

# **FROM SARASVATĪ TO BENZAITEN**

by

Catherine Ludvik

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Centre for the Study of Religion  
University of Toronto

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Sarasvatī is known in India as the beautiful *viṇā* (zither)-playing goddess of knowledge. In China little remains of her presence. In Japan, on the other hand, she, under the name of Benzaiten 辯才天, enjoys widespread popularity as a goddess associated primarily with wealth, and depicted either as playing the *biwa* (lute) or carrying weapons. This study traces the path from Sarasvatī to Benzaiten, using the Indian background to elucidate what is found in China and Japan, and resorting to information gathered from China and Japan to detect changes on the Indian front.

The conceptual development of Sarasvatī from India to Japan is examined here through textual sources, artistic representations, inscriptions, and historical records of India, China, and Japan. The time period covered in India spans from ca. 1500 B.C.E. to ca. 700 C.E.; in China, primarily from the fifth to eighth century; and in Japan, from the seventh to the ninth century.

This study is divided into five parts. The first part on the Vedic Sarasvatī examines

the depiction of the goddess in the *Rg, Atharva, and Yajur Veda Saṃhitās*, as well as in the Brāhmaṇas. It revolves around the gradual transformation of the river goddess into the goddess of knowledge. The second part on the Epic and Puranic Sarasvatī covers the *Mahābhārata* and the early Purāṇas. In the discussion of the *Mahābhārata*, the resurgence of the importance of the river, alongside the goddess of knowledge, and the proliferation of its *tīrtha*-related myths are taken up. In the Purāṇas, the fully developed Brahmā-Sarasvatī myth, the names, worship, and iconography of the goddess are discussed. The iconography of the goddess then leads into the third part on the early Indian images of Sarasvatī, where Hindu, Jain, and possibly Buddhist images are introduced. The Buddhist Sarasvatī is then discussed in the fourth part, which extends from India to China to Japan through the *Sutra of Golden Light* and its repentance ritual. In the fifth part on the Chinese and Japanese images of Sarasvatī, the two principal forms of the goddess are discussed and further Japanese developments are summarized.



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*vedāḥ śāstrāṇi sarvāṇi gītanṛtyādikaṃ ca yat /  
na vihinam tvayā devi tathā me santu siddhayaḥ //*

The Vedas, all the Śāstras, the songs, the dances, etc.  
are not separate from you, O Goddess, so may I have successes.

*Matsya Purāṇa* 66:8

Parts of my dissertation were previously published in the form of articles. The section on *dhī* (pp.24-38) in the *Ṛg Veda* chapter (Vedic Sarasvatī) is a slightly modified version of an article entitled “Sarasvatī-Vāc: The Identification of the River with Speech” published in *Asiatische Studien/ Études Asiatiques* 54:1 (2000), pp.119-30. My discussion of the Barter for Soma myth (pp.85-100) in the Brāhmaṇas chapter (Vedic Sarasvatī) appeared in *Annali dell’Istituto (Universitario) Orientale di Napoli* 58:3-4 (1998, published in 2000), pp.347-58, under the title “The Barter for Soma: Vāc, Women’s Love of Music, and Sarasvatī’s *Vīṇā*.”. The chapter on the eight-armed form of the goddess in China and Japan (pp.245-78) (Chinese and Japanese Images of Sarasvatī) was published in French in slightly modified form in *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 11 (1999-2000), pp.292-338, under the title “La Benzaiten à huit bras: Durgā déesse guerrière sous l’apparence de Sarasvatī.” I would like to thank the respective publishers of these journals for allowing me to include this material in my dissertation.

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- Fig.41A Thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) surrounded by thirty-two figures, including Śrī (Gongdetian), from Dunhuang (Pelliot Collection, Musée Guimet). 981. Colour on silk. 189.4 x 124 cm. (Nicolas Vandier 1974, vol.15, pl.103.)
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- Fig.42 Uga-Benzaiten from Enoshima Jinja near Kamakura. Mid-Kamakura Period. Wood. Ht. 59.3 cm. (Nedachi 1992, fig.20.)
- Fig.43 Uga-Benzaiten from a private collection (Tokyo National Museum). Second half of the Kamakura Period. Ht. 31.3 cm. (Nedachi 1992, fig.21.)
- Fig.44 Benzaiten Jūgo dōji from Kotohiragū, Kagawa Prefecture. Late Kamakura Period. Colour on silk. 129.1 x 52.4 cm. (Nedachi 1992, fig.27.)

- Fig.45 Benzaiten Jūgo dōji from Hōgonji on Chikubushima on Lake Biwa. Nanbokuchō Period. Colour on silk. 80 x 42.1 cm. (Nedachi 1992, fig.151.)
- Fig.46 Ugajin from Chōkenji near Kyoto. Edo Period. Wood. Ht. ca. 50 cm. (Photograph by Catherine Ludvik.)
- Fig.47 Tenkawa Benzaiten mandala image from Ishiyamadera, Shiga Prefecture. Muromachi Period. Colour on silk. 105 x 38.4 cm. (Osaka shiritsu bijutsukan 1999, fig.184.)
- Fig.48 Naked Benten from Enoshima Jinja near Kamakura. Nanbokuchō Period. Wood. Ht. 26.3 cm. Photograph taken before the restoration of 1927. (Nedachi 1992, fig.157.)
- Fig.49 Benzaiten from the Seikadō Bunko Museum, Tokyo. Nanbokuchō Period. Colour on silk. 156.1 x 59.7 cm. (Santorī bijutsukan 1994, fig.37.)
- Fig.50 Shichifukujin Takarabune (Treasure ship of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune) by Hiroshige (1797-1858) from a private collection. Woodblock print. (Shibuyakuritsu shōtō bijutsukan 1999, fig.142.)
- Fig.51 Fuji Film advertising of 1999 for New Year's cards with photographs.

## INTRODUCTION

Sarasvatī is known in India as the beautiful *vinā* (zither)-playing goddess of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> In China little remains of her presence. In Japan, on the other hand, she, under the name of Benzaiten 辯才天, enjoys widespread popularity as a goddess associated primarily with wealth, and depicted either as playing the *biwa* (lute) or carrying weapons. The aim of this study is to trace the path from Sarasvatī to Benzaiten.

Although the Indian Sarasvatī has been the subject of a number of studies, Benzaiten has so far received less scholarly attention, to say nothing of her elusive Chinese counterpart, on which not a single independent work may be noted.

Studies on the Indian goddess Sarasvatī may be divided into three broad categories: textual, art historical, and a combination of the two. On the textual side, short discussions are included in Macdonell's *Vedic Mythology* (1897, pp.86-88), Hillebrandt's *Vedische Mythologie* (1927-29 [2nd ed.], vol.2, pp.335-340), Keith's *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and the Upanishads* (1925, vol.1, pp.172-174), and Hopkins' *Epic Mythology* (1915, see index). Puranic studies came later, primarily with Ananda Swarup Gupta's articles (1962, 1966). Entire volumes or significant portions of volumes dedicated to Sarasvatī appeared in the 1970s and 1980s: Raghunāth Airi (1977) and Jan Gonda (1985) published Vedic studies, while Mohammed Israil Khan (1978) produced a general study of Sarasvatī in Sanskrit sources. On the art historical side, significant contributions include discussions

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<sup>1</sup> The term *vinā*, as we shall see, originally referred to an arched-harp, then to a lute, and finally to a stick-zither. The Indian Sarasvatī is almost always depicted with a zither.

in Nalini K. Bhattasali's *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum* (1929, pp.181-190) and Jitendranath Banerjea's *Development of Hindu Iconography* (1956, pp.376-380), and Umakant P. Shah's article on the "Iconography of the Jain Goddess Sarasvatī" (1941). There have also been articles dealing with specific images (e.g. Bajpai 1946). Two general studies on Sarasvatī combining both textual and art historical material appeared back to back: Kanailal Bhattacharyya's *Sarasvatī: A Study of her Concept and Iconography* was published in 1983 and Niranjan Ghosh's *Śrī Sarasvatī in Indian Art and Literature* in 1984. Although very general, Bhattacharyya's volume is by far the better of the two.<sup>2</sup>

Japanese studies on Benzaiten, on the other hand, are far fewer. The first fascicle of the *Hōbōgirin* Buddhist encyclopedia (1929, pp.63-65) has a short entry dedicated to her, and Ingrid Fritsch's 1996 study of the blind *biwa*-playing singers (*biwa hoshi* 琵琶法師) includes a section on the goddess (pp.13-32). Yamamoto Hiroko 山本ひろ子 in her *Ishin. Chūsei Nihon no hikyōteki sekai* 異神。中世日本の秘教的世界 (Strange Gods. The World of Secret Teachings of Medieval Japan) published in 1998 writes about Benzaiten in her Uga-Benzaiten form and edits related apocryphal sutras and other short works (pp.326ff.). There are, furthermore, volumes of a more popular nature, such as Sasama Yoshihiko's 笹間良彦 *Benzaiten shinkō to zokushin* 弁才天信仰と俗信 (Benzaiten Faith and Popular Beliefs) published in 1992. On the art historical side, while there are some good discussions of individual images (e.g. Nishikawa Kyōtarō 西川杏太郎 1968), there is only one

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<sup>2</sup> Ghosh's study is unfortunately neither well-organized, nor well-presented. There are numerous misprints on every page and the reproduction quality of the illustrations is so low that it renders some of them almost entirely invisible.

comprehensive study of modest length on Benzaiten representations in general by Nedachi Kensuke 根立研介 (1992, pp.58-80) in the *Nihon no bijutsu* 日本の美術 series (no.317).

Studies on the Indian Sarasvatī, as self-contained works, do not generally mention Benzaiten.<sup>3</sup> To Indologists, the Japanese Sarasvatī is, in fact, little known. Studies on Benzaiten, on the other hand, invariably begin with a brief look back at her Indian origins, either in a few lines, a paragraph, or a short section. No work on Benzaiten, however, includes a thorough study of the Indian Sarasvatī. In other words, Sarasvatī's complex Indian and Chinese background are used minimally to understand what is found in Japan. From the Japanese angle, it is clear that somehow or other the Indian goddess, through a couple of Buddhist sutras, made her way to China and to Japan. It is less clear, however, who this goddess was, in what way and why she was differently depicted in Buddhist sources, and hence also why one of her principal Japanese forms, extant also in China, looks completely different from the Indian Sarasvatī.

