



Forgeries, Falsifications, Fictions, *Fälschungen*?

Some Early Modern European “Vedas”

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ABSTRACT This article examines—and rejects—the idea that, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europeans who sought to obtain copies of the Vedas were repeatedly duped by having other works (purporting to be Vedas) passed off on them. The focus is on a text entitled “The Essence of the Yajur Veda,” produced by a Pietist missionary, Christoph Theodosius Walther (1699–1741), and a Brahmin identified only as Krishna, published in a German missionary periodical in 1740. This text is examined in the context of a series of similar works produced by Indian intellectuals with, or at the behest of, European missionaries and colonial officials in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rather than seeing these works as fakes, it is argued here that they are better understood as the outcome of distinctive modes of composition, transmission, and translation of Indian religious literature emerging from the early modern encounter of Indian and European scholars.

KEYWORDS Vedas, Forgeries, Orientalism, Brahmins, Secrecy

Introduction

In 1734, Jean Calmette, a Jesuit missionary in South India, announced that he had at last achieved what had been thought impossible since the very beginning of Christian mission in India: he had acquired copies of the Vedas, the most sacred texts of the Brahmins.¹ Among Calmette’s readers were his contemporaries and rivals, the Pietist missionaries of the Danish-English-Halle mission at Tranquebar.² It appears that his announcement prompted them also

1 *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrit des missions étrangères par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 21 (1734): 457–58. Calmette (1692–1740) was a key figure in the Jesuits’ Carnatic mission. On Calmette’s acquisition of the Vedas—but against the idea that this had been a goal for Christian missionaries since the sixteenth century—see Sweetman (2019). Calmette believed he had sent all four Vedas, but the text that he believed to be the Atharva Veda is in fact a collection of an assortment of tantric and magical texts connected with goddess worship called *Ātharvaṇatantrarāja* and *Ātharvaṇamantraśāstra*.

2 The Pietist missionaries often cite from the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*. The first Protestant mission in India was established in the Danish enclave at Tranquebar in 1706. Almost all of its missionaries over

to seek copies of the Vedas, but their diary for 1734 reports that all their efforts to do so were in vain.³ Just three years later, however, the Pietists were able to trump their Jesuit rivals by announcing that they had acquired and would soon publish a translation of one of the Vedas.⁴

The announcement appeared under the names of all four missionaries in Tranquebar at the time,⁵ but there is little doubt that the key figure in obtaining this text was Christoph Theodosius Walther, a missionary in Tranquebar from 1725 to 1739. In 1740, his account of the “essence of the Jadsur [i.e., Yajur] Veda, one of the four law books of the Brahmans,” obtained from a Brahmin named Krishna, appeared in the mission’s periodical, the *Hallesche Berichte* (HB 46: 1251–94). While it is immediately obvious that the text published is not the Yajur Veda, it does reflect texts associated with the Black Yajur Veda and is it clear that Krishna provided some authentic details about the Yajur Veda.

In 1853, Albrecht Weber—who was then engaged in critically editing the white Yajur Veda—published the only study to date of this text. In the very first sentence of his article, Weber compares Krishna and Walther’s work to another “Yajur Veda” published in Europe in the eighteenth century: “We are not here dealing with the *Ezour-vedam* edited in 1778 by Sainte-Croix but rather with a work already published 36 years earlier, albeit also a forgery [*Fälschung*] only not by a Jesuit but by a Brahman.” Weber admits that Walther’s “Jadsur Veda” is not—presumably like the *Ezour-Vedam*—“a mere figment of the imagination” but rather “rests on factual foundations and may at best be described as an encyclopaedia of the brahmanical worldview.” He nevertheless repeats that Krishna’s representation of its contents as “the essence of the Yajurveda” can only be regarded as “either gross ignorance or—for he is not ignorant—gross forgery” (Weber 1853, 235–36).

Secretive Brahmins, Fake Vedas

The idea that Brahmins like Krishna duped Europeans who sought the Vedas, passing off other works on them, is deeply rooted and plays also into the narrative of duplicitous priestcraft which strongly flavoured early modern European accounts of Hinduism (Gelders 2009).⁶ Both Catholic and Protestant writers emphasize that the Brahmins sought to keep their doctrines secret from other Hindus and especially from foreigners. In 1543, Francis Xavier (1944, I: 1535–1548:173) recounted his meeting with a Brahmin who confessed that while their texts

the following century came from the Pietist centre at Halle in Germany, but the mission also received substantial support from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in England, especially after the establishment of mission stations in towns under the control of the English East India Company (initially Madras and Cuddalore, later Thanjavur). Since the tercentenary of the mission, the portmanteau Danish-English-Halle mission has become the quasi-official designation for the mission. The missionaries themselves, and their contemporaries, most often described it as the Danish Mission.

3 *Hallesche Berichte* 39: 418. They cite here several earlier volumes of the *Lettres édifiantes*, including an earlier letter from Jean-Venant Bouchet (*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* 9 (1711): 38–39) about the inaccessibility of the Vedas. The *Hallesche Berichte* was a series of letters and reports published at irregular intervals from Halle and edited initially by August Hermann Francke. References to the *Hallesche Berichte* (HB) are given to the installment and page number. For full publication details, see <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:ha33-1-23377>.

4 HB 45: 1182–85. The translation of the text appeared in the next installment (HB 46: 1251–94). The Lutheran missionaries, and Walther in particular, were keenly aware of their Catholic rivals. In 1735, Walther had completed his *Tiruccapai carittira postakam* (1735), a church history in Tamil composed in response to requests from the mission’s Indian catechists about the differences between Catholic and Protestant Christianity.

5 Nicolas Dal, Martin Bosse, Christian Friedrich Pressier, and Christoph Theodosius Walther.

6 It is still more deeply rooted in the idea—expressed, e.g., by Jean-Venant Bouchet in 1711—that even authentic Hindu scriptures were nothing but counterfeits of the Christian scriptures.

contained monotheistic teachings, they were obliged not to reveal this. The most important Protestant account of Hinduism, prior to the establishment of the Danish-English-Halle mission, was the Dutch Calvinist Abraham Roger's book, *De Open-Deure tot het Verborgene Heyden-
dom*, published in 1651 (Roger 1915). The appeal of this work was in part due to the fact that Roger's key informant was a Brahmin named Padmanabhan. The title emphasized Roger's claim to be revealing doctrines hitherto concealed by Brahmins like Padmanabhan.

