

An Explanation

Two men wrote saying that while Prof Witzel deserved the lashing he got in my Open Letter to him (4/2/10), I went perhaps too far in my accusations of dishonest scholarship.

I don't doubt at all that W knows Vedic and the *RV*. I have made this plain in other earlier writings. Moreover, I accept that he, like all of us, makes inadvertent mistakes and, whenever I met such, I (corrected them silently and) bypassed them. I too make errors. Some years back, I wrote that Whitney translated the word *rathavāhana* as 'chariot-frame' and not as 'a platform upon which is transported the chariot'. I was right in that he had used the compound 'chariot-frame' (i.e. box of the cart) but in a subsequent note, which I had missed in my first reading, he explained that he meant the 'platform'. In a different paper I took the phrase *brahmāyām* to mean 'this Spirit absolute' ignoring the first accent which suggests 'this brahmin priest' or, at best, 'sanctity, the soul of the world'. The term 'Spirit absolute' would have the accent on the first syllable *bráhma-n*. And more recently I wrote the Modern Greek name *Dēmētra* instead of the classical *Dēmētēr* !

We all make such errors; most of us are prepared to acknowledge them and are grateful to have them pointed out. Not so Witzel. He does not acknowledge mistakes and, if they are spotted, he marshals all kinds of excuses to justify them, or attacks the other writer in most vulgar, insulting or derisive terms. Thus he accused Talageri, among other unjustifiable criticisms, of ignorance of linguistics and zoology (!) in their 2000-2001 altercation. Talageri had written in his 2000 publication that *Jahnāvī* in the *RV* is, of course, the river Ganges (post-rigvedic *jāhnavī*) and that *śimsumāra* is the Gangetic dolphin. W wrote that *Jahnāvī* is the wife of *Jahnu* and the dolphin is that of the Indus. T replied cogently that no *Jahnu* is mentioned in the *RV* while the context justifies the river-name and *śimsumāra* was said by W himself to be the Gangetic dolphin in his own EJVS 1999! Indeed on p 465 of his book, T cites the whole passage from W's publication. W then replied with vague generalities and accused T of employing unreliable texts! Such is W's scholarly style of arguing and "deconstructing" opponents – a term that both W and his henchman S. Farmer are fond of using.

In 2003, in his comments ('Ein Fremdling im *Rgveda*', i.e. a stranger in the *RV*) on my paper 'Indigenous Indo-Aryans and the *Rgveda*' (2000), W, in one of his many incoherent fault-findings, criticized me for using mythological, not realistic data in my treatment of the chariot. This of course is his usual diabolic distorting demeanour, because where I used mythological details, as with the *Aśvin*'s car, I said so; furthermore I included realistic data like the types of wood (i.e. *śalmali*, *khadira* etc) used in constructing chariots and also the only real-life race of *Mudgala/Mudgalānī* in *RV* 10.102. In this race the car is magically and perversely transformed into a chariot which is pulled by a bull, not horses (Kazanas 2002, §VII, 1). Then W gave his own "realistic" details to show the differences between *ratha* (i.e. light two-spaced chariot for race or war) and *anas* (heavy cart/wagon for transport). Thus: "spokes ... surrounded by wooden rim... bent by the carpenter ... made of suitable wood ..." and so on. These descriptions are solemnly presented by W as features specific to chariots!

He went even further. He gave another "realistic" feature, namely that the "(light) chariot has two wheels (*cakra*)", as if there are no carts with two wheels. And here he refers

to *RV* 1.164.13 and 8.5.29 and thus betrays incredible sloppiness. Because 1.164.13 has only ONE wheel (with five spokes!) while the previous stanza (12) mentions SEVEN wheels (with 6 spokes). 8.5.29 has indeed two wheels but these are golden and the chariot belongs to the *Ásvins*! So much then for W's realistic two-wheel chariots.