To understand what we find in China and Japan, I would argue, it is absolutely fundamental also to have a clear idea of the Indian background—even to be able to verify the identity of the goddess in question invoked in the sutras. An understanding of the Indian situation, furthermore, reveals unexpected Indian influences extending as far as Japanese soil. And from the Indian angle, it is fascinating to study the metamorphosis of the native goddess in different environments and under different influences. The Chinese and the Japanese situation, moreover, clearly reflects changes on the Indian front that are

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<sup>3</sup> Two exceptions are Kanailal Bhattacharyya (1983, pp.143-144) and Niranjan Ghosh (1984, pp.63-65), who include short sections on the Buddhist Sarasvatī outside of India. Both, unfortunately, are misinformed, and hence provide a highly distorted picture of Benzaiten.

barely discernible in the Sanskrit sources as they have come down to us. A study of India, then, goes a long way in revealing what is to be found in China and Japan, while a study of China and Japan can show us something easily missed in India.

The conceptual development of Sarasvatī from India to Japan is examined here through textual sources, artistic representations, inscriptions, and historical records of India, China, and Japan. The time period covered in India extends from ca. 1500 B.C.E. with the *R̥g Veda*, the earliest textual source on the goddess Sarasvatī, to ca. 700 C.E. with the early Purāṇas and images of the goddess. The geographical region is northern India. In China, the period covered extends primarily from the fifth to eighth century, when Sarasvatī was introduced to China, with additional references to surviving images and textual sources up to the eighteenth century. The few extant artistic representations discussed come from Dunhuang. In Japan, the time period focused on is from the seventh to the ninth century, marking the entry of Sarasvatī into Japan, to which are added references to texts and images of subsequent periods, and also a summary extending to contemporary times. No regional limits are set for Japan, but the images from the period focused on are from temples in or near the imperial capitals of the time, Heijō-kyō 平城京 and Heian-kyō 平安京, modern day Nara and Kyoto in western Japan.

My study is divided into five parts: Vedic Sarasvatī, Epic and Puranic Sarasvatī, Indian Images of Sarasvatī, Buddhist Sarasvatī, and Chinese and Japanese Images of Sarasvatī. The first three parts are on India, the fourth on the trajectory from India through China to Japan, and the fifth on China and Japan.

Of the three parts dedicated exclusively to India, the first and the second are textual



studies (Vedic, epic, and Puranic), while the third is art historical. The first part on the Vedic Sarasvatī examines the depiction of the goddess in the *Rg. Atharva*, and *Yajur Veda Samhitās*, as well as in the Brāhmaṇas. It revolves around the gradual transformation of the river goddess into the goddess of knowledge. The Epic and Puranic Sarasvatī covers the *Mahābhārata* and the early Purāṇas. In the discussion of the *Mahābhārata*, the resurgence of the importance of the river, alongside the goddess of knowledge, and the proliferation of its *tīrtha*-related myths are taken up. In the Purāṇas, the fully-developed Brahmā-Sarasvatī myth, the names, worship, and iconography of the goddess are discussed. The iconography of the goddess then leads into the third part on the early Indian images of Sarasvatī, where Hindu, Jain, and possibly Buddhist images are introduced.

The Buddhist Sarasvatī is then taken up in the fourth part, which extends from India to China to Japan through the *Sutra of Golden Light* and its repentance ritual. The contents of the sutra in its Sanskrit and Chinese versions are examined, and the political significance of the sutra in China and Japan is discussed.

The final part deals with Chinese and Japanese images and their textual sources. The two principal forms of the goddess are taken up and further Japanese developments are summarized.

As Sarasvatī is an Indian river goddess, my study touches on issues of geography as reflected in Vedic to epic textual sources. The features of the river are described in the *Rg Veda* and in the *Mahābhārata*, its course is delineated in some of the Brāhmaṇas and, in much more detail, in the *Mahābhārata*, and rituals are performed on its banks. While I deal with “textual geography,” I do not enter into the long-standing discussions of “map geography” or geology: I do not try to identify the changing course of the river or of the

location on the map, of the places on its banks mentioned in textual sources. Flowing from the Himalayas through Eastern Punjab and into the sea,<sup>4</sup> it seems the Sarasvatī was a far mightier river in pre-Vedic and Vedic times than during the epic and subsequent periods. Northwestern Rajasthan would have been a much greater place with the river flowing through it and into the sea (Rann of Kutch).<sup>5</sup> Much has been written and many conflicting hypotheses proposed to identify the “lost” Sarasvatī and to explain the desiccation of the region.<sup>6</sup> As discussed by Yash Pal and others, environmental changes occurred, and since the Sarasvatī’s channel was structurally controlled by faults, tectonic factors assumed greater importance. Therefore when even minor tectonic movements occurred, they caused widespread changes in the configuration of the river channels. Thus, it has been argued, the Sarasvatī as described in the *Mahābhārata* is either the same river, all-be-it much changed, as that of Vedic literature, or another river bearing its name.

A study of Sarasvatī, even if confined to India, is indeed a vast subject, to say nothing of one that extends far beyond its borders. Certain limits, therefore, such as time frame and geography, must inevitably be set. Within India, my study does not cover the period after ca. 700 C.E., including contemporary popular worship of the goddess. General studies on the Indian Sarasvatī, such as Kanailal Bhattacharyya’s (1983), discuss post-700 C.E. textual and art historical material. As far as I am aware, there is no modern anthropological study dedicated to the worship of Sarasvatī in India today.

My dissertation, furthermore, does not cover Tibet, Korea, Campā, Java, or Bali.

<sup>4</sup> Indras 1967, p.46.

<sup>5</sup> Pal, Sahai, Sood, Agrawal 1984 .

<sup>6</sup> Oldham 1874, Das Gupta 1955, Godbole 1961, Indras 1967, to name but a few. See Pal, Sahai, Sood, Agrawal 1984 for further details.

Kanailal Bhattacharyya (1983) and Niranjan Ghosh (1984) briefly discuss the Tibetan and Indonesian Sarasvatī. On Tibet, see also W.E. Clark's *Two Lamaistic Pantheons* (1937, e.g. vol.2, p.288, no.253) and Antoinette K. Gordon's *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism* (1959, p.73 and fig. after p.72), for instance. The Tantric Buddhist forms of Sarasvatī are discussed by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya (1968, pp.349-352, figs.230-235) and Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann (1975, pp.336-338, pl.13:1-2; 1976), primarily on the basis of the *Sādhanamāla*, compiled in the eleventh century, and the *Niṣpannayogāvalī* of the late eleventh to early twelfth centuries. The Tibeto-Mongol pantheon is illustrated in Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra's 1961-72 volumes on the subject (e.g. vol.9, pl.49a for Sarasvatī). I am not aware of any studies on Korea. On Campā, see, for instance, the *Cham Sculpture Album* of the State Committee for Social Sciences of Vietnam, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, where a late-tenth to early-eleventh century sculpture of Sarasvatī is illustrated (1988, pp.85, 228, fig.76).<sup>7</sup> There is also a short article by Saveros Pou (1984) on Sarasvatī in Khmer culture: he notes two bronze statues in the style of Jayavarman VII (r. 1181-1215) found in Thailand (pp.207-208). Javanese representations are published by Kanailal Bhattacharyya (1983, pl.51, ninth to tenth century), Niranjan Ghosh (1984, pl.3:1-2), and Vincent Smith (1930, pl.112A, date unspecified), and a Sarasvatī festival is described in Andrew Beatty's anthropological account of Javanese religion (1999, pp.211-215). For a Balinese festival day dedicated to Sarasvatī, see Fred B. Eiseman, Jr.'s study (1989, vol.1, p.184). Sanskrit hymns from Bali, including one dedicated to Sarasvatī, have been edited by Sylvain Lévi (*Sanskrit Texts from Bāli*, pp.62-63).

<sup>7</sup> This late tenth- to early eleventh-century sculpture of Sarasvatī was also published in Girard-Geslan et al. 1994, fig.595. See also Parmentier 1919, who notes a possible Sarasvatī from about the eleventh century (p.52).

# 1. VEDIC SARASVATĪ

## Introduction

The earliest known texts in which Sarasvatī appears are the Veda Saṃhitās composed in northwestern India.<sup>1</sup> Held in utmost sanctity, the Saṃhitās were faithfully transmitted, word-for-word, through oral tradition.

The *R̥g Veda* (RV) is the oldest of the Saṃhitās. Although composed sometime after 1750 B.C.E., as a collection of 10 books (*maṇḍalas*, lit. circles), it is considered to date from about the twelfth century B.C.E.<sup>2</sup> It consists of 1028 hymns (*sūktas*) arranged in these 10 books.

The *Sāma Veda* is a collection of certain verses of the *R̥g Veda*, arranged for recitation in ritual performances. As it does not contain any new material on Sarasvatī, it will not be taken up here.

The *Atharva Veda* (AV) is in parts as old as the *R̥g Veda*, but the grammatical forms indicate a younger age than the *R̥g Veda*. Michael Witzel assigns its composition to the twelfth century B.C.E. Although it also includes philosophically speculative portions, the *Atharva Veda* is in many ways a practical text intended to deal with the problems of everyday life, from health difficulties to love, marriage, happiness, and prosperity, by way of magical charms.

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<sup>1</sup> See maps in Witzel 1989, pp.242-243, for regions specific to the *R̥g*, *Atharva*, and *Yajur Vedas*.

<sup>2</sup> I follow Michael Witzel's chronological chart in 1989, pp.249-251.

The liturgical *Yajur Veda*, composed from about the twelfth to the ninth century B.C.E., was compiled a few centuries later than the *Rg Veda*. As Jan Gonda points out,<sup>3</sup> it was amongst the exponents of this text that the methods of sacrificial practice were developed. Although tradition has it that there were one hundred and one schools of the *Yajur Veda*, collections from five of the schools survive: the earliest are the *Maitrāyaṇīya* (MS) and *Kāṭhaka* (KS) *Samhitās*, followed by the *Kapiṣṭhala Kāṭhaka* (only fragmentary: about half of the original) (KpS) and the *Taittirīya* (TS) *Samhitās*, all belonging to the Black *Yajur Veda*; the *Vājasaneyā Samhitā* (VS), on the other hand, belongs to the White *Yajur Veda*. The distinction between the so-called Black (*Kṛṣṇa*) *Yajur Veda* and the White (*Śukla*) *Yajur Veda* rests in the inclusion of Brāhmaṇa-type explanatory material in the former, which is consequently viewed as “not arranged.”<sup>4</sup>

The Brāhmaṇas, enormous appendices to the Veda *Samhitās*, are commentaries, written in prose, to rituals. They are assigned to a period between 900-500 B.C.E. The Brāhmaṇa material of the Black *Yajur Veda* belongs to this category. Apart from the Black *Yajur Veda Samhitās* noted above, we will look at passages from the *Śatapatha* (ŚB), *Taittirīya* (TB), *Aitareya* (AB), *Pañcaviṃśa* (PB), *Jaiminīya* (JB), *Kauṣītaki* (KB), and *Vādhūla Brāhmaṇas*.

The Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads, appendices in turn to the Brāhmaṇas, hardly mention Sarasvatī, and hence will not be discussed here.