When Calmette obtained copies of the Ṛg, Yajur and Sāma Veda *saṃhitās* in August 1732, [5] he recalled that it was only six years since two of his colleagues—René Gargam in the Carnatic and Jean-François Pons in Bengal—had been “deceived” into buying works which purported to be Vedas but were not.⁷ Instances of actual duplicity—perhaps most notably the *purāṇas* bowdlerised for Francis Wilford in the late eighteenth century (Bayly 2000)—are much less common than fears or accusations of having been duped. Anquetil Duperron was shown actual Veda *saṃhitās* in Surat in 1760 but, doubting their authenticity and concerned at the price, he declined to buy them (Anquetil Duperron 1997, 378–81). He did, however, buy the manuscripts which he was to publish as the *Zend-Avesta, ouvrage de Zoroastre* (1771). These were declared by William Jones to be modern forgeries (1771). Although Jones was wrong, it was his views that prevailed for more than two decades.⁸ In more recent scholarship, it is the Europeans who translated Indian texts, rather than the Indians who supplied them, who have been accused of duplicity and forgery. Since at least the time of Francis Ellis's account of it in 1822, the *Ezour-Vedam* has regularly been described as a fake or forgery, although it seems unlikely that it was composed with the intent of deceiving Hindus into thinking that it was actually the Yajur Veda (Killingley 2008, 40–41). Most recently, John Zephaniah Holwell has been accused of simply fabricating the texts on which he claimed to base his account of Hinduism (App 2010; Patterson 2020).⁹

Here I will argue that there is no need to posit duplicity on the part of either Krishna or Walther in their presentation of the “essence of the Yajur Veda.” Neither Krishna nor Walther intended that the text they produced be regarded as a translation of the Yajur Veda *saṃhitā*. To understand their intentions—both separately and jointly—in producing the text, it is helpful to examine a range of similar texts, produced by Brahmins at the behest of Europeans, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. [6]

Krishna and Christoph's “Veritable Veda”

This is not to say that Walther, who had read the Jesuits' accounts of their attempts to obtain the Vedas and their concerns about Brahmin duplicity, was not concerned with the authenticity of the texts he obtained. For Walther, Krishna's very reluctance to communicate the text, despite the offer of a “reasonable” payment, was a sign that it must be authentic. It was only when the missionaries solemnly promised that they would not reveal his role to anyone in India during his lifetime that Krishna conceded. Even then, he absolutely refused to write down what he presented as Veda. When Walther wished to check the spelling of a Sanskrit word, Krishna would either trace the letters on the table with his bare finger or point to the [7]

7 Calmette to Souciet, 25 Aug 1732, Archives de la Province de France de la Compagnie de Jésus, Paris, Fonds Brotier 89, f. 35r–v.

8 A final irony is that Anquetil Duperron was one of the last to defend authenticity of the *Ezour-Vedam* (Rocher 1984, 15).

9 Against this, see Sweetman (Forthcoming).

word in the notes on palm-leaf he wrote out as *aides-memoire* for himself but then afterwards destroyed.

For Walther, a further confirmation of the authenticity of the text was that its structure corresponded to what he knew—presumably from sources other than Krishna himself—of the structure of the Yajur Veda. In the last paragraph of his introduction, Walther states that the first part of the Yajur Veda, called *saṃhitā*, consists of seven *kāṇḍa* in turn divided into forty-six *praśna*.¹⁰ The second part is divided into three *aṣṭakas*, corresponding to the three divisions of the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa.¹¹ The third and fourth parts—which Walther calls *āruṇam* and *kāthakam*¹²—further divided into three and eight parts, are likewise also references to the Āraṇyaka. As Weber and Willem Caland note, this is a reasonably accurate account of the structure of the Yajur Veda in its south Indian recensions (Weber 1853, 236; Caland 1918, 284). [8]

Although anxious to be sure that he obtained “the veritable Veda,” Walther was fully aware of the flexibility of the term *veda* and the range of texts to which it may be applied. Walther lists the Yajur Veda among the four Vedas but notes that while the names appended to each are proper names, *veda* itself simply means knowledge.¹³ He goes on to explain that the whole corpus of Vedic texts includes also the six *vedāṅga*.¹⁴ By contrast, he adds that the Vedas may be summed up in the *mahāvākya*.¹⁵ He notes, too, that “the *śāstra*” provides an explanation of the content of the Veda in vernacular languages” (HB 46: 1254–55). [9]

Krishna and Christoph’s Veda: Content

The actual content of the text produced by Krishna and Walther belies the account they give of its structure. The first quarter of the text consists of purāṇic cosmology and an incomplete account of the Śaiva *tattvas* (principles of reality). After a brief account of the duties of the four *varṇas*, most of the remainder of the text deals with aspects of the life of a brahmin male—life-cycle rites (prenatal and birth rites, naming, tonsure, initiation, marriage, death and postmortem rites), sacrifices (*agniṣṭoma*, *atirātram*, *aśvamedha*), austerities (vows, fasting, and *saṃnyāsa*) and aspects of conduct (*ācāra*, purity rules, penances, auspicious and inauspi- [10]

10 *Samhitā* “collection” can refer either to the hymns which form the first part of each Veda or to the whole collection of texts preserved by a particular school of Vedic transmission; *kāṇḍa* and *praśna* refer to sections and sub-sections of many works.

11 Although *aṣṭaka* means “eighth” or “eightfold,” the term is also used—along with *kāṇḍa*—for the three sections of the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, the text on ritual exegesis transmitted in the Taittirīya branch of the Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda.

12 The *āruṇa*, dealing with the modes of fire-piling, is one of eight sections of the Kāthaka Samhitā (another branch, or school, of the Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda) which are not preserved in the Taittirīya tradition.

13 It was for this reason that his missionary predecessors had felt able to use the Tamil equivalent (*vētam*) in translating works of Christian theology and even the Bible itself. Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg’s translation of the Gospels and Acts into Tamil was published in 1714 as *Añcu vēta poṣṭakkam* and his 1717 translation of Johann Freylinghausen’s *Grundlegung der Theologie* (1703) as *Vētacāṣṭiram*.