His worst sin in this matter of "realistic" chariots is his reference to *RV* 10.85.11. He obviously did not read the original nor the whole hymn. This refers to the *Sungod's* daughter *Sūryā* and her bridal car. This car runs indeed on two wheels but has also the sky as its covering in stanza 10 and is said to be 'the mind' *manas*! But the original sanskrit text has here *anas* 'cart, vehicle, wagon', **not *ratha*** as per Witzel! It is really too slovenly for words. But neither he nor his braves bothered to read my reply and recheck W's self-damning citations.

Now, this is how wizard Witzel "deconstructed [N.K.] in hilarious fashion", as S. Farmer wrote on Feb 28, 2009 (Indo-Eurasian list) vilifying the Conference on the *Sarasvatī* river held at Los Angeles a little earlier. These people, Witzel and his braves, thoroughly enwrapped in their own self-importance, live high up in their cloud-cuckoo-land and are blithely oblivious of the contempt in which they are held by reputable indologists in the USA.

Back in 1995 W "proved" that immigration took place by translating a passage from the very late *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra* (18.44). The original passage was given by him in footnote 27, p 321:

prañ āyuh pravavrāja; tasyaite kuru-pañcālāḥ kāśī-videhā ity;
etad āyavam. pratyāñ amāvasus; tasyaite gāndhārayas parśavo 'rāṭṭā ity; etad
āmāvasavam.

Some time later, K. Elst produced the following translation: 'Āyu migrated/went eastwards; his [people] are the Kuru-Pañcālās and Kāśī-Videhas: this is the Āyava [migration]. Amāvasu [migrated] westwards; his [people] are the Gāndhārī, Parśu and Arāṭṭā: this is the Āmāvasava [migration]'. (Note in the second statement about Amāvasu the verb *pra-vavrāja* is omitted, as is common in parallel statements in all languages.) This translation was later supported by G. Cardona, probably the most accomplished sanskritist in the West, when Witzel first denied it. Independently B.B. Lal also produced a similar translation plus the original in devanāgarī (2004).

But Witzel had translated the second statements as – **“(His other people) stayed at home in the west.** His people are... ” etc! Now is it likely he knows no Sanskrit? Not likely, since he translated correctly the first statement as – “Āyu went eastwards...” etc. Whence did he drag in the phrase “(His other people) stayed at home in the West” which is not in the text? Is it likely he did not know that in parallel statements one supplies the same verb where (in the second) it is missing? I don't believe it because he has shown that he is quite well-educated.

What then? He is simply using stealth to prove his pet mainstream theory that some Indoaryans emigrated from the N-W (Afghanistan, Bactria, etc) into a south-eastern location while others stayed behind.

When in due-course W was notified of his mistranslation, he declared his innocence and said the editors or publishers were to blame for distorting his (correct) text!

I think therefore I am quite justified in ascribing to W ‘dishonesty’ *sarvaśas* ‘on all sides’.

Lal wrote he hoped W might change his ways. Hope never dies, of course, but W can’t change, not in this embodiment.

tá eté vācam abhipádyā pāpáyā sirís tantram tanvate áprajajñayah
‘having gained access to Vāk by evil means, they spin out their thread in sheer ignorance’ (*RV* 10.71.9).

Finally, a note on Geldner’s translation of the *RV* in German. It is fairly good as far as it goes, with an excellent critical apparatus, but it can be misleading. For instance, he translates *RV* 2.35.6 *āmāsu pūrṣú* ‘in den rohen Burgen, in raw forts/towns’; realizing that this does not mean much, he adds in note 6c *nicht wie die gewöhnlichen Burgen aus gebrannten Ziegelsteinen gemacht* ‘not like the usual Burgs made from baked bricks’(!) but he does not say that **the *RV* has not a single mention of bricks**, baked or unbaked. The text has no bricks and Geldner imports them unjustifiably. This is one of the determinative points of the *RV* date. For if the *RV* was post-Harappan there should have been mention of *iṣṭakās* ‘bricks’, just as there is frequent mention of them in post-rigvedic texts. This and similar points are misleading.

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