

THE ANTIQUITY OF VEDIC CULTURE

Professor Jacobi's second article on the Antiquity of Vedic Culture (above, pp. 456 seqq.), some parts of which have been replied to already by Mr. Keith (*ibid.*, pp. 464 ff.), makes me wish for my part to add a few words to what I have said before on the same subject.

1. In the first part of his paper Professor Jacobi argues against my supposition, the reasons for which I have stated in this Journal, 1909, pp. 1095 seqq., that the gods Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, and the Nāsatyas, mentioned in the Mitannian inscriptions, are proto-Iranian rather than Indian. Varuṇa, Professor Jacobi says, is nowhere mentioned in Iranian records. It need not be said that this was well known to me. But there is another fact, the importance of which seems to me to be underrated by Professor Jacobi—a fact indicating the probability, even before we knew those newly discovered inscriptions, that Varuṇa bore a part in prehistoric times in the religion of Iran, in spite of not being named in that country. This fact, which has been alluded to by Darmesteter and others and by myself in this Journal, 1909, p. 1097, is, that both in India and Iran a couple of gods are found, one of whom in either country is called Mitra, while the other one in Iran bears the name of Ahura, in India the name of Varuṇa.

Jacobi (p. 457) contends that although the first member of this couple of gods is identical, it does not follow that the second member on either side should also be the same. I do think that the distinguished Indianist in this matter gives way too readily to scepticism and passes over those particular circumstances that furnish an important factor for concluding that Varuṇa and Ahura are equivalent. For the association of Mitra with Varuṇa lies on quite a different line from those numerous fluctuating associations which so frequently in the Vedic hymns make a god appear united now to this god, now to that one, in

constantly new and ever-varying combinations. The Vedic Mitra, on the contrary, over and over again appears in a most intimate association, which grammatically is expressed by a Dvandva compound, with Varuṇa. Vedic texts, which upon the whole do not teach us much about the proper character of Mitra, give this, and this alone, as the predominant trait in his character, that he is the constant companion of Varuṇa. Considering the standpoint of the Veda this very close association would seem groundless and unintelligible; it is evident that Vedic India had inherited it from long bygone days.

Just in the same way we find in the Avesta the name of Mithra associated in a dual Dvandva with one, and only one, name of another god, Ahura. In the sphere of Zarathustrianism such an association can hardly have originated, for in this religious system Ahura stood incomparably above the level of a god like Mithra. Thus with regard to the couple Mithra-Ahura also we have reason to believe that, as Bartholomae says,¹ this is "zweifellos eine aus arischer Zeit stammende Verbindung".

Consequently, in confronting the two couples Mithra-Varuṇa and Mithra-Ahura with each other, we are dealing with uncommonly fixed and uncommonly old associations.

Let there be added further that the Vedic hymns give most frequently to Varuṇa the epithet of *asura*, which is, as is well known, the precise equivalent to the Iranian *ahura*.² And further that, as Darmesteter has persuasively shown, the personality and the divine functions of Varuṇa are described by the Vedic poets in expressions that most remarkably resemble those which in the Avesta are employed with regard to Ahura. So in my opinion there is a far stronger basis for the supposition of Ahura and Varuṇa being equivalent gods than would appear from the rather brief statements of Jacobi, p. 457.

¹ *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, col. 1185.

² This Jacobi (p. 457) has not failed to mention.

In a similar way I consider the Vedic Indra and the Avestan Verethrajan as derived from the same Indo-Iranian prototype. Jacobi states that in the Avesta Verethrajan and Indra are two distinct mythological persons, and that "it is just as likely that the Indians should have fused two gods into one as that the Iranians should have split one into two". Perhaps other students of the Rigveda will look with the same distrust as I do at a theory which would make of Indra and of the slayer of Vṛtra two different gods. For our present purpose, however, it is of no consequence how we judge on this question. For as in any case Indra appears by this name in the Avesta as well as in the Veda, I certainly do not see, even if this Indra should have originally differed from the slayer of Vṛtra, what difficulties would arise by assuming the existence of that proto-Iranian Indra who I believe is recognizable in the In-da-ra of the Mitannian inscriptions.