14 However, to *śikṣa*, *kalpa*, *nirukta* and *vyākaraṇa*, he adds *kathā* and *purāṇa* and his gloss on the first (“to make disciples by threats and promises”) suggests Walther may have confused *śikṣa* (pronunciation) with *śiṣyaḥ* (disciple) or *dikṣā* (initiation). The *vedāṅga*, the six auxiliary sciences for understanding and interpreting the Vedas, are usually identified as *śikṣa* (pronunciation), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *nirukta* (etymology), *chaṇḍa* (prosody), *jyotiṣa* (astronomy) and *kalpa* (ritual). *Kathā* and *purāṇa* are later narrative genres, tales or histories.

15 The *mahāvākya* (“great sayings”) are pithy statements from the Upaniṣads which are thought to express the essence of the Vedas. Here, by contrast to his account of the *vedāṅga*, Walther’s transcriptions are testimony to the accuracy of his reading of Krishna’s spelling out of Sanskrit terms.

cious times). This is followed in the final section by an account of the yogic body,¹⁶ which is certainly the most detailed published in Europe to that date. The text concludes with a brief description of *prāṇāyāma* (breath control), some mantras for exorcism of the possessed, a further brief account of *varṇadharmā*, and a final full Sanskrit *śloka* of benediction. As Weber states, most of this has “not the slightest thing to do with the Yajurveda” (Weber 1853, 236). Moreover, it is clear that the material provided by Krishna has been somewhat awkwardly shoehorned into the structure of the Yajur Veda. If we examine the *kāṇḍas* of the “*saṃhitā*,” we find the account of *varṇa-lakṣaṇam* spans the fourth and fifth *kāṇḍa*. The fifth *kāṇḍa* then lists a number of the brahminical life-cycle rites (prenatal rites, birth rites, naming, tonsure, and initiation) but marriage comes in the sixth, which also includes the beginning of a list of the kinds of sacrifice (*agniṣṭoma*, *atirātram*) that is only concluded in the seventh *kāṇḍa* (beginning with *aśvamedha*).

At a few places in the text we have direct quotation from Sanskrit sources—that is, what we might expect in a direct translation of an Indian text. For instance, the sixth *praśna* of the fifth *kāṇḍa* of the *saṃhitā*, on *upanayanam* (initiation) begins with what could be an almost direct quotation, interspersed with German translation, from the Āpastamba Gṛhysūtra (10.1–2): “*upanayanam vyākhyāsyāmo*, explanation of the cord, *garbhāṣṭameṣu brāhmaṇam upanītam*, in the eighth year after birth, the cord must be tied around the Brahmin” (HB 46: 1270).¹⁷ The section on *upanayanam* continues with an explanation of the terms for the three different ways the thread can hang: “When it hangs from the left shoulder on the righthand side, as in the *yajña* or fire-sacrifice, it is called *yajñopavītam*; when it simply hangs around the neck in front of the chest, as in the worship of the Gods, then it is *nivītam*. In the remembrance of deceased parents and ancestors, it hangs from the right shoulder on the lefthand side, and that is called *prācīnāvītam*” (HB 46: 1270–71).¹⁸ These three modes are distinguished in a number of texts belonging to the Black Yajur Veda.¹⁹ The default mode (*yajñopavītam*) is reversed when performing funeral rites or rites for the ancestors (*prācīnāvītam*, with the thread to the east, while facing south).²⁰ The third mode (*nivītam*, hanging down) is for rites for humans such as *saṃskāras*.²¹

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16 Hindu—and more broadly, Indian—accounts of the yogic body are multiple but generally refer to a body having the same form as the physical (the gross or tangible) body but distinct from both that and the essential immaterial soul. It includes the energy centres (*chakras*) and the channels (*nāḍī*) connecting them along which vital energy (*prāṇa*) flows. This is often called the “subtle body,” but this is a misnomer (Padoux 2017, 75).

17 Several other *gṛhya*- and *dharmasūtras* include also the similar specification of the brahman’s age. See, e.g., Śāṅkhāyana- (II, 1) and Vārāha-gṛhysūtra (V, 1), “*garbhāṣṭameṣu brāhmaṇam upanayita*”: “In the eighth year after the conception let him initiate a Brāhmaṇa” (Oldenberg 1886, 58), or Vasiṣṭha (11, 49) and Baudhāyana (1.3.7): “One should initiate a Brahmin in the eighth year from conception” (Olivelle 1999, 278, 135).

18 Walther’s annotations add that the thread is called *pūṇīl* in Tamil but that Abraham Roger uses the Telugu *jandemu*. He notes also that the thread consists of three strands for unmarried Brahmins but is doubled or tripled after marriage.

19 E.g., Taittiriya Saṃhitā 2.5.11.1: *nivītam manusyaṇām prācīnāvītam pitṛṇām upavītam devānām* (see Gonda 1980, 153–54).

20 Āpastamba-gṛhysūtra I, 7–8: *aparapakṣe pitṛyāṇi prācīnāvītinā*. “Ceremonies belonging to the Fathers (are performed) in the second fortnight (of the month), with the sacrificial cord suspended over the right shoulder” (Oldenberg 1892, 251).

21 It is however, the first mode (*yajñopavītam* or simply *upavītam*), not the third (*nivītam*) which is said to be “for the Gods.”