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<sup>3</sup> Gonda 1975, p.323.

<sup>4</sup> See Gonda 1975, p.324 and Winternitz 1972 (English translation repr. of 1904-1920 original), vol.1, pp.148-49.

## 1. *Ṛg Veda*

Sarasvatī appears in many verses of the *Ṛg Veda*, and is invoked, in particular, in three hymns: while 6:61 is entirely dedicated to her, she shares 7:95-96 with her male counterpart Sarasvat, to whom are addressed a few of the stanzas (7:95:3; 7:96:4-6). He is a somewhat nebulous figure, a male river god obviously corresponding to Sarasvatī. In 1:164:52, he appears, more generally, as a water genie connected or identified with Apām Napāt, the son of the waters.<sup>5</sup> In post-ṛgvedic literature, he forms a pair with Sarasvatī, and in the *Mahābhārata*, appears as her son.<sup>6</sup>

In the *Ṛg Veda*, Sarasvatī is a deified river representing abundance and might. She is associated above all with the waters (*āpas*) and the storm gods (*maruts*), and forms a group with the sacrificial goddesses Iḷā and Bhāratī. Subsequent developments in her conceptualization are rooted in her *Ṛg Veda* connection with inspired thought (*dhī*), which in turn is linked to the sacrificial activity on the banks of the sacred river Sarasvatī.

### a. River Goddess

#### i. Mighty Flood

Sarasvatī appears as a powerful river, surpassing all others in her activity (6:61:13b

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<sup>5</sup> For Sarasvat, see Hillebrandt 1927-29, vol.1, p.380 (1980, vol.1, pp.237-39); Geldner 1951, vol.2, p.265, note on 7:95:3; Gonda 1985, p.7, note 20.

<sup>6</sup> For the Brāhmaṇas, see p.65 below; for the *Mahābhārata*, see pp.119-121 below.

*apāsām apāstamā*). She roars with energy (6:61:8c)<sup>7</sup> like a bull, bellows (*vāvaśānā* 7:36:6a) like a cow,<sup>8</sup> and ragingly snorts like a boar (6:61:2ab):

*iyām śuśmebhir bisakhā ivārujat  
sānu girīnām taviṣēbhir ūrmibhiḥ /*

With enraged snorting, like one who digs up lotus roots,<sup>9</sup> this one broke the back of mountains with her strong waves.

Uncontrollable by nature, she reveals [herself as] a mighty flood (1:3:12ab): *mahó arṇaḥ sārāsvatī prā cetayati ketūnā* / Taken predicatively, the mighty flood is Sarasvatī's ensign (*ketú*), by which she is characterized.<sup>10</sup> As fire is known by smoke, Sarasvatī is known by the might and volume of her waters. She is thus signalled not only by water as such, but by water in uncontrollable, impetuous, raging movement, roaring with life. Swelling with her own waters (*abhi svēna pāyasā pīpyānāḥ //*),<sup>11</sup> she comes down from the mountains to meet the ocean (*śúcīr yati girībhya ā samudrāi /*).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Literally, she "whose impetuosity keeps roaring": *yāsyāh... āmaś cārati rōruvat* (6:61:8bc).

<sup>8</sup> Rivers are often compared to cows (e.g. 3:33:1cd; 10:75:4ab [p.28 below]). See Gonda 1985, pp.39ff.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Hoffmann (1975-76, vol.2, p.337) identifies this with a boar: "Sie... durchbrach wie ein wurzelgrabender (Eber) den Rücken der Berge mit tosenden machtvollen Wogen."

<sup>10</sup> I follow Werner Knobl's suggestion here (personal communication). Geldner's translation of *ketūnā* as "mit ihrem Banner" (1951, vol.1, p.4) renders the passage entirely unclear. *Ketú* is derived from *cit*, and thus is, as Renou (EVP vol.1, p.7) explains, "proprement le signe permettant de 'comprendre.'" In hymns to Uṣas (Dawn), the term often appears as a luminous signal and a sign of recognition (EVP vol.3, p.32). In its illuminating quality, *ketú* is thus the sign which makes recognition possible. See also EVP vol.2, pp.71, 73, 85; vol.7, p.47.

<sup>11</sup> 7:36:6d. Renou (EVP vol.4, p.99) explains that the association *pāyasā pīpyānāḥ* reflects an ancient etymology: "gonflant de leur gonflement."

<sup>12</sup> 7:95:2b. *Śúcīr* refers to the purity of her waters. Renou (EVP vol.15, p.133) translates: "allant pure des montagnes à l'océan."

Seven-sistered (*saptāsvasar*)<sup>13</sup> Sarasvatī is praised as the most riverly (*nādītama*)<sup>14</sup> and as the divine one from amongst the rivers (*asuryā nadīnām*),<sup>15</sup> “pressing forward by her greatness all the waters,” (*prabābadhānā ... víśvā apó mahinā ... anyāḥ //*).<sup>16</sup> Inexhaustible plenitude in liquid form, she fills the earthly [spaces] and the wide space in between (6:61:1 lab *āpapriśi pārthivāny urú rájo antárikṣam /* ).<sup>17</sup>

## ii. Abundance and Might

Rituals were performed on the banks of the Sarasvatī. Vedic religion centered on the sacred fire into which offerings were placed, as hymns were recited. Her banks, the *Rg Veda* (3:23:4) tells us, were amongst the best places on earth to establish one’s sacred fire:

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<sup>13</sup> 6:61:10b. In 7:36:6b she is said to be the seventh (*saptáthi*). As Heinrich Lüders (1951, pp.163ff.) observes, throughout the ages in India, the names of rivers with a numeral, seven in particular, have been used to indicate the country’s river system. From a purely mathematical point of view, however, to call her *saptāsvasar* is to say that there are, all together, eight sisters. Nevertheless, as Whitney (1889, pp.502-03, §1294b) and Wackernagel (1896, vol.2:1, pp.273-74) explain, there is a particular kind of *bahuvrihi* in the older language which implies “the relation of appurtenance” (Whitney 1889, p.502). Thus the one who is said to be seven-sistered may be included in the seven.

The *saptāsvasar* as rivers are also referred to in 8:41:2de (*yāḥ sindhūnām upodayé saptāsvasā sá madhyamō*), where Varuṇa appears amongst them. In this case, he is clearly not one of the seven, but rather one who has seven sisters, and thus would be counted as an eighth sibling.

<sup>14</sup> 2:41:16a.

<sup>15</sup> 7:96:1b.

<sup>16</sup> 7:95:1cd.

<sup>17</sup> Although *urv antárikṣam* occurs several times in the *Rg Veda* (e.g. 3:22:2c; 3:54:19d), *urú rájas* appears only here. *Urú* means “wide,” and *rájas*, “atmosphere.” Thus Renou (EVP vol.5, p.132) takes *urú rájo antárikṣam* as an enlargement of the usual formula *urv antárikṣam*, and translates: “le vaste espace, (à savoir) l’espace-médian.” Geldner’s reading as “the earthly [spaces], the wide space, [and] the aerial realm” (1951, vol.2, p.163 “Die irdischen (Räume), den weiten Raum, das Luftreich...”) might suggest the sky for *urú rájas*, and yet *rájas* is not the sky, but rather the misty atmosphere around the earth. At any rate, it is not entirely clear what Geldner had in mind by “wide space.” It is not insignificant, however, that in the immediately following stanza (6:61:12a), Sarasvatī is said to abide in three places (*triśadhāsthā*): *pārthivāni*, *urú rájas*, and *antárikṣam*?



*nī tvā dadhe vāra ā pṛthivyā  
 ilāyās padé sudinatvé áhnām /  
 dr̥ṣádvatyām mānuṣa āpayāyām  
 sárasvatyām revád agne didīhi //*

I set thee down in the earth's choicest [place],  
 in Ilā's footstep, on the best of days.  
 On the Dr̥ṣadvatī, amongst Manu's [people],<sup>18</sup> on the Āpayā,  
 on the Sarasvatī shine richly, O Agni.

Worshipped by those dwelling on her banks (e.g. the Pūrus in 7:96:2ab), Sarasvatī is invoked as the most motherly (*āmbītame*)<sup>19</sup> and as dear amongst the dear ones (*priyā priyāsu*).<sup>20</sup> In the eyes of her devotees, her liquid abundance in the form of overflowing waters embodies wealth in the widest sense (1:164:49):

*yās te stānaḥ śasāyó yó mayobhūr  
 yéna vísvā púṣyasi vāryāṇi /  
 yó ratnadhā vasuvid yāḥ sudātraḥ  
 sárasvati tām ihā dhātave kaḥ //*

Make [us] suck here that breast of yours which is abundant,  
 which is refreshing, with which you make all choice things thrive,  
 which is providing treasures, finding goods, whose gifts are good.  
 O Sarasvatī.<sup>21</sup>

In their hymns, calling to mind how in the past Sarasvatī had bestowed her gifts on others,<sup>22</sup> her worshippers invoke her, asking for everything from wealth,<sup>23</sup> vitality,<sup>24</sup> and

<sup>18</sup> In the *Rg Veda*, six out of nine times the locative *mānuṣe* is connected with *jāne* (1:48:11b; 5:14:2c; 5:21:2a; 6:16:1c; 8:64:10a; 10:118:9c), once with *vṛjāne* (1:128:7a).

<sup>19</sup> 2:41:16a.

<sup>20</sup> 6:61:10a.

<sup>21</sup> This stanza is discussed on pp.30-31 below.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, she is said to have given Nāhuṣa ghee and milk (7:95:2d *ghṛtām páyo duduhe náhuṣāya*), and Vadhryaśva a son called Divodāsa (6:61:1b *divodāsam vadhryaśvāya dāśūṣe*).

<sup>23</sup> 3:54:13d *dhātā rayim...*

<sup>24</sup> 10:30:12d *sárasvati tād gr̥ṇatē váyo dhāt*

progeny<sup>25</sup> to pleasure,<sup>26</sup> fame,<sup>27</sup> and, very importantly for her later identification with speech, inspired thought.<sup>28</sup> As a life-giver and sustainer, she is asked to place the embryo in a woman's womb<sup>29</sup> and she is identified as the one who makes the five generations grow.<sup>30</sup>

While the volume of her waters represents abundance, the uncontrollability and might of her flood embodies her fearful strength. The mighty river goddess is called on for protection and shelter (6:49:7cd):

*gnábhīr ácchīdram śaraṇām sajośā  
durādhārsam gr̥maté śárma yamsat //*

Together with the wives of gods, she shall grant the singer unbroken refuge, protection which is difficult to assail.

Even in the singer's supplication for protection, Sarasvatī's might and invincibility dominate. Words such as *áchīdram*, "unbroken" (i.e. unbreakable), and *durādhārsam*, "difficult to assail," that is, invincible, are used, reflecting her ensign, the mighty flood. It is not simply her compassion which is invoked, but rather her compassionate strength. Perhaps behind expressions like *priyá priyásu* lies a certain fear of an all-too powerful, uncontrollable mother, whose raging energy, it is hoped, might be compassionately directed.

