus the ancient Indoaryans would seem to belong among the most highly cultured people on earth with a culture that consisted not so much of material artifacts but of inner knowledge and spiritual strength: *bráhma várma māmántaram* ‘the holy-power is my inner defence’ *RV* VI, 75, 19.

I think it a great pity that native Indian scholars today, and particularly sanskritists, do not throw into the dustbin of History the noxious AIT and notions rooted in it.

<sup>1</sup> All ancient dates hereafter are BCE. Some abbreviations used: AIT = Aryan Invasion/Immigration Theory. Gk = Greek. Goth = Gothic. OE = Old English. PIE = ProtoIndoEuropean. RV = *R̥gveda* .

<sup>2</sup> *pur* in the RV never means 'fort' or 'town' but a magical, esoteric defence. Merely citing verses in the RV but not analysing and exploring their meaning is not very sound scholarship. Here are some examples merely cited by both writers. In II, 35 the Offspring-of-Waters *Apām Napāt* is protected in *āmāsu pūrṣu* (usually translated as 'forts of unbaked bricks' even though bricks are nowhere mentioned!); the phrase means 'non-artificial natural defences' (in this case obviously 'divine'). In I 166, 8 Agastya prays to the Maruts to protect (*raṅṣ-*) from evil *agha* and injury *abhihruti* the man they favour (*av-*) with 'hundredfold defences' *śatābhujibhiḥ pūrbhīḥ*: no such many-walled structure existed (allowing for the hyperbole) and, moreover, it is difficult to see how people can be protected from evil by 100fold forts/towns! VI 48, 8 is a similar prayer to Agni to protect (*pā-*) from anxiety *aṃhas* the fire-kindler with '100 purs': clearly one cannot be protected from anxiety with 100 forts/cities (again allowing for a hyperbole) but only with internal occult defences. A final example: X 101, 8 is a prayer to *Viśvedevās* "to fashion inviolable metal purs" to protect the rite of soma-pouring; obviously no forts or towns are meant to be built around the sacrificial locus but magical, other-worldly defences against demons. Not one *pur* is built and not one is destroyed by human beings! See Kazanas 2003: 224-5 and n 12; also <[www.omilosmeleton.gr/english/en\\_index.html](http://www.omilosmeleton.gr/english/en_index.html)> '*R̥gvedic pur*'.

<sup>3</sup> Th. Mc Evilly finds "monism" in just about every pre-Socratic philosopher, Plato etc, as well as Egypt and Mesopotamia and connects this with monism in ancient Indic texts (2002 passim). He does not realize that Vedic monism differs radically in two essential respects. First, the Vedic Absolute *brahman* is not one of many gods raised to supremacy by some influential priesthood or sect at a particular period and place nor some material element like water or air (as was the case with the Near Eastern and Greek cultures), but It is the Self of the universe, the First Cause of all, transcendent and indescribable, beyond all mental conception. Second, the true Self of man *ātman* is at all times identical to the Absolute and, therefore, only by knowing himself can man know Reality and First Cause and so the true causes and nature of the universe. No text in the Near East or Greece has this monism; it will appear towards the end of the 1st or the beginning of the 2nd century CE in the Gnostic (=proto-Christian?) and Hermetic writings and later (3rd cent CE) in Plotinus.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allchins, B.&R. 1997. *Origins of a Civilization* N.Delhi,Viking Penguin.
- Crawford, H. 1994. *Sumer and the Sumerians* Cambridge, CUP.
- Dange, S.A. 1967. 'The *Gaviṣṭi* (*Go-iṣṭi*) and the Mehanā in the Ṛgveda' *Nagpur University Journal: Humanities*, Vol 22 (75-108).
- EWA see Mayrhofer M.
- Elizarenkova, T.Y. 1996-7. 'The concept of Water and the names for it in the Ṛgveda' *Orientalia Suecana* XLV-XLVI (21-8).
- Francfort, P-H 1992. 'Evidence for Harappan Irrigation System' in *Eastern Anthropologist* vol 45: 87-103.
- Frawley, D. 2001. *The Rig Veda and the History of India* Delhi, Aditya.  
2002. Articles in *The Hindu* June 18 and July 16.
- Geldner, K.F. 1951-7. *Der Rig-Veda* 4 vols, 33-36 Cambridge Mass, Harvard Oriental Series.
- Kazanas, N. 2002. 'Indigenous Indoaryans' *Journal of Indo-European Studies*.  
1999. 'The Rgveda and InoEuyropeans' *ABORI* vol 80 (15-42), Pune.
- KEWA see Mayrhofer M.
- Klaus, K. 1989. 'Samudrá im Veda': Deutscher Orientalistentag 1985, Würzburg, XIII, E von Schuler (ed) *Ausgewählte Vorträge*, Wiesbaden (364-71).
- Lal, B.B. 1997. *The Earliest Civilization of South Asia* Delhi, Aryan Books Intern.
- Levitt, S.H. 2003. 'The Dating of the Indian Tradition' *Anthropos* vol 98 (2): 341-359.
- Mayrhofer, M. 1980, 1996. (KEWA) *EWA Kurgefastes and Etymologisches Wörterbuches Altindischen*; Heidelberg, Carl Winter.
- Mc Evilly, T. 2002. *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, New York, Allworth Press.
- MSD = Monier-Williams sir M 1899. *Sanskrit English Dictionary* Oxford, OUP.
- Possehl, G. 1998. 'Did the Sarasvati ever flow to the sea?' G S Philips et al eds, *Arabia and its Neighbours (In Honour of Beatrice de Cardi)*, Turnhout, Brepols (339-354).
- Rao, S.R. 1991. *Dawn and Devolution of the Indus Civilization* Delhi, Aditya
- Rudgley, R. 1998. *Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age* London, Century.
- Saggs, H.W.F. 1989. *Civilization before Greece and Rome* N Haven/London, Yale University Press.
- Vedic Index* (1912). 2 vols 1995, by A A Macdonell & A B Keith: Delhi, M Banarsidass.
- Ward, D.J. 1968. *The Divine Twins* Folklore Studies 19, Berkley, University of California Press.
- Watkins, C. 2001 (1995). *How to Kill a Dragon...* Oxford, OUP.
- White, H.E. 1935. *Hesiod and Homeric Hymns* etc, Loeb Ed, Camb Mass, London, Heinemann: Harvard Oriental Series.
- Witzel, M. 2001. 'Autochthonous Aryans?' *Electronic Journal Vedic Studies* 7-3: 1-93.  
2002. Articles in *The Hindu*, June 25, and Aug 13 and 20.