Veda and śāstra: Krishna's Text and the Parāśarasmṛti

While it is clear that Krishna is leading Walther through elements of the prescriptions for ritual practice which derive from the texts of the Black Yajur Veda, for the most part it is equally clear that Walther is fully aware that what was published in the *Hallesche Berichte* is a descriptive summary rather a full translation of any text.²² This can be demonstrated by quoting in full what Krishna and Walther describe as the third *aṣṭakam* of the second part of the Yajur Veda (thus, supposedly, of the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa): [12]

1. *Niṣeka-lakṣaṇam*, precautions regarding sexual intercourse. Here one must check whether it is a good or an evil day and first recite a prayer, the meaning of which is that, should one obtain a descendant, they will deliver one from hell through their *dharma* or good works. [13]
2. *Bhōjana* (Malabarian²³: *pōcaṇam*) -*vidhi*, how to eat. Here *sthala*, *pātra* and *anna śuddhi* are required: the place, the vessel and the food must be pure. After a prayer has been recited, *maunam* (*silentium*), not a word spoken. After eating, *puṇyakathā*, or telling edifying stories.
3. *Abhyaṅgaḥ-vidhi*, how to anoint the head with *tailam*, that is linseed or sesame oil, and to wash. Not suitable at the new moon, etc.
4. *Ūrdhvaṇḍra*, to make a stripe on the forehead above the nose with *dvārakāmṛtikā*, or the red earth which comes from *Dvārakāpatnam*, a place lying on the western side of the Ganges, perhaps Patna.
5. *Tripunḍra*, to make a three stripe above the nose with holy ashes, either with that taken from the fire-sacrifice *yajña*, which is called *narabhasman*, or with pulverised cow-dung, burnt in the fire mentioned earlier (at the beginning of the fourth chapter of the sixth section), which is called *aupāsana-vipūti*.
6. *Śaṅṅavati śraddha*, the ninety-six days of the year to perform a *tivacam* for the ancestors.
7. Likewise *mahālaya*, once a year, to honour the father, mother and mother's brother.
8. *Nakṣatram*, the twenty-seven constellations, what one or other of these, under which one is born, predicts; to which God each is dedicated, and how one should propitiate such a God should one commit a *doṣam*, or fault. (HB 46: 1285–87)

The abbreviations and annotations show clearly that Walther is aware that Krishna is not simply providing a translation of one particular text. Moreover, in a footnote to the section on *tripunḍra*, Walther explains that “the *tirunāmam* of those who worship Viṣṇu does not appear in the Veda; in the same way, the *uruttirāṭcam*, the rosary or coral cord, which is also very common, only appears in the *śāstra*.” When they first set out to obtain the Veda, Walther and his colleagues had been informed that the language in which it was recorded (*kirantam*; Grantha) was so old that no-one could understand it without reference to the detailed exegesis contained in the “*śāstra*” (HB 39: 418). Not only is Walther aware that Krishna is relying on another text (the “*śāstra*”) to explicate the Veda, but he identifies the text. [14]

In his preamble to the text, Walther mentions that in order to make sense of the Veda Krishna had used “a book called *Parāśaram*, composed by one Parāśara, who is also supposed to be the author of the eighteen purāṇas” (HB 46: 1253). The *Parāśarasmṛti*, or the *dharmaśāstra* ascribed to Parāśara, is relatively late, dating from the seventh or eighth centuries CE. Patrick [15]

22 An obvious exception would be the *śloka* of benediction cited in full at the end.

23 “Malabarian” is how the Tranquebar missionaries usually refer to the Tamil language.

Olivelle (2018, 28) characterises it as a “very brief and somewhat mediocre text... deal[ing] with issues relating to conduct (*ācāra*) and penance (*prāyaścitta*).” Parāśara is not the author of the *purāṇas* but rather the father of Vyāsa, to whom the *purāṇas* are usually ascribed. In the Parāśarasmr̥ti, when the other ṛṣis ask Vyāsa to explain the dharma appropriate for the Kali age, he defers to his father Parāśara, who explains that some concessions are necessary for the degraded times in which we live. The text allows, for instance, that higher castes may resort to agriculture, even in ordinary circumstances (Bhattacharya 1887, iv). Although some of the material in Krishna and Walther’s text coincides with the Parāśarasmr̥ti, this is material that would be found in any *dharmaśāstra*—such as the duties of the four castes. It is perhaps only the Parāśarasmr̥ti’s connection with the fourth yuga that can explain why Krishna should have identified it as the *śāstra* on which he relied in his account of brahminical lifestyle.²⁴ But while Krishna’s text is no more a translation of the Parāśarasmr̥ti than it is of the Yajur Veda, it does point to a better way of understanding the text.

Jesuit Dharmaśāstra *nibandhas* and the Parāśarasmr̥ti

The Parāśarasmr̥ti had also been named as a key source in an earlier missionary treatise on brahminical lifestyle. This work, from the beginning of the previous century, was composed by the Jesuit Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso with the aid of another brahmin of the Yajur Veda, Śivadharmā.²⁵ Fernandes Trancoso was the first and fiercest opponent of Roberto Nobili in the Malabar rites debate. His treatise was composed in response to Nobili’s works in defence of his own adoption of aspects of brahminical diet and dress and his toleration of these on the part of his brahmin converts (Županov 1999; Ferrara 2020). With the aid of Śivadharmā, their respective works cite from many *dharmaśāstras* in the attempt to argue for their position on whether or not the practices of Nobili and his converts were inimical to Christian practice. [16]

It was important for Fernandes Trancoso’s argument that his text was drawn from a wide range of the most authoritative authors (Wicki 1973, xxiii). However, the title of the second section of his treatise states that it is a compendium of sayings regarding penances collected by Parāśara, “a learned and very ancient authority” (1973, 220). One chapter of the text—prescriptions for brahmins bitten by animals, such as dogs or jackals, and for those who commit suicide—indeed follows very closely the corresponding chapter of Parāśara’s *dharmaśāstra*, albeit in abbreviated form.²⁶ But this chapter is very much the exception and, although there [17]

24 Krishna’s initial reluctance to communicate the Veda and subsequent change of heart may also be connected here. Antoine Polier, who in 1782 became the second European to acquire copies of the Vedas, challenged the view that Brahmins were unwilling to share them. When he asked why he had been allowed to see the Vedas, given that this was expressly forbidden, the Brahmins replied that in the Kali yuga “Religion is reduced to nought, it matters not who sees or studies them in these days of wickedness” (Regamey 1966, 202).

25 The work was not published until Wicki’s edition in 1973. On Fernandes’s treatise, see Zupanov (1999, 127–45) and Zupanov (2007, 100–107). For Śivadharmā’s role, see Trento (2018, 105–9).