<sup>25</sup> 2:41:17d *prajám devī didīdhi naḥ //*

<sup>26</sup> 1:89:3d *sārasvatī naḥ subhāgā māyas karat //*

<sup>27</sup> 2:41:16d *prāśastim amba nas kṛdhi //*

<sup>28</sup> 6:49:7b *sārasvatī virāpatnī dhīyaṃ dhāt //*

<sup>29</sup> 10:184:2b *gārbham dhehi sarasvatī //* (= AV 5:25:3b)

<sup>30</sup> 6:61:12b *pāñca jātā vardhāyanti //*

The neuter *jātā* "generations" is not to be confused with tribes, as, for instance, Macdonell and Keith (1912, vol.2, pp.435-36) have done. In the *R̥g Veda*, the five tribes, as discussed by Bernfried Schlerath (1960, pp.28ff.), are referred to as the *pāñca kṣitāyah* (e.g. 1:176:3b), *pāñca carṣanāyah* (e.g. 5:86:2c), *pāñca kṛṣṭāyah* (e.g. 2:2:10c), and *pāñca janāsah* or *janāh* (e.g. 1:89:10c)—but not as the *pāñca jātāni*.

Like her wild, raging waters, this mother takes on a fierce, awful (*ghorā*) appearance.<sup>31</sup>  
 She who remains mighty and unconquerable as a stronghold, as a metal rampart (*sārasvatī dharūnam āyasi pūh /*),<sup>32</sup> is asked to conquer the enemies of her loved ones (*jeṣi sātrūn*).<sup>33</sup>  
 She is called a slayer of strangers (*pārāvataḥnī*).<sup>34</sup> Her violent aggression is described in no uncertain terms (6:61:8a-9a):

*yāsyā anantó āhrutas tveṣās cariṣṃūr arṇavāh /  
 āmaś cāрати rōruvat //*

*sā no viśvā āti dviṣaḥ*

Elle dont l'élan-offensif illimité, impossible à faire dévier,  
 redoutable, mobile, fluctuant, avance en hurlant-avec-force,

C'est elle qui nous (a fait passer) outre à toutes hostilités...<sup>35</sup>

She is also the slayer of the foe within, for she is called on to guard her devotees against slander: *sārasvatī nidās pātu //* (6:61:11c).

<sup>31</sup> 6:61:7b.

<sup>32</sup> 7:95:1b. In the *Rg Veda*, *pūr* (f.) is not a citadel, but a rampart, a wall. See Thieme 1970, p.448 (repr. 1995, p.816).

<sup>33</sup> 2:30:8b. See also 6:61:7c *vṛtraghnī*, an epithet discussed on pp.51-53 below.

<sup>34</sup> 6:61:2c. Geldner (1951, vol.2, p.163) translates *pārāvataḥnī* as "die die Fremden abwehrt," but adds in a note that it could also refer to the Pārāvatas as a proper name of a people. Likewise, Renou (EVP vol.15, p.131) is not quite sure about *pārāvata*, but thinks it is probably a proper name. He does add, however, referring to other passages (5:52:11 "ceux d'un domaine lointain"; AV. 20:135:11), that "l'appellatif est plus vraisemblable..." Böhlingk-Roth's (1855-75, vol.4, p.673) definition of the Pārāvatas, reiterated by Monier-Williams (1899, p.620), as a tribe living on the banks of the river Yamunā may reflect a later, particularized understanding of the term. Hillebrandt (1927-29, repr. 1965, vol.1, p.278) and Macdonell and Keith (1912, vol.1, pp.518-19; vol.2, p.436) also take the Pārāvatas to be a people.

<sup>35</sup> Translation by Renou (EVP vol. 15, p.132).

Boris Oguibénine's (1988, p.209) understanding of Sarasvatī as a protective deity of poets, intervening on their behalf and destroying their rivals in competitions is certainly a far too limited view of her aggression, as the above passages clearly show. For further discussion of Sarasvatī's aggressive aspect, see pp.18-20, 51-53 below.

## b. Water: Sarasvatī and the Āpas

Sarasvatī, as a river, finds her most obvious connection—deepened even further with time—with the never-resting (*āniviśamānāḥ*) waters (*āpas*),<sup>36</sup> to whom four entire hymns of the *Rg Veda* (7:47, 49; 10:9, 30) and many of its verses are dedicated. Sarasvatī is one of them, and appears in RV 10:30:12 as their representative:

*āpo revatiḥ kṣāyathā hi vaśvaḥ  
krātuṃ ca bhadraṃ bibhṛthāmṛtaṃ ca /  
rāyās ca sthā svapatyaśya pāniḥ  
sārasvati tād grṇatē vāyo dhāt //*

O rich waters, since you have command over the good, since you carry [within you] auspicious resolve and immortality, [and] since you are mistresses of wealth consisting of good descent, may Sarasvatī grant the singer this vital force.

The waters are often called celestial (*devī*),<sup>37</sup> and likened to loving mothers (*uśatīr iva mātāraḥ //*).<sup>38</sup> Much as Sarasvatī, they bring food,<sup>39</sup> wealth,<sup>40</sup> strength,<sup>41</sup> and health.<sup>42</sup> Within the waters, according to Soma, dwell all remedies (10:9:6ab): *apsú me sómo abravīd antār viśvāni bheṣajā* / Hence they can cure diseases.<sup>43</sup> They also carry away all defilements in the form of betrayal and bearing false witness (10:9:8):

<sup>36</sup> 7:49:1b.

<sup>37</sup> 7:49:1-4.

<sup>38</sup> 10:9:2c.

<sup>39</sup> 2:35:14c *āpo náptre ghṛtām ānnaṃ vāhantiḥ*.

<sup>40</sup> 10:30:14a *émā agman revatir jīvādhanyā*.

<sup>41</sup> 10:9:1ab *āpo hi ṣṭhā mayobhūvas tā na ūrjē dadhātana* /

<sup>42</sup> 10:9:5c *apó yācāmi bheṣajām //*

<sup>43</sup> 10:137:6cd *āpaḥ sārvasya bheṣajīs tās te kṛṇvantu bheṣajām //* See also 10:9:5-7.

*idám āpaḥ prá vahata yát kīṃ ca duritám máyi /  
yád vāhám abhidudróha yád vā śepá utánṛtam //*

O Eaux, convoyez au loin ce qui va mal en moi, quel qu'il soit,  
ce que j'aie-jamais commis-en-fait-de-dol ou que j'aie-jamais  
juré mensongèrement.<sup>44</sup>

Just as the Sarasvatī runs clear (7:95:2b *śúcir yatí...*) and is pure (1:3:10a *pāvakā*),<sup>45</sup> the  
waters too are clear and pure (7:49:3c *madhuścūtaḥ śúcayo yāḥ pāvakāḥ*), and thus purifiers  
and healers by nature.

The waters are both celestial and earthly (7:49:2):

*yá āpo divyá utá vā srāvanti  
khanītrimā utá vā yāḥ svayamjāḥ /  
samudrārthā yāḥ śúcayah pāvakās  
tá āpo devīr ihā mām avantu //*

The waters of the sky or those that flow, those that are dug out or  
those that arise by themselves, those pure and clear waters that  
seek the ocean as their goal—let the waters, who are goddesses,  
help me here and now.<sup>46</sup>

Just as they “are present in the luminous space beyond and beneath the sun” (*yá rocané  
parástāt sūryasya yás cāvastād upatiṣṭhanta āpaḥ //*),<sup>47</sup> Sarasvatī fills the realms of earth  
and the wide space in between and is characterized as dwelling in three places (6:61:11-12a).

The waters, however, are more potent and powerful than Sarasvatī, for they, as the

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<sup>44</sup> Translation by Renou in EVP vol.15, p.126.

<sup>45</sup> Geldner 1951, vol.1, p.4, note on 1:3:10-11: “Sarasvatī als Göttin der sakralen Rede.” On 1:3:12: “als Flussgöttin.”

<sup>46</sup> Translation by W.D. O’Flaherty in 1981, p.232.

<sup>47</sup> 3:22:3cd.

primeval waters of creation, are the producers of all that is fixed and moves (*viśvasya sthātūr jāgato jānitriḥ //*),<sup>48</sup> even of sacrifice itself (*āpo... janāyantīr yajñām /*).<sup>49</sup> The very elixir of immortality (*amṛta*) comes from them (1:23:19a; 10:30:12ab).<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted here that 10:30:12 is the same stanza in which Sarasvatī appears as their representative, and therefore is, through them, also connected with *amṛta*, and by extension, with the creative process itself.

### c. Might: Sarasvatī and the *Maruts*

Sarasvatī is also associated with the highly prominent storm gods (*maruts*),<sup>51</sup> with whom she shares might<sup>52</sup> and a certain wild, fighting spirit (e.g. 1:85):

*vī yé bhrājante sūmakhāsa ṛṣṭibhiḥ  
pracyāvāyanto ācyutā cid ójasā / (1:85:4ab)*

*śūrā ivéd yūyudhavo ná jāgmayah  
śravasyāvo ná pṛtanāsu yetire /  
bhāyante viśvā bhūvanā marūdbhyo  
rājāna iva tveṣāsamdr̥ṣo nāraḥ // (1:85:8)*

<sup>48</sup> 6:50:7d.

<sup>49</sup> 10:121:8ab.

<sup>50</sup> 1:23:19a *apsv āntār amṛtam apsu bheṣajām*; 10:30:12ab *āpo revatiḥ kṣāyathā hi vāsvaḥ krātum ca bhadrām bibhrthāmṛtam ca*

<sup>51</sup> Thirty-three hymns are dedicated exclusively to them, while in others they are invoked together with Indra (seven hymns), Agni (one hymn), and Pūṣan (one hymn).

<sup>52</sup> E.g. 1:85:10ab *ūrdhvām nunudre 'vatām tā ójasā dādṛhānām cid bibhidur vī pārvatam*

“Ces (Marut) ont poussé vers en haut la fontaine, grâce à (leur) force-formidable; ils ont pourfendu la montagne, si ferme-en ses-bases (soit-elle).” (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.10, p.19.)

8:20:12a *tā ugrāso vṛṣaṇa ugrābhavo*

“Ces formidables taureaux aux bras formidables...” (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.10, p.50.)