Professor Jacobi (p. 459) thinks it difficult to believe that two distinct peoples, derived from a common stock, can have preserved the same gods as in prehistoric times, when those people had not yet separated. With reference to this I think that the length of time of the separation of the two nations is a point of most considerable influence. The Zarathustrian gods naturally are very different from the gods of the Mahābhārata or the Purāṇas. But it is not reasonable to doubt that a few centuries after the separation of the Indians and the Iranians, before the great Zarathustrian reform set in, some of the principal deities may have remained identical with each other on both sides. Differences between the creed and the mythology of the western and of the eastern group of people will not have been lacking even at this time. But it is not in the least surprising if the few names we read in the Mitannian inscriptions do not reveal anything of these differences. Thus there is no reason

to conclude from the conformity of these names with Indian names of gods that the gods named in these inscriptions should, in spite of the geographical improbability, be Indian.

2. I now turn to the chief question at issue. Let us assume that those gods with Vedic names are indeed, as Jacobi believes, Indian gods; what conclusions are then to be drawn with regard to the problem of the antiquity of Vedic culture? After all that has been said before on this subject a few words will suffice. I believe that most readers of Professor Jacobi's first article will have had the same impression as I had, that he understands those inscriptions to be a decisive testimony in favour of his own belief in "the enormous antiquity of Indian civilization" (Journal, 1909, p. 722). It is very satisfactory to me—though I must say it is rather unexpected—to see that Professor Jacobi's real opinion, as now stated by him, is quite different, and that his claims as to the chronological significance of the inscriptions are much more moderate. Till recently, he says (p. 460), the oldest authentic date in Indian history was the date of Buddha's death, and now the oldest certain date is pushed back for well-nigh a thousand years. The progress in our knowledge pointed out by this is, in fact, far less substantial than it would appear after those words—the somewhat sonorous mentioning of a thousand years. For it was naturally clear to all of us, even before the discovery of the Mitannian inscriptions, that the period of the oldest Upaniṣads, and further back, of the Brāhmaṇas, and still further back, of the Rigveda Saṃhitā, and of the beginnings of Indian history that precede the origin of the Rigveda, must have extended through many centuries before Buddha. There will be few scholars—if there are any at all—who did not, and who do not, think it certain, or nearly certain, that nine hundred or a thousand years before Buddha the worship of Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa was

firmly established among Indian sacrificers and poets. Now documents have been discovered which—if they refer to *Indian* gods, which I think they actually do not do—would state exactly the same things which, with tolerable certainty, we had inferred before.

Nobody, of course, will find fault with an historian who gladly accepts such a confirmation of his conclusions. But is it not saying rather too much to say that all this “gives an entirely new aspect to the whole question of the antiquity of Indian civilization”?

3. Finally, I wish to make a remark on one point of minor importance.

Professor Jacobi (p. 460) ascribes to me the opinion that in the old Vedic calendar the full moon of Phālguna “marked the beginning of the hot season”, which he very naturally finds unacceptable. But if he will take the trouble to look at my statements in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 49, 475 seq., he will see that it is not the beginning of the *hot season* with which I have connected that full moon, but—for reasons there stated—the beginning of *spring*. I think it will be admitted that this makes a difference.

HERMANN OLDENBERG.

THE EARLY USE OF THE BUDDHIST ERA IN BURMA

It appears to me that at least three issues are raised by Dr. Fleet's note, taken together with mine, in the last number of this Journal, p. 474 seq., viz. :—

1. Was *any* method of reckoning from an assumed date of Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* (i.e. death) current in Burma before (say) 1165 A.D.? And, if so,

2. Was such method identical with the one used in Ceylon (and subsequently also in Burma) after 1165 A.D. (and in that case was it imported from Burma to Ceylon