26 The second chapter of the second part of Fernandes Trancoso’s treatise describes how a brahmin who is bitten should wash and recite the Gayatrī mantra, and should purify himself by bathing in water in which cow horns have been dipped or at the confluence of two rivers or by seeing the sea. A brahmin woman should purify herself by looking at the stars. A brahmin who dies by his own hand should be burned without mantras, his bones washed with milk, and then burned again, with mantras, in the usual manner. Anyone who does not follow Parāśara’s rules will have their life cut short and will go to hell (Wicki 1973, 228–29 and Parāśara V).

are a couple of other places where Parāśara is directly quoted,²⁷ the bulk of the text is drawn from other more important *dharmasāstras*.

Margherita Trento characterises Fernandes Trancoso's text as a rich but chaotic representation of Brahminical practices (2018, 105). For Ines Zupanov, the confusing orthography, ungrammatical forms, repetitions and poor style rendered the text both "unreadable and unread" (2007, 103). The disorder in the work was seized upon by Nobili in his response. He even accuses Fernandes Trancoso of forging a quotation which Nobili's own informant, "a doctor eminently versed in the sciences of this country", was not able to locate [...] in any of the known texts" (Županov 1999, 130). But there has been no suggestion that the text as a whole should be regarded as a forgery, either by Fernandes Trancoso or by his primary informant, Śivadharmā. [18]

Fernandes Trancoso's treatise, which compiles statements from various authorities, sometimes identified but even then not translated directly, provides us with a better way to understand Krishna and Walther's "Yajur Veda." The title Walther gave to the text he produced with Krishna is "Haupt-Inhalt des *Jadsur-Wedam*, eines von den vier Gesetz-Büchern der Brahmaner."²⁸ I suggest that the work may best be understood as Krishna's attempt to provide an account of the "Essence of the Yajur Veda," perhaps translating *sāra*, a term which appears in the titles of many Sanskrit digests or *nibandhas* which summarise or re-present the content of *dharmasāstras* or other authoritative works. [19]

British Dharmasāstra *nibandhas*

Later in the eighteenth century, Sanskrit pandits in Bengal produced a whole series of digests (*nibandha*) of *dharmasāstra* and other works for the use of Europeans. Some of these were given formal titles, others were not. The *Vivādārṇavasetu* was composed in 1773 for Nathaniel Halhed by eleven pandits, translated by them into Persian and then by Halhed into English as *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776). In 1783, Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa composed the *Purāṇārthaprakāśa*, a digest of the Purāṇas, for Warren Hastings.²⁹ Another pandit, Govardhan Kaul, prepared a text entitled *Vidyādarśa*, which became the basis for his paper "On the literature of the Hindus, from the Sanscrit," read to the Asiatic Society of Bengal by Jones in 1787 and published, with a commentary by Jones, in the *Asiatic Researches*. Rādhākānta was also asked by Jones to produce a summary of Vedic texts for a "dissertation on the primitive religion of the Hindus" (Rocher 1989, 630). Jones died before completing this, but the translated "Extracts from the Vedas" appeared posthumously in his widow's edition of his works (Jones 1799, VI, 413–27). Jones also commissioned Rādhākānta's teacher, Jagannātha, to compose the *Vivādabhaṅgārṇava* (1788–94), although he did not live to translate it. It was instead translated, directly from Sanskrit to English, and published by H. T. Colebrooke as *A Digest of Hindu Law* (1797–98). [20]

Only one of these digests provoked accusations of forgery or falsification and it is perhaps no surprise that this was specifically connected to the inclusion of a part of a Veda *saṃhitā*. In [21]

27 E.g., the section on the punishments for those who do not have their daughters married before puberty (Wicki 1973, 238 and Parāśara VII, 6–8).

28 HB 46: 1251; this is also the title on the manuscript (Archiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen/Missionsarchiv 2 B 12 : 2) suggesting that this is not an editorial intervention.

29 This was translated into Persian by Zūrāvār Singh and then into English by Halhed. It became the main source for William Jones's essay "On the Chronology of the Hindus" (1788) and was published by John Haddon Hindley (1807).

1794, Jones read Colebrooke's essay, "On the Duties of a Faithful Hindu Widow," to a meeting of the Society. This essay, which launched Colebrooke's orientalist career, is a short compilation of extracts from various Hindu texts, mostly from the *dharmasāstras* and *purānas* but notoriously also including an extract from the Ṛg Veda. The question of whether Colebrooke was following an existing digest, or compiled the extracts himself from different texts, was the subject of debate among both Indian and European scholars long after his death. Friedrich Max Müller thought the source was the *Vivādabhaṅgārṇava*, while Rādhākānta Deva thought it was Raghunandana's *Śuddhitattva* (Rocher and Rocher 2012, 25). Fitzedward Hall replied in two articles, arguing that Colebrooke had compiled the sources himself (Hall 1867a and b). Rosane Rocher and Ludo Rocher, having reviewed the evidence, find both positions unconvincing, and suggest instead that—like Halhed, Hastings and Jones—Colebrooke relied on his pandits to select the sources (Rocher and Rocher 2012, 25). These East India Company scholars were thus following a pattern set by Fernandes Trancoso and Walther in their reliance on Śivadharma and Krishna.

The most controversial aspect of Colebrooke's text, however, was its inclusion of an extract from the Ṛg Veda which appeared to provide a Vedic warrant for *satī*. Jones was immediately sceptical. It is notable that in the same year that he received and presented Colebrooke's essay, he had begun to express doubts about Wilford's pandits (Cannon 1970, 926). Famously, Jones's own study of Sanskrit, begun a decade earlier, had been motivated by his disgust at being "at the mercy of our Hindu pundits, who deal out Hindu law as they please, and make it at reasonable rates, when they cannot find it ready made" (Cannon 1970, 684). The debate that followed became so intense that Charles Lanman would later conclude that "there is probably no other stanza in the Veda about which so much has been written" (cited in Rocher 2016, 27). In their outrage at what they regarded as a deliberate "falsification," introduced by a member of "an unscrupulous priesthood" (2016, 29), in order to present a Vedic precedent for *satī*, European Sanskritists from H. H. Wilson and Friedrich Max Müller to Maurice Bloomfield and Franklin Edgerton recapitulate an old European trope of the duplicitous Brahmin. Müller's anger at both the unscrupulous priest and the gullible Colebrooke, expressed in 1856, provides further context for us to understand Weber's charge of "Fälschung" against Krishna and Walther, expressed in 1853. [22]

The text produced by Krishna and Walther is shorter than many—but not all—of these digests and is not as clearly identified as a digest, although Walther was aware that it was a summary. It was made in very different circumstances—without access to the networks of pandits or the significant financial resources of the East India Company officials in Bengal. But it bears a sufficient resemblance to these works to suggest that it is best understood as another in a series of such works produced by Indian intellectuals with or at the behest of Europeans during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. [23]

The Role of Orality in the Transmission of Indian Texts

Colebrooke's notorious reference to *satī* in the Ṛg Veda apart, no accusation of forgery has been raised in regard to the digests produced for British orientalists in Bengal. Why then was Walther's work characterised as a forgery by Weber and compared to the *Ezour-Vedam*? Another part of the answer lies in the way the work was most likely produced—from Sanskrit sources but via oral mediation in Tamil. This method was widely used in both European and [24]

Mughal renderings³⁰ of Sanskrit literature into other languages in the early modern period. Walther's reliance on this method bears also on the question of the extent of his knowledge of Sanskrit. Walther was the first of the Pietist missionaries to have engaged in depth with Sanskrit.³¹ Although he was a gifted linguist, who had published a work on Hebrew before becoming a missionary,³² the extent of knowledge of his Sanskrit is not entirely clear. The "Essence of the Yajur Veda" is his only extended engagement with Sanskrit literature.

A note in Walther's 1739 grammar of Tamil has been taken to suggest that he had also composed a grammar of Sanskrit. However, a letter from the following year, explaining why this work had not been printed, describes it only as "a brief introduction," suggesting a work of more limited scope (Van Hal 2016, 132).³³ It may also not have been Walther's own work. Since the 1720s, the missionaries had been in intermittent contact with Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer, a member of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg and a pioneering philologist. In 1734, hearing that the missionaries had found difficulty in learning Sanskrit, he sent Walther some "lessons in the Brahmanic Indostani language." These he had received from an Indian man from Multan named Sondhara, who had travelled with his father through Persia and then to Russia.³⁴ Heike Liebau and Kurt Liebau cite a catalogue description of a lost "Lehrbuch der Granthamischen Sprache," said to have been written in 1737 on palm-leaves by another of the Tranquenbar missionaries, Benjamin Schultze. They suggest this may have been a copy of the introduction to Sanskrit sent to the missionaries by Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer in 1734 (Liebau and Liebau 2003, 99). This may well have formed the basis of the work which Walther planned to print in 1739.

Even if Walther's knowledge of Sanskrit was sufficient to allow him to have composed his own grammar, there is no doubt that the work published in the *Hallesche Berichte* is not his translation of a written text he had before him. As mentioned above, Krishna could not be brought to write down what he presented as Veda, but would only recite it from memory. Even though Krishna was willing to transcribe whole passages from the *śāstra*, Walther nowhere says that he worked from these texts. Rather, he mentions that Krishna "recited, with the greatest reverence, closing his eyes so as not to perceive the exterior world at all." As we have seen, what Krishna recited included some Sanskrit verses which were duly recorded by Walther with sufficient accuracy to indicate the effectiveness of their method for ensuring orthographic correctness. But Walther states that the *śāstra*, on which Krishna relied for understanding the Veda, "has been translated out of the *Gränd'am* [Grantha] into other Indian languages" (HB 46: 1253). It is likely that this indicates that Walther and Krishna followed the method used by many other Europeans who "read" Sanskrit literature in the early modern period.

Fernandes Trancoso's treatise on brahminical lifestyle cites many Sanskrit texts, but he did

30 Manan Ahmed Asif, following Ronit Ricci, uses the term "rendering" rather than translation for "the movement of Persian histories into English during the colonial period," such as Alexander Dow's version of Muhammad Qasim Firishta's *Tarikh-i Firishta* (Asif 2020, 231).

31 Benjamin Schultze began to study Sanskrit in late 1724 but the death of his teacher in 1725 put an end to his studies.

32 Jürgens (Jürgens 2006, 129) suggests this was a doctoral thesis, but I have found no confirmation of this.

33 Van Hal also cites Schultze's recollections, on his deathbed in 1760, that "Mr. Walther has had something recited to him and written down in Latin letters, which has already also been printed; but whether a Grantha script is available that would be sufficient, and whether he intended to have his draft or manuscript printed as a grammar, I cannot say with certainty." Schultze left Tranquebar in 1726 and his relations with the other missionaries were not good (Nørgaard 1977).

34 Archiv des Evangelisch-Lutherischen Missionswerks Leipzig im Archiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, Bestand Dänisch-Hallesche Mission 9/19 : 14 (cited in Van Hal 2016, 129–30).

not know Sanskrit. Rather, the texts were translated for him into Tamil by Śivadharma. The same method was used by the Mughals for their translations of Sanskrit literature into Persian: “More than one dozen Sanskrit works were translated under the direct orders of Akbar or Jahangir. All these projects required Sanskrit intellectuals to verbally communicate the text in Hindi to the Mughal translators, who invariably lacked working knowledge of Sanskrit” (Truschke 2016, 37). Other examples of Europeans using this method include the Augustinian friar Agostinho de Azevedo, who describes how he had Sinhalese chronicles recited and simultaneously translated into Portuguese for him in Goa around 1587 (Azevedo 1960–1963, I:242).