Eux bons combattants qui brillent au loin avec les lances, ébranlant  
d'une force-formidable les choses inébranlables elles-mêmes...  
(1:85:4ab)

Marchant-à-grands-pas tels des héros, tels des combattants, ils  
ont pris rang pour les batailles, tels (des hommes) avides-de-renom.  
Tous les êtres ont peur des Maruts. (Ces) seigneurs à l'aspect  
redoutable (sont) comme des rois.<sup>53</sup>

Sarasvatī, however, despite her raging energy, does not seem to take quite as much pleasure in battle as these unstoppable and hence much-feared warriors of the sky. In fact, as if to draw upon their aggressive, combative energy, she is requested to conquer enemies in unison with them (2:30:8b): *marūtvaṁ dhṛṣatī jeṣi śātrūn* / As she broke the back of mountains,<sup>54</sup> they pierce them,<sup>55</sup> shaking the immovable (*dhruvacyūt*).<sup>56</sup> As she ragingly snorts like a boar,<sup>57</sup> the thundering storm gods (... *tanyatūr marūtām*...),<sup>58</sup> like hawks on high competing [for speed], are accompanied by the howling and roaring of the winds (*vātasvanasaḥ śyenā asṛdhran* // ).<sup>59</sup> Probably in allusion to the sound of the wind, Macdonell points out, the storm gods are called “celestial songs” (*divó arkāḥ*).<sup>60</sup>

Associated with lightning, wind, and thunder, one of the main activities of the *maruts*

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<sup>53</sup> Translation by Renou in EVP vol.10, p.18.

<sup>54</sup> 6:61:2. See p.11 above.

<sup>55</sup> 1:85:10b.

<sup>56</sup> 1:64:11c. Cf. 1:85:4b above.

<sup>57</sup> 6:61:2ab.

<sup>58</sup> 1:23:11ab.

<sup>59</sup> 7:56:3b.

<sup>60</sup> 5:57:5d. See Macdonell 1897, p.80. Although Macdonell calls them “the singers of heaven,” *arkā* means rather “hymn” or “song.” Therefore Geldner (1951, vol.2, p.65) translates *divó arkāḥ* as “des Himmels Chöre” and Renou (EVP vol.10, p.34) as “chants du ciel (personnifiés).”

is to shed rain.<sup>61</sup> They lift up the rains from out of the ocean and pour them down: *úd irayathā marutaḥ samudrató yūyám vṛṣṭīm varṣayathā puriṣinaḥ* / (5:55:5ab).

The storm gods are also compared to rivers: *sindhavo ná yayíyo bhrájadṛṣṭayah* (10:78:7c).<sup>62</sup> Again, the healing properties of water, even in the form of rain, are called upon for remedies because the storm gods, while showering rain, bestow medicine (*vṛṣṭí śám yór ápa usri bheṣajám*).<sup>63</sup> Like Sarasvatī and the waters, they are clear and pure: *śúcijanmānaḥ śucayah pávakāḥ* (7:56:12d).

Sarasvatī and the storm gods are invoked together, supplicated to grant possessions and sons.<sup>64</sup> Sarasvatī has them for companions (*marútsakhā*).<sup>65</sup>

#### d. Sacrifice: Sarasvatī, Ilā, and Bhāratī

Sarasvatī is also regularly associated with two other female figures, Ilā and Bhāratī, with whom she forms an oft-invoked triad. They appear in the *āpri-sūktas*, the propitiation hymns composed for ritual purposes centering on Agni, which belong to an early stage of

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<sup>61</sup> E.g. 5:53:10c *ánu prá yanti vṛṣṭáyah*.

<sup>62</sup> See also 10:78:5c: *ápo ná nimnair udābhir jigatnávo*.

“...allant-avec-vitesse comme les cours-d'eau avec les eaux déclives...” (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.10, p.53.)

<sup>63</sup> 5:53:14c “Quand il a plu, que les eaux à l'aurore (nous soient à) salut (et) bonheur, (nous soient) un remède!” (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.10, p.30.)

<sup>64</sup> 3:54:13a,cd *vidyúdrathā marúta ṛṣṭimáto... sárasvatí śṛṇavan yajñtyāso dhātā rayim saháviraṃ turāsaḥ* // “Les Marut aux chars (faits) d'éclairs, pourvus de lances... (ainsi que) Sarasvatī (et autres dieux,) qu'ils entendent (notre prière, eux qui sont) dignes du sacrifice! Conférez (nous) la richesse comportant des hommes d'élites, (dieux) vigoureux!” (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.5, p.13.)

<sup>65</sup> 7:96:2c.



Vedic ritual.<sup>66</sup> The three goddesses, who are said to bring delight (*tisró devír mayobhúvah /*)<sup>67</sup> are invited to sit on the sacrificial grass<sup>68</sup> and to protect it.<sup>69</sup>

Īlā is a milch cow<sup>70</sup> and the mother of a herd.<sup>71</sup> Clarified butter in hand (*ghṛtāhastā*)<sup>72</sup> and her foot dripping with it (*ghṛtāpadī*),<sup>73</sup> she is entreated to swell<sup>74</sup> so as to flow abundantly. She may, therefore, represent libation.<sup>75</sup> Renou, in fact, translates *īlā* as “offrande liquide”<sup>76</sup> and equates it with *pāyas*.<sup>77</sup>

Bhārati is, in some verses, referred to as *hótrā bhārati*, as in 3:62:3d, where she, together with the female guardian deities (*vārūtriḥ*), is asked to favour those invoking: *asmán vārūtriḥ śaraṇair avantv asmán hótrā bhārati dākṣiṇābhiḥ //* (3:62:3cd).<sup>78</sup> She

<sup>66</sup> Gonda 1975, p.104.

<sup>67</sup> 1:13:9b = 5:5:8b

<sup>68</sup> E.g. 1:13:9c *barhiḥ sidantu...*

<sup>69</sup> 2:3:8cd *tisró devīḥ svadhāya barhir édām áchhidraṃ pāntu śaraṇāṃ niśādya* /

“... que (ces) trois Déeses, s’installent selon leur libre vocation sur cette litière, veillent (sur nous) d’une protection sans faille!” (Renou’s translation in EVP vol.16, p.43.)

<sup>70</sup> 3:55:13a-c *anyāsyā vatsām rihatī mimāya kāyā bhuvā ni dadhe dhenúr údhaḥ ṛtāsya sá páyasāpinvatēlā.*

“Licking the calf of the other one, she has bellowed. Into which world has the milch cow put down her udder? Īlā swelled with the milk of truth.”

<sup>71</sup> 5:41:19a *abhi na īlā yūthāsya mātā.*

<sup>72</sup> 7:16:8a.

<sup>73</sup> 10:70:8d.

<sup>74</sup> 10:36:5a *éndro barhiḥ sídatu pinvatām īlā.* (Translated in note 75 below.)

<sup>75</sup> Böhtlingk-Roth 1855-75, vol.1, p.782; EVP vol.4, p.114; vol.5, pp.16, 52. According to Geldner, however, Īlā is the personification of offering in 1:128:7 (1951, vol.1, p.179n), but represents the earth in 3:55:13c (vol.1, p.401n). Khan (1978, p.65) most likely follows Böhtlingk-Roth in his interpretation of Īlā as libation, yet he seems to take *pinvatām* with *barhiḥ* in 10:36:5a, interpreting it erroneously as an invocation to Īlā to flow “on the sacrificial grass.” It is rather: “Let Indra sit on the sacrificial grass; let Īlā swell.”

<sup>76</sup> 3:55:13c in EVP vol.5, p.16; 10:36:5a in EVP vol.5, p.52.

<sup>77</sup> EVP vol.4, p.114 (note on 10:36:5a).

<sup>78</sup> See also 1:22:10b (*hótrām yaviṣṭha bhāratiṃ* /), 1:142:9b (*hótrā marítsu bhārati* /), and 2:1:11b (*tvám hótrā bhārati vardhase girá* /).

represents the *hótar* priest of the Bharatas who were once settled in the area of the river Sarasvatī.<sup>79</sup> In a verse in which Agni is identified with each of the goddesses (2:1:11), he, as *hótrā bhāratī*, is said to increase by means of eulogies: *tvám hótrā bhāratī vardhase girá* / (2:1:11b). She is clearly, therefore, connected with priestly activity, and with recitation in particular.<sup>80</sup> In *R̥g Veda Khila* 2:13:2,<sup>81</sup> an apocryphal supplement to the *R̥g Veda*, Bhāratī is said to be *brahmavādīnī* “expounding on Vedic texts.”<sup>82</sup>

Like the sacrificial goddesses Iḷā and Bhāratī, Sarasvatī too appears to be connected with sacrifice as such. In 10:17:7ab, she is called upon while the sacrifice is in progress:

*sárasvatīm devayánto havante  
sárasvatīm adhvaré táyámāne /*

Those who seek after the gods call on Sarasvatī  
while the sacrifice is being performed.

The word *adhvará* (m.), sacrificial ceremony, is etymologically related to *ádhvan* (m.), meaning the way, course, or journey.<sup>83</sup> This *ádhvan* is also the road upon which gods make their way to the sacrificial grounds, and upon which the oblations and successful sacrificers travel to heaven. Thus the *adhvará* is related to this particular way or journey of the

<sup>79</sup> Gonda 1985, p.20.

<sup>80</sup> Bhāratī appears, in one instance (1:22:10 *á gná agna ihávase hótrām yaviṣṭha bhāratim : várūtrīm dhiṣāṇām vaha* // “O Agni, convey here the wives of the gods for favour. Hotrā Bhāratī, Varūtri, Dhiṣāṇā, O you youngest one.”), in the company of *dhiṣāṇā*, which, according to Renou (EVP vol. I, pp.4-5) is sometimes poetic inspiration, sometimes a poem. The meaning and etymology of the word, however, are entirely uncertain. See Mayrhofer 1992, vol. I, pp.791-92.

<sup>81</sup> *Die Apokryphen des R̥gveda*. Ed. Isidor Scheftelowitz, 1906, p.85.

<sup>82</sup> Gonda 1985, p.20

<sup>83</sup> Already in 1848, Theodor Benfey (1848, glossary p.35, under *ṛtu* ) connected *ádhvan* with *adhvará*. See also Gonda 1975, p.86 and Mayrhofer 1992, vol. I, p.68.

sacrifice to the celestial abodes.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, in being called on at this time (*adhvaré tāyāmāne*), Gonda suggests, Sarasvatī seems to play a role in the conveyance of oblations to the gods.<sup>85</sup>

The explicit connection of all three goddesses (as well as others) with the conveyance of sacrifice to the gods appears in a stanza of the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (29:8) of the *Yajur Veda* :

*ādityāir no bhāratī vaṣṭu yajñām  
sārasvatī sahā rudrāir na āvit /  
idāpahūtā vāsubhiḥ sajōṣā  
yajñām no devīr amṛteṣu dhatta //*

May Bhāratī with the Ādityas love our sacrifice;  
Sarasvatī with the Rudras [i.e. Maruts] hath holpen us,  
And Idā invoked with Vasus in unison;  
Our Sacrifice. O goddesses, place ye with the immortals.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Gonda 1975, pp.93ff.

<sup>85</sup> Gonda 1985, pp.25-26. Gonda's interpretation, in this connection, of *yajñām dadhe sārasvatī* (1:3:11c), however, is less convincing: he understands it to mean, in a rather wide sense, that Sarasvatī "has taken, accepted, received, or borne (*dadhe*) the sacrifice" (p.25). *Dadhe*, however, is in the *ātmanepada*, and thus reflects back unto the subject. She may, therefore, "take," "accept," or "receive" the sacrifice, but to say that she "bears" it is to imply action, quite plausibly directed toward another (*parasmaipada*). And if she "has taken, accepted, received" it, one would assume she has received it for herself: there is no reason to believe she would have received it to pass it on to other gods. This is supported by 1:3:10c *yajñām vaṣṭu dhiyāvasuḥ* // "let her long for our sacrifice," where surely it is not hoped that she will long for what is intended for others. And parallel to v.10c, appears 11c: *yajñām dadhe sārasvatī* /

<sup>86</sup> VS 29:8 (≡ MS 3:16:2[184,12-13]) = KS 5:6:2[175,6-7] = TS 5:1:11:3

Translation by Arthur Berriedale Keith (1914, vol.2, pp.402-03).

Cf. VS 28:18c-e: *āsprkṣad bhāratī divam rudrāir yajñām sārasvatīdā vāsumati gṛhān...*

Gonda (1985, p.26) points to VS 29:8 as supporting evidence for his interpretation of RV 1:3:11c (*yajñām dadhe sārasvatī*) [see note 85 above] and 10:17:7ab (*sārasvatīm adhvaré tāyāmāne*) [see main text above] as implying Sarasvatī's function as conveyor of offerings to the gods. In VS 29:8, however, it is not only Sarasvatī who is asked to convey the sacrifice to the gods, but rather all three of the goddesses—together also with other gods—and thus it is not a function exclusive or even particular to Sarasvatī in VS 29:8.

## e. *Dhī*

As mentioned above,<sup>87</sup> Sarasvatī is invoked to grant, amongst other gifts, *dhī*, inspired thought (6:49:7b): *sārasvatī virāpatnī dhīyaṃ dhāt* / She is closely connected with *dhī*, which in turn is inextricably linked with *vāc*, speech, with which Sarasvatī is later identified. It is, in fact, her association with *dhī* which paves the way for her transformation into Sarasvatī-Vāc, the goddess, not only of speech, but above all of knowledge. It is, therefore, to *dhī* that we must now turn our attention.

### i. Meaning

Böhtlingk and Roth list a series of explanations for *dhī*, beginning with thought and ending with the personification of intelligence.<sup>88</sup> Geldner translates it as thought (“Gedanke”) in 1:3:12 and as wisdom (“Weisheit”) in 1:3:10.<sup>89</sup> In 6:61:4c, Renou renders it as “vision[s] poétique[s],” in 9:100:3a as “pensée-poétique,” and in 1:139:2f as “intuition.”<sup>90</sup> He explains that *dhī* indicates a kind of intuition linked in particular with *mānas*, and frequently appearing in combination with *mānas* as in *mānasā dhī*, “voir par la pensée.”<sup>91</sup> For Gonda

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<sup>87</sup> See p.14 above.

<sup>88</sup> 1855-75, vol.3, pp.964-65.

<sup>89</sup> 1951, vol.1, p.4.

<sup>90</sup> 6:61:4c is translated in EVP vol.15, p.131; 9:100:3a in EVP vol.9, p.53; and 1:139:2f in EVP vol. 5, p.8.

<sup>91</sup> EVP vol.1, p.3.

E.g. 1:163:12b *devadrīcā mānasā dīdhyanāḥ* : “... perceiving with the mind turned towards the gods.”

9:100:3ab *tvām dhīyaṃ manoyujam sṛjā vṛṣṭim nā tanyatūḥ* : “You, pour forth inspired thought yoked with the mind, as thunder (discharges) rain.” [to Pavamāna Soma]

it is vision or inspiration, “the exceptional and supranormal faculty, proper to “seers.” of “seeing” in the mind.”<sup>92</sup> Although *dhī* generally refers to the inspired thought in its un verbalized state, there are instances where it can be rendered as “poem, hymn, recitation,”<sup>93</sup> in that the thought is translated into words. In a reciprocal kind of process, the devotee invokes the god, asking for *dhī*, and upon receiving it, elaborates the inspired thought into a hymn in praise of the god, wherein he asks again for what he desires.<sup>94</sup> Thus *dhī* functions as a means provided by the gods to reach the gods so as to benefit from them in the widest possible sense.

## ii. Sarasvatī and *Dhī*

Sarasvatī is requested to grant inspired thought (*sārasvatī virāpatni dhīyaṃ dhāt*),<sup>95</sup> for she rules over all *dhī* (*dhīyo viśvā vi rājati //*).<sup>96</sup> Accompanied by inspired thoughts (*sārasvatī sahā dhībhiḥ*),<sup>97</sup> she is their promoter (*dhinām avitrī...*).<sup>98</sup> She completes the seers’ *dhī*, making it successful (*sārasvatī sādhaṃyanti dhīyaṃ naḥ*),<sup>99</sup> and should give the singer of the hymn unchallengeable protection (*durādhārṣaṃ grṇatē śārma yaṃsat //*).<sup>100</sup>

<sup>92</sup> 1963, p.68.

<sup>93</sup> E.g. 5:52:14d *stutā dhibhiḥ*... See Gonda 1963, p.133; EVP vol.1, p.3.

<sup>94</sup> Gonda 1963, p.66.

<sup>95</sup> 6:49:7c.

<sup>96</sup> 1:3:12c.

<sup>97</sup> 10:65:13d. See also 7:35:11b.

<sup>98</sup> 6:61:4c.

<sup>99</sup> 2:3:8a.

<sup>100</sup> 6:49:7d.

Thus the singer implores (7:35:11b): “Auspicious [for us] be Sarasvatī with inspired thoughts”

(*śám sárasvatī sahá dhibhir astu* /).

In a hymn (1:3) to the Aśvins (vv.1-3), Indra (vv.4-6), the *viśve devāḥ* (vv.7-9), and Sarasvatī (vv.10-12), the poet invokes the goddess as follows:

*pāvakā naḥ sárasvatī vājebhir vājīnīvatī /  
yajñám vaṣṭu dhiyāvasuḥ //*

*codayitrī sūñtānām cétanti sumatinām /  
yajñám dadhe sárasvatī //*

*mahó árṇaḥ sárasvatī prá cetayati ketúnā /  
dhiyo viśvā ví rājati //*

Pure Sarasvatī, rich in rewards, who [finds] goods through inspired thought,<sup>101</sup> shall long for our sacrifice.

Incitress of energy, expert in good thoughts, Sarasvatī has received the sacrifice.

Sarasvatī reveals [herself as] a mighty flood with [that as] her ensign. She directs all inspired thoughts.

The bestowal of inspired thought, it should be noted, was not considered a function exclusive to Sarasvatī. Agni (3:11:2c), Indra (1:23:3c), Soma (9:75:2b), Mitra and Varuṇa (7:66:3bc), Savitr (3:62:10c), Uṣas (7:79:5c), and others were all in some way connected with *dhi*, either as granters, stimulators, or lords of it. In Sarasvatī’s case, however, other factors came into play, most notably her connection with the recitation of hymns on her banks within a ritual context, which together with her related association with *dhi* had a transforming effect on the river goddess. Points of common imagery shared by Sarasvatī, *dhi*, as well as speech also contributed to her identification with speech.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. 1:46:2c *dhiyá devá vasuvidā* // “the two gods who through inspired thought are finders of goods.”

### iii. Common Imagery

#### Cow

Cow and water imagery were used for both Sarasvatī and *dhī*. In several instances (e.g. 2:2:9bc; 4:41:5ab; 10:64:12a-c), *dhī* is compared to a cow:

2:2:9a-c  
*evā no agne amṛteṣu pūrvya*  
*dhīṣ pīpāya bṛhāddiveṣu mānuṣā /*  
*dūhānā dhenūr vṛjāneṣu kārāve*

Thus, O Agni, O Primordial One, human inspired thought has swelled (with milk) for us amongst the immortals in the high heaven, as the milch cow giving milk to the poet in (sacrificial) enclosures .

4:41:5ab  
*indrā yuvām varuṇā bhūtām asyā*  
*dhīyāḥ pretārā vṛṣabhéva dhenóḥ /*

O Indra, O Varuṇa, you two be lovers of this inspired thought, as bulls (are) of a milch cow.

10:64:12  
*yām me dhīyam māruta indra dévā*  
*ādadāta varuṇa mitra yūyām /*  
*tām pīpayata pāyaseva dhenúm*  
*kuvīd gīro ādhi rāthe vāhātha //*

O Maruts, Indra, gods, Varuṇa, Mitra, make the inspired thought which you gave me swell as a cow with milk. Would you carry (my) songs of praise on (your) chariot?

Inspired thoughts (*dhītáyāḥ*) are said to move afar, like cows along pastures, in search of the far-sighted one [i.e. Varuṇa]: *pārā me yanti dhūtāyo gāvo ná gāvvyūtir ānu / icchāntir*

*urucákṣasam* // (1:25:16). The cow represents not only milk, food, abundance, and liberality, but also poetic art in the form of inspired thoughts. The “large cow” (*mahí gauḥ*) in 4:41:5d and 10:101:9d is, as the poet indicates (see 4:41:5b quoted above), inspired thought.<sup>102</sup> Renou understands this *mahí gauḥ* and *mahí* in 10:74:4c as poetic art.<sup>103</sup> The divine cow, having come from (the realms of) the gods, approaches with all inspired thoughts, finds words, and rouses speech (8:101:16a-c): *vacovidam vacam udirāyantim viśvābhir dhibhir upatīṣṭhamānām / devīm devébhyaḥ páry eyúṣim gām*.<sup>104</sup>

Like *dhí*, Sarasvatī too is associated with the cow. By virtue of being a river, the connection arises in a general context wherein rivers flowing along are compared to cows (e.g. 10:75:4ab):

*abhi tvā sindho śísum in ná mātáro  
vāśrā arṣanti páyaseva dhenávaḥ /*

(Rivers) flow towards you, O Sindhu, like mothers to their child,  
like bellowing cows with milk.

When Indra slays Vṛtra, he releases the rivers, like fenced-in cows (*gá ná vrāṇá avánir amuñcat*).<sup>105</sup> The rivers bring milk with their waters (*páyo hinvāná udábhīr bharante*).<sup>106</sup> and in their relationship to Indra are called the “bull’s wives” (*vṛṣṇaḥ pátnir nadyò*

<sup>102</sup> 4:41:5d = 10:101:9d *sahásradhārā páyasā mahí gauḥ* : (“the thousand-streamed great cow with her milk”)

<sup>103</sup> EVP vol.1, p.10.

<sup>104</sup> As far as the sequence of activities is concerned, the word order in 8:101:16ab is clearly reversed in that the earlier is put last: it is certainly not that the cow finds words, rouses speech, and only then approaches with all inspired thoughts. Of what possible use is *dhí* after the words have already been expressed? And of what poetic value are the words if they have not arisen from inspired thoughts?

<sup>105</sup> 1:61:10c.

<sup>106</sup> 1:104:4d. See also 3:33:1cd.



*vibhvataṣṭāḥ /*).<sup>107</sup>

As for Sarasvatī herself, although she is never explicitly called a cow in the *R̥g Veda*, she would have been perceived as such: RV 7:36:6 refers to the rivers of which Sarasvatī is the seventh as *sudúghāḥ*, yielding good milk, as if they were milch cows swelling with their own milk—in this case both the milk of the milch cow and the water of the river:

*á yát sākāṃ yaśáso vāvasānāḥ  
sārasvatī saptāthī síndhumātā /  
yāḥ suṣváyanta sudúghāḥ sudhārā  
abhi svéna páyasā pípyānāḥ //*

When the glorious and longing (rivers come) to (us) in unison—Sarasvatī, whose mother is the Sindhu, (being) the seventh—(they) who are fertile, well-yielding, rich-streamed are swelling with their own milk towards (us).<sup>108</sup>

Some of the words in this stanza carry a double meaning, referring on the one hand to the water of the rivers and on the other to the milk of the milch cow. *Vāvasānāḥ* is a perfect participle either of root *vās* “to bellow,” or of root *vas* “to wish for, long for.” If the rivers are bellowing, then they are clearly being likened to cows. The noun *páyas* is derived from root *pay/pi* (*páyate*) and literally means “swelling.” It denotes any kind of fluid, and thus in the context of this stanza can be both water and milk.

There is also a passage (6:61:14b) where Sarasvatī is asked not to push aside, that is, not to kick the bucket as a cow might during milking:

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<sup>107</sup> 5:42:12b.

<sup>108</sup> *Suṣváyanta* is a “non-formation.” It appears to consist of prefix *su-* (well, etc.), or reduplication, with root *sū* (to bear, bring forth), to which *-aya-* is added. Geldner, referring to the derivation from *sū*, translates it as “die fruchtbar sind” (1951, vol.2, p.218) and Renou as “qui enfantent” (EVP vol.5, p.42).

*sārasvaty abhī no neṣi vāsyo  
māpa sphariḥ pāyasā mā na ā dhak /*

O Sarasvatī, lead us to prosperity. May you not push aside. May you not fail us with (your) milk. (6:61:14ab)

Yet another relevant instance is 1:164:49, which although not addressed to Sarasvatī as a cow, but rather to Sarasvatī in the form of a woman, comes to be addressed to a cow in the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (38:5) and then again in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14:2:1:15).<sup>109</sup> In fact, she is specifically called a cow (*dhenū*) in VS 8:43 and 20:55c, 65d.<sup>110</sup>

As for RV 1:164:49, here the poet desires to suck Sarasvatī's breast: *yās te stānaḥ śaśayó yo mayobhūḥ... sārasvati tām ihā dhātave kaḥ //*<sup>111</sup> In a note to this stanza, Geldner<sup>112</sup> says it is dedicated to Sarasvatī, goddess of eloquence, but does not explain. As Werner Knobl suggests,<sup>113</sup> the mouth is used both in sucking and speaking, and to speak is exactly what the poet does. The image reveals the intimacy of his relationship to Sarasvatī: like an infant bonded to his mother, he is nourished by her precious milk, sucking it directly from her body. Her milk, in this stanza, represents all precious things which she gives in full from her abundant breast (*yéna víśvā pūṣyasi vāryāni*)—wealth in the widest sense. For the poet, as a poet, however, there is one treasure above all: inspired thought. Without it he cannot compose; without it he is not a poet. Thus if one were to apply this stanza directly to the poet, one might say that he wishes to suck *dhī* directly from its source so that inspired

<sup>109</sup> Griffith 1899, p.328 note (in rev. ed. 1987).

<sup>110</sup> Gonda (1985, p.43) lists several other instances wherein Sarasvatī's name is associated with the milch cow (*dhenūḥ sārasvatī*): KS 38:8[109,7]; MS 3:11:2[142,1]; 3:11:3[143,10]; 3:11:3[144,12]; VS 21:34; TB 2:6:12:1, 4.

<sup>111</sup> 1:164:49ad. This stanza is quoted in full on p.13 above.

<sup>112</sup> 1951, vol.1, p.236.

<sup>113</sup> Personal communication.

thoughts might flow from him in the form of words. And as the riverine waters flow and milk flows, inspired thoughts and their verbalized expression must embody a certain fluidity: if they do not flow, then surely it is not poetry.

## Water

Water, the very being of Sarasvatī, is another symbol of inspired thought. The *dhitāyaḥ* assemble like rushes (of water) into wells (10:25:4ab): *sām u prā yanti dhitāyaḥ sārgāso [a]vatām iva* / There is an allusion to the wave which the seer causes to surge from the ocean (*samudrād ūrmīm úd iyarti venāḥ*),<sup>114</sup> that is, the heart, as indicated in hymn 4:58:5a, 11b:

*etā arṣanti hṛdayāt samudrāt*

These (streams of ghee) flow from the sea, the heart.

*antāḥ samudré hṛdy antār...*

... inside the sea, inside the heart...<sup>115</sup>

And if the heart is the seat of inspiration,<sup>116</sup> then the wave represents the surge of *dhī*.

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<sup>114</sup> 10:123:2a. Cf. 4:58:1a *samudrād ūrmir mādhumām úd ārat*. "From [out of] the ocean the sweet wave has risen."

<sup>115</sup> Likewise 10:177:1bc *hṛdā paśyanti mānasā vipāścītaḥ samudré antāḥ kavāyo ví cakṣate*.

<sup>116</sup> EVP vol.1, p.24; Gonda 1963, p.281; Kuiper 1964-65, p.125.

iv. *Dhī* and *Vāc*

*Dhénā*

There is also the term *dhénā*, etymologically related to *dhenú*, which occurs with *dhī* in various passages, such as 10:104:3cd:

*indra dhénābhir ihá mādayasva  
dhībhir víśvābhiḥ śácyaḡ ḡṛṇānáḡ //*

O Indra, revel here in the nourishing streams (of soma or speech),  
being lauded mightily by all the poetic visions.<sup>117</sup>

In the first volume of EVP (p.11), Renou understands *dhénā* as speech in the form of prayer in 4:58:6, and in subsequent volumes considers it to mean a stream of milk (3:1:9)<sup>118</sup> or of prayer (7:94:4).<sup>119</sup> According to Hanns-Peter Schmidt's study of the term, the primary meaning of *dhénā* is "milk-stream, nourishing stream" and its figurative sense is "nourishing stream of speech." The two senses, however, are never dissociated.<sup>120</sup> *Dhénā* is derived from *dhay* '(~*dhā*) "to suck," in the way a calf sucks its mother's milk, in the way the poet wishes to suck Sarasvatī's breast (1:164:49). Thus *dhénā* would be that which is sucked. As verbalized inspired thoughts, the flows of speech (*dhénāḥ*) are said to run together like rivers, being purified inside by the heart, the mind (4:58:6ab): *samyák sravanti saríto ná*

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<sup>117</sup> Translation by Hanns-Peter Schmidt in 1975, p.173. For another occurrence of *dhénā* with *dhī*, see 7:94:4, for instance: *indre agná námo brhāt suvrktīm érayāmahe : dhiyá dhénā avasyāvaḡ //* "En Indra, en Agni (est notre) haut hommage: nous mettons en branle l'hymne-bien-tournée, les coulées (de prières réalisées) par la vision-poétique, nous qui cherchons (votre) assistance." (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.14, p.56.)

<sup>118</sup> E.g. vol.12, p.49.

<sup>119</sup> E.g. vol.14, p.56. His comment, however, that *dhénā* is "un aspect poétique de *vāc*" (vol.14, p.127) is, as Schmidt (1975, p.170) remarks, entirely unclear, as it is too vague.

<sup>120</sup> 1975, p.179. Schmidt also provides a summary of other interpretations of *dhénā*.

*dhēnā antār hṛdā mānasā pūyāmānāḥ* / <sup>121</sup>

From *Dhī* to *Vāc*

*Dhī* is obviously connected with *vāc*, speech,<sup>122</sup> for inspired thought not only precedes its utterance, but the utterance itself is nothing but *dhī* in different, i.e. verbalized, form. *Vāc* is thus *dhī*, and yet *dhī* is not *vāc*, for inspired thought undergoes some modification while being transformed into speech. The translation of *dhī* into *vāc* is likened to weaving (2:28:5c):

*mā tāntuś chedi vāyato dhīyaṃ me*

Let the thread (warp of the loom) not be cut off  
while I weave my inspired thought [into a poem].

RV 10:71:2ab states that they who are thoughtful (*dhīrāḥ*) have produced speech with their mind,<sup>123</sup> purifying it like (barley) grits with a sieve: *sāktum iva tītaiṇā punānto yātra dhīrā mānasā vācam ākrata* / The different stages in the transformation of inspired thought (*dhīti*) into speech in the form of *brāhman* are described in the *Atharva Veda* (7:1:1):

*dhītiḥ vā yé ānayan vācō āgram  
mānasā vā yé [ā]vadann ṛtāni /*

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. 9:34:6 *sām enam āhrutā imā giro arṣanti sasrītaḥ : dhenūr vāsrō avivaśat :*

“Ces chants délivrant du mal coulent ensemble vers lui, d’un même cours. / (Le dieu) mugissant a fait mugir les vaches-laitières.” (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.8, p.20.)

<sup>122</sup> EVP vol.1, pp.1ff.; Gonda 1985, pp.49-50.

<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, according to 8:100:11a, *vāc* was created by the gods: *devīm vācam ajanayanta devāḥ*.

*tṛtīyena brāhmaṇā vāvr̥dhānās*  
*turīyeṇāmanvata nāma dhenóḥ //*

They who through inspired thought led to the beginning of speech or they who in their mind spoke truths, having grown through the third formulation, with the fourth [formulation] they understood the name of the milch cow.<sup>124</sup>

The cow, as we have seen, represents inspired thought: she rouses speech, for she is the finder of words (*vacovíd*).<sup>125</sup> Appropriately, she is asked to invigorate the praiser: “The cow should strengthen him [the poet (*kāri*)] with [her] nourishment, with [her] milk” (7:68:9c *iṣá tam vardhad aghnyá páyobhiḥ* ). Speech is also called a milch cow (8:100:11d *dhenúr vák*). It might be added that *dhénā* is both a stream of milk from the udder and the flow of speech from the mouth.<sup>126</sup>

Similar to *dhíra* is *vípra*, an ecstatic seer.<sup>127</sup> *Vípra* comes from the root *vip* “to tremble, shake, quiver.” Born with the faculty of *dhí* (8:6:28c *dhiyá vipro ajāyata //*),<sup>128</sup> the *vípra* is closely connected with *vác* (3:8:5d): *devayá vipra úd iyarti vácam //* The *vípra* as speaker, therefore, conveys *dhí* into *vác* in the form of vibrating metrical words.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> AV 7:1:1 is discussed by Thieme (1952, p.106 [repr. 1971, p.115]). The “name of the milch cow,” as he explains, is a mystic expression for the poetic formulation of a secret truth (“dichterische Formulierung einer geheimen Wahrheit”).

<sup>125</sup> 8:101:16a. See pp.28 above.

<sup>126</sup> See pp.32 above.

<sup>127</sup> A *ṛṣi* can indeed be a *vípra*, as indicated in 4:26:1b *ahám kaksívām ṛṣir asmi viprah*

<sup>128</sup> In 8:6:28c the *vípra* is Indra or Soma. See Geldner’s note in 1951, vol.2, p.297.

<sup>129</sup> Gonda 1963, p.39.

## v. Sarasvatī and Vāc

Thus since *dhī* and *vāc* walk hand in hand so to speak, Sarasvatī, who is repeatedly associated with *dhī* in the *Rg Veda*, is, in turn, by way of *dhī*, implicitly connected with *vāc*. As she grants inspired thought, she makes its manifestation in the form of poetry or prayer, and thus speech, possible. *Dhī*, therefore, over which she presides (1:3:12c),<sup>130</sup> is fundamental to the gradual rapprochement and eventual identification of Sarasvatī with speech. In fact, already in the *Rg Veda*, the river goddess and speech share common imagery and metaphorical language, which thus also bring them together. Their association, never expressed in the *Rg Veda*, was nevertheless present at the level of ritual performed on the banks of the Sarasvatī, for the recitation of inspired hymns accompanied offerings into the sacred fire. The connection of the river goddess with the recitation and hence also with the composition of hymns would inevitably have contributed to her connection with inspired thought, and in the long run with speech. It is, furthermore, not without significance and subsequent impact that her associate Bhāratī, known as *hótrā bhāratī*, is connected with speech in the form of recitation.<sup>131</sup> Just as Sarasvatī will come to be identified with Vāc, she and Bhāratī, by the time of the Purāṇas, will be one and the same. And thus we find in the *Brhaddevatā* of the late Puranic period<sup>132</sup> that Vāc is called Bhāratī (5:101).

Another point of connection between Sarasvatī and *vāc* is sound, common to both the

<sup>130</sup> See p.25 above.

<sup>131</sup> See pp.21-22 above.

<sup>132</sup> The *Brhaddevatā*, an exegetical text intended to explain the deities of the *Rg Veda* and the episodes related to them, dates back, according to Macdonell (1904 [repr. 1965], pt. 1, p.xxiii) to ca. 400 B.C.E. Muneo Tokunaga's extensive study of the text (1997), however, shows the date of the legends contained therein may not go beyond the middle of the first millennium C.E. Furthermore, the text was completely revised and expanded between the seventh century and 1187 C.E. (pp.xxiii-xlv).

river flow and speech. *Vāc*, furthermore, can be translated as voice.<sup>133</sup> The sound of Sarasvatī's waters, as we have seen, is powerfully described: they bellow (7:36:6a) like a cow, roar (6:61:8c) like a bull, and snort ragingly like a boar (6:61:2ab). With the river's raging as the background to the rhythmic recitation of inspired hymns on Sarasvatī's banks, the connection with speech on the one hand and music on the other can hardly be overlooked.<sup>134</sup>

Despite the connecting links between *vāc* and Sarasvatī, the goddess *Vāc* clearly extends far above and beyond Sarasvatī in the *Rg Veda*. In a beautiful hymn (10:125) of *Vāc*, it is Speech, in the first person, who reveals herself. Her womb is in the waters within the ocean, from which she spreads to the sky (10:125:7b-d).<sup>135</sup> All-pervading (10:125:6d),<sup>136</sup> she dwells in many places (10:125:3d).<sup>137</sup> She gave birth to the creator (10:125:7a),<sup>138</sup> and is the power behind all actions (10:125:4-6): it is she who strings Rudra's bow (10:125:6a),<sup>139</sup> and through her do beings see, hear, eat, and breathe (10:125:4ab).<sup>140</sup> She blows like the wind, embracing all creatures (10:125:8ab),<sup>141</sup> who depend on her (10:125:4c),<sup>142</sup> while she

<sup>133</sup> See, for instance, RV 3:8:5d quoted above in connection with the *vīpra*. The phrase *iyarti vācam* can be translated either as "starts speech" or as "raises his voice."

<sup>134</sup> Sarasvatī's connection with music is discussed on pp.146-47 below.

<sup>135</sup> *māma yōnir apsv āntāḥ samudrē tāto vi tiṣṭhe bhūvanānu viśv[ā u]tāmūḥ dyām varsmānōpa sprśāmi*

<sup>136</sup> *aham dyāvā pṛthivī ā viveśa*

Literally, "I have entered the heaven and the earth."

<sup>137</sup> *bhūriṣṭhātrām bhūry āveśāyantim*

<sup>138</sup> *aham suve pitāram asya mūrdhān.*

<sup>139</sup> *aham rudrāya dhānur ā tanomi.*

<sup>140</sup> *māyā sō ānnam atti yō vipāśyati yāḥ prāṇiti yā im śṛṇōty uktām*

<sup>141</sup> *aham evā vāta iva prā vāmy ārabhamāṇā bhūvanāni viśvā*

Literally, "It is I who blow forth like the wind, taking hold of all beings."

<sup>142</sup> *amantāvo mām tā ūpa kṣiyanti.*



herself is beyond the earth and the sky (10:125:8c).<sup>143</sup>

Her aquatic womb, even if only symbolic, links her with Sarasvatī, as does her all-pervasiveness, for the river goddess too fills more realms than one, the earth and the wide space in between (6:61:11ab).<sup>144</sup> Vāc, however, extends beyond these realms, beyond even the creator himself. She sets creation in motion by giving birth to the father and thus becoming a creator herself, like the waters, producers of all that is fixed and moves (6:50:7d).<sup>145</sup> Likened to the wind and enabling beings to breathe, Vāc is also closely connected with breath, with the element air, as speech is dependent on it. As an unseen, all-pervading power, producing, sustaining, and extending beyond creation, she is said to be the prototype of the *ātman-brahman* the Upaniṣads.<sup>146</sup> In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (4:21:1), the two are identical: *brahma vai vāk*. Since *brāhmaṇ-* in the *Ṛg Veda* very often stands for hymns or stanzas accompanying the ritual,<sup>147</sup> the two were closely related at the level of speech even then (RV 10:114:8d):

*yāvad brāhma viṣṭhitam tāvati vāk //*

As far as *brāhmaṇ* is extended, so far is *vāk*.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *paró divá pará ená pṛthivyá.*

<sup>144</sup> See p.12 above.

<sup>145</sup> See p.18 above.

<sup>146</sup> EVP vol.1, p.1. Geldner (1951, vol.3, p.355) says this hymn represents one of the early stages of the *prāna-brahman-ātman* doctrine. In later conception, however, Vāc is nearest to Om, the sound symbol of *brāhmaṇ*. It is not without interest that just as in the *Ṛg Veda*, Vāc is divided into four quarters (1:164:45), so is Om (as AUM) in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (9-12). (My intention here is simply to point to the common fourfold division, for it is impossible to identify correspondences between the respective quarters, as in the case of Vāc they are largely undefined.)

<sup>147</sup> EVP vol.1, p.1; Gonda 1950, p.14.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. AV 7:1:1 quoted on pp.33-34 above.

In this sense, therefore, Vāc extends beyond Sarasvatī, who is very much within creation, flowing through it rather than transcending it. Her very being lies in her creative, life-giving waters which embody her inexhaustible plenitude and strength. As a powerful mother, she gives, she nourishes, she protects. She is the river of inspired thought, the great flood of *dhī*. And as inspired thought is transmuted into recitation, into *vāc*, she roars with joy, dancing from the mountains to join the ocean.

#### **f. Studies on the Transformation of Sarasvatī: from River to Speech**

The transformation of Sarasvatī into Sarasvatī-Vāc has been the subject of very little discussion. Macdonell, for instance, suggested Sarasvatī's healing of Indra through speech in the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (19:12)<sup>149</sup> as the starting point.<sup>150</sup> But why should she have suddenly resorted to speech if she had had no direct connection with Vāc in the *Rg Veda*? Oldenberg looked further back and perceptively noted Sarasvatī's function as inspirer of hymns in the *Rg Veda* (6:61:4c).<sup>151</sup> Others, such as Hillebrandt<sup>152</sup> and Keith,<sup>153</sup> suggested geography: it was especially here, on the banks of the Sarasvatī, that Vedic culture flourished and sacred hymns were recited. Amongst more recent studies, Airi in his book on Sarasvatī in Vedic literature (1977) does not, surprisingly, discuss why her identification with speech

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<sup>149</sup> See p.49 below.

<sup>150</sup> 1897, p.87.

<sup>151</sup> 1923, p.248, note 1. Although Oldenberg does not give a reference for "Förderin der Gebete" (p.248), 6:61:4c (*dhinām avitrī avatu* . . .) is the passage he speaks of.

<sup>152</sup> 1981, p.399, note 114.

<sup>153</sup> 1925, vol.1, p.173.

might have occurred. Khan in his volume on Sarasvatī in Sanskrit literature (1978) states that “The sacred waters of the river Sarasvatī, infused life into the people residing along its banks and this fresh life was the cause of the holy speech in the form of sacred hymns, which led them to identify the river with speech or conceive it as goddess of speech.”<sup>154</sup> Kanailal Bhattacharyya in his monograph on Sarasvatī (1983) thinks “the principal idea underlying the concept of these two deities—Vāc and Sarasvatī—is that of good fortune which brings in blissful prosperity and abundance.”<sup>155</sup> He adds that the identification is made possible by shared characteristics and association with a number of the same deities, such as the *maruts* and the Aśvins.<sup>156</sup>

There is only one study which actually discusses the factors that contributed to the identification of the river goddess with speech: Jan Gonda’s *Pūṣan and Sarasvatī* published in 1985, the first five chapters of which deal with the Vedic Sarasvatī (as opposed to the sequence suggested by the title). Here Gonda collects the relevant Vedic passages and concludes that Sarasvatