

HERMANN OLDENBERG. *Prolegomena on Metre and Textual History of the Ṛgveda*, trans. into English V. G. Paranjape and M. A. Mehendale (from *Metrische und textgeschichtliche Prolegomena*, Berlin, 1988), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005, xiv, 507. ISBN: 81-208-0986-6, Rs. 895

There is no need to introduce here Professor Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920) and his contribution to classical Indian studies. His work under review has been of great importance for almost four generations of scientists engaged in Vedic studies. Nevertheless till recent it was available only for those who could read quite sophisticated scientific texts in German. From this point of view, the significance of the translation into English of this prominent and, one could say, classical study on textual features of the Ṛgveda needs no discussion. It should be noted that the translation made by two outstanding Indian scholars, Prof. V. G. Paranjape (1887–1976) and V. A. Mehendale, shows both the high precision and the deep competency of the authors.

It seems not out of place to remind here the main ideas and themes discussed in this study of Prof. H. Oldenberg. The work mainly deals with the Vedic textual criticism. Prof. H. Oldenberg planned to prepare and publish his own critical edition of the Ṛgveda based on his precise investigations on the prosody, arrangement and usage of this monument of Old Indian sacred poetry. As he noted in the Preface to his book, “the critically restored text of the Ṛgveda itself accompanied by the critical apparatus consisting of the material contained in the other Saṃhitās, the Brūhmaṇas and the Śtras, will follow the present volume as early as the nature of such a large task beset with such considerable difficulties would allow” (p. xiv). Later Oldenberg gave up the idea of publishing such ‘critical edition’ of the Ṛgveda.

In this regard, Oldenberg himself considered his work to be only an introduction to the main opus and called it *Prolegomena*. From the present-day perspective the *Prolegomena* are undoubtedly an important and very accurate investigation of the textual tradition of the Ṛgveda. In the first chapter Oldenberg gives us a systematic exposition of the Vedic prosody by discussing in consecutive order the usage of stanzas formed of lines of eight, eleven or twelve syllables. Further he provides a very detailed overview of all the cases of metric usage which could be considered as not very typical of Ṛgveda Saṃhita – those of five-syllabled pāda, a variety of combinations of pādas of different types in the same stanzas, hymns in various metres and with irregularly constructed stanzas. It should be observed that Oldenberg adopted the method of strict statistical calculations in his investigation of the Vedic prosody, and in *Prolegomena*

we have the first systematic observation of both the whole usage of the Vedic metre and its historical development.¹

The second chapter of the book under review deals with such fundamental problems as the arrangement of the Saṃhita text into books (maṇḍal s) and the relative chronology of different parts of the Ṛgveda. Here, as Oldenberg remarks, “the question then will have to be raised regarding the circumstances and the processes due to which the entire hymn-material of the Ṛgveda was drawn up into units just of this kind...” (p. 181). A special attention in this connection here was given to all exceptions from the traditional arrangement of the text in the family books, e.g., to exceptions from the arrangement of hymns according to the descending number of stanzas (a regularity noticed already by Bergaigne) or exceptions to metrical sequence. Then Oldenberg overviews the arrangement of non-family maṇḍal s (books VIII, I and X, respectively). An exhaustive analysis of the traditional arrangement of the text given in this chapter served for a long time as a basis for further textual investigations of the Ṛgveda.

The connections between Ṛk-text and the text of the later Saṃhit s and the Br hmaṇas are discussed in the third chapter of the book. Here Oldenberg overviews all cases of the usage of the Ṛgveda stanzas both in the later Vedas and in the main corpus of the other class of works that belongs to the Vedic literature. All given cases are again provided with careful textual analysis.

The fourth and the fifth chapters of the book deal with the problems of orthoepic usage and different branches (ñ kh s) of the traditional text, respectively. This exhaustive study of “how it worked” is of great interest also for contemporary Vedic studies, especially those connected with the genesis and transmission of these sacred texts.

Lastly, the sixth chapter of *Prolegomena* is devoted to the analysis of the connections and textual relations between the Ṛgveda and the Ś tra literature that does not belong to the Veda corpus and is not considered as ruti in the traditional classification.

To conclude, the first English edition of Prof. H. Oldenberg’s *Prolegomena on Metre and Textual History of the Ṛgveda* by Motilal Banarsidass could be considered as a contribution both to studies of the history of classical Indology and to the contemporary Indian studies. This edition will be of particular value for students of Indology to whom nowadays English is more customary than German.

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¹ Another fundamental study of the Vedic metre was edited by E. V. Arnold a few decades later, cf. Arnold, E. Vernon. *Vedic Metre in Its Historical Development*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967 (1st ed. 1905).