Texts were orally mediated even when working from written texts. A Bengali Brahmin, Madhusūdhana, read from written texts in Sanskrit, translating them into Bengali, so that John Marshall, an East India Company factor, could record an English translation. In this manner John Marshall “read” and translated two Sanskrit texts in the years 1674–1677.³⁵ The first of these was a version of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. This diverges considerably from canonical versions of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and includes, for example, a much lengthier account of the Rāmāyaṇa than is found in standard editions of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Moreover, the account of the Rāmāyaṇa includes episodes which are not found in Vālmīki but do occur in Bengali retellings such as Kṛttibāsa.³⁶ But the bulk of the translation, which was interrupted by Marshall’s death, consists of episodes taken from, and following the order of, the first sixty-eight chapters of the tenth book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. This is sufficient to suggest that Madhusūdhana and Marshall had in front of them a text which, while not *the* Bhāgavata Purāṇa, has certainly to be regarded as *a* Bhāgavata Purāṇa. There is no reason here to suggest that Madhusūdhana set out to deceive Marshall, but both his actual source and the method by which it was translated have resulted in significant divergence from the text which is usually regarded as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

The other text translated by Madhusūdhana and Marshall is very different, however, and more akin to Walther’s. This text is entitled “Moodoo Soodun’s translation of the Saun-Bead into Hindostand language out of the Sinscree, and translated from him into English by John Marshall, 24 July 1676.” The text begins by stating that the “Saun-Bead is the Epittomie or the Sum of the four Beads or the most material things in them.” That the Sāma Veda is intended is made clear by the listing of the three other Vedas (as “Reeke Bead, Judjoor Bead and Attorb Bead”) with which the “Saun Bead” enters into dialogue about the nature of the world as God’s body. The text is short and (to say the least) confusing but it begins, like Krishna and Walther’s text, with a brief account of purāṇic cosmology and it includes references to a range of Hindu ideas, including the *puruṣasukta*³⁷ and the yogic body. Madhusūdhana also briefly recounts the birth of Vyāsa from Parāśara’s encounter with Satyavati (who is not named) and mentions Vyāsa’s role in organising the Vedas and creating the *purāṇas* because the Vedas were “difficult to be understood & the world wanted understanding.”³⁸ Madhusūdhana and Marshall’s “Sāma Veda” has even less claim to represent an authentic Veda than does Krishna

35 British Library, Harley Ms 4256 and Mss EUR C 461.

36 For instance, the birth of Bhagīratha from two queens and the monkey captain Nila urinating on Rāvaṇa’s head (Smith 1988, 185, cf. 2004, 102 where he calls this “*grāmyatā*,” villageness or vulgarity).

37 The *puruṣasukta* is a late Vedic hymn which provides an origin story for the universe and, more particularly, the four *varṇas* in the sacrifice and dismemberment of a primal being.

38 BL Mss EUR C 461, 10r.

and Walther’s “Yajur Veda.”³⁹ But I suggest that their goal to provide “the epitomy” of the four Vedas is comparable to the latter’s attempt to provide “the essence” of the Yajur Veda.

Walther on the Brahmins’ Reputation for Secret Wisdom

Walther believed that the Brahmins did not deserve the reputation for a secret wisdom which they enjoyed among both ancient and contemporary authors. Relying on Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg’s account of Tamil literature—mediated by Mathurin Veyssière de Lacroze—Walther makes a distinction between the Brahmins and the Jains.⁴⁰ He identifies the latter with the naked philosophers—the gymnosophists—renowned for their wisdom since Antiquity. The Brahmins have been wrongly identified, he says, as the modern inheritors of this tradition. Walther acknowledges that the Veda is ancient, but insists that it shows very few signs of the knowledge of a transcendent deity who is to be worshipped without an image. The Veda, he writes, is mostly concerned with ritual. Reading it shows plainly, even to the unlearned, the inadequacy of natural religion (HB 45: 1183–84). Walther hoped that publishing Krishna’s account of the Yajur Veda would mean that scholars in Europe would no longer wish to have the other Vedas translated. He quotes Johann Albert Fabricius’s dismissive comment about how those caught up in the *sinomanie* of the seventeenth century were disappointed following the Jesuits’ publication of parts of the Confucian canon in 1687: “many made far more of Chinese philosophy than was subsequently encountered in the works of Confucius” (HB 45: 1182–83).⁴¹

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It is therefore not surprising that Walther himself appears to have shown no further interest in the Veda. Walther had been repeatedly ill since 1735, when a fever had swept through Tranquebar, and he planned to leave for Europe as soon as he could bring some of his new colleagues to a sufficient knowledge of Tamil. In his last years in Tranquebar, he was occupied with his other scholarly endeavours, including his *Herbarium Tranqambariense* (Jensen 2019), seeing Costanzo Beschi’s grammar of literary Tamil through the press, and composing his own *Observationes grammaticae* on common Tamil. Nor did any of his successors in the mission engage substantively with the Vedas or with Sanskrit literature.⁴² The few members of the Danish-English-Halle mission who studied Indian literature in the second half of the eighteenth century returned to Tamil works such as those of Auvaiyar⁴³ or Tiruvalluvar.⁴⁴ Missionary interest in the Vedas was not revived until the beginning of the nineteenth century (Galewicz 2019).

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39 Their Bhāgavata Purāṇa, by contrast, is an important and interesting work. Although unpublished, it circulated among scholars in Europe, including John Locke (see Sweetman 2022).

40 He refers to the latter as “Samaṇaei,” following Ziegenbalg’s use of the Tamil term *camaṇar* (from Sanskrit *śramaṇa*, “striver, ascetic,” but in Tamil referring primarily to Jaina ascetics).

41 Fabricius, a classical scholar born in Leipzig, had contributed a foreword to Johann Christian Schöttgen’s *Curiöses Antiquitäten-Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1719). Schöttgen’s biography of Walther was printed in the *Hallesche Berichte* in 1741 (HB 50: 353–88).

42 In 1755, the Mission Board in Copenhagen wrote to the mission director in Halle, Gotthilf August Francke, to ask if it were true that the missionaries had received the Veda or another book from a Brahmin and whether they could send a translation or a substantial extract from it (AFSt/M 1 F 8: 33). Francke had little to add to what was published in the *Hallesche Berichte*, repeating that the Veda was not a written book and that the extract published was not the whole Veda but only a part of it (AFSt/M 1 F 8: 35).

43 Translated by Christoph Samuel John into German in the *Neue Hallesche Berichte* in 1791 (39: 263–69) and the *Asiatick Researches* in 1803 (7: 343–61) (Jürgens 2014, 153).

44 August Friedrich Cämmerer translated the first two books of the Tirukural (*Tiruvalluvar: Gedichte und Denksprüche*. Nürnberg: Raw 1803) (Nehring 2000).

The Reception of Walther's Work

In the case of his own work at least, Walther's hope that European scholars would lose interest in the Veda seem to have been realised: his published version of Krishna's account of the Yajur Veda gained very little attention in Europe. An abbreviated version, which excised most of the Sanskrit and Walther's annotations, appeared as an appendix to the German translation of the Abbé Guyon's *Histoire des Indes orientales anciennes et modernes* (History of the East Indies, Ancient and Modern, 1744; Guyon 1749, II:353–64). But otherwise it was virtually ignored—it is not even mentioned in the biographies of Walther published by the mission.⁴⁵ The only other eighteenth-century reference to Krishna and Walther's text is in August Hennings's account of European colonies in India, *Gegenwärtiger Zustand der Besitzungen der Europäer in Ostindien* (The Present Condition of European Possessions in the East Indies, 1784–86). Hennings was a politician and enlightened thinker—a friend of Mendelssohn, correspondent of Lessing, and son-in-law of Reimarus—who moved between Denmark and Germany. In the third volume of his work, entitled *Versuch einer ostindischen Litteratur-Geschichte* (Attempt at an East-Indian Literary History), Hennings entered into the debate on the authenticity of the Avestan works collected by Anquetil-Duperron.⁴⁶ But his account of the Veda is contained in the second volume, which focuses on the Carnatic and in particular the Danish possessions in Thanjavur and includes an account of Tamil customs.⁴⁷ Here Hennings notes that the contents of the “Jadsur Wedam” are entirely different from the *Ezour-Vedam* (Hennings 1784–1786, I:435–36). Hennings was aware that Pierre Sonnerat and others regarded the *Ezour-Vedam* as a work of missionary polemic rather than a genuine Veda (1784–1786, I:399).⁴⁸ This might therefore indicate that Hennings believed that what Walther had published was a more authentic account of the Veda, but he says nothing further.⁴⁹

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It is perhaps telling that Walther's text was not included in the *Sammlung asiatischer Original-Schrifte* (Anthology of Asian Scriptures, 1791), even though this anthology includes other extracts from the *Hallesche Berichte*. This work was likely compiled by Johannes Samuel Ith (App 2010, 437), who in 1779 had translated the *Ezour-Vedam* into German (Ith 1779). And this points to the primary reason why Walther's work did not find a larger audience. It was not that European scholars lost their appetite for the secret wisdom of the Brahmins, which they believed to be contained in the Vedas. It was rather that the *Ezour-Vedam* was available to satisfy it.⁵⁰ Although not published until 1778, the *Ezour-Vedam* was received by Voltaire at the end of 1760, and several other scholars saw or had copies of it in manuscript and it was

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45 In addition to Schöttgen's biography in the *Hallesche Berichte*, an anonymous but quasi-official biography was published in 1889 by the Leipzig mission, in many ways the successor to the eighteenth-century Danish-English-Halle mission (*Christoph Theodosius Walther*, 1889).

46 Hennings examines Johann Friedrich Kleuker's defence of Anquetil Duperron in his German translation of the Zend-Avesta. Hennings does not take a final position but agreed with Jones that it would have been better for Anquetil Duperron not to have printed his translations (*Versuch einer ostindischen Litteratur-Geschichte*, II:652).

47 *Geschichte des Carnatiks in Beziehung auf das Tanjourische Gebiet und der Dänischen Colonie nebst einer Nachricht von den Produkten der Coromandelküste und den Sitten und der bürgerlichen Verfassung der Tamulischen Indianer*.

48 He mentions Gottfried Less's doubts, based on biblical elements in the *Ezour-Vedam*. Less had declared: “I cannot believe the work to be anything other than the fiction [*Erdichtung*] of some European and French missionary” (Less 1786, I:420).

49 Following Hennings, Walther's work was forgotten until Weber's 1853 article. It does not appear, for instance, in Johann Gildemeister's survey of scholarship on Sanskrit (*Bibliothecae Sanskritae*, 1847). It was Hennings who made Weber aware of Walther's text (Weber 1853, 237).

50 Ith was aware (1779, 17) that the three Vedas, collected by Calmette, were available in the royal library in Paris. As noted above, although Calmette believed he had sent all four Vedas, the text that he believed

widely discussed prior to its publication (Rocher 1984, 3–13). By the time the *Ezour-Vedam* was exposed as the work of a missionary, in Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes Orientales* (*Voyage to the East Indies*, 1782), a stream of works from the British Orientalists in Bengal which promised better access to authentic Indian texts was ready to take its place. Prior to the first published translation of a direct translation from Sanskrit—Charles Wilkins's *Bhagvat-Geeta* (1785)—other British scholars who claimed access to Hindu texts, notably Holwell and Dow, were widely cited. In this respect, Walther's hope that his work would slake the European thirst for the Vedas was far from realised.

Conclusion: Veda and Dharmaśāstra in Early Modern European Renderings of Indian Texts

While there is some truth to the idea that Brahmins were unwilling to share their texts with outsiders, the significance of this has been overstated. When Europeans first obtained Hindu texts, in the 1540s and 1550s, this was by theft or seizure—making Brahmin reluctance irrelevant. And European authors were consistently able to obtain Indian texts throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the later eighteenth century, both Antoine Polier and Henry Thomas Colebrooke expressed their surprise that anyone had ever thought the Brahmins reluctant to share their texts (Sweetman 2019, 783, 801–2). A related idea—that Brahmins sought to preserve the secrecy of the Vedas, especially by passing off other texts, calling them Vedas—is found among both early Europeans who collected texts, notably the Jesuits, and later scholars who, like Albrecht Weber, have labelled the texts that were collected as fakes or forgeries. By examining the text produced by Krishna and Walther in the context of a series of works emerging from collaboration between European and Indian intellectuals, I hope to have shown that charges of duplicity or forgery on the part of either the European or the Indian scholars involved are, for the most part, misplaced and do not help us to understand how Indian texts were rendered into European languages. The flexibility of the term Veda, the genre of digests (*nibandha*, *sāra*, *saṃgraha*), the role of orality in the transmission of texts and the mediation of Sanskrit texts through the Indian vernaculars all help to explain the character of the texts published in European languages prior to the more direct translations which began to appear at the end of the eighteenth century.

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to be the Atharva Veda was not. It appears that Ith has already discounted this work, but the grounds on which he was able to do so are unclear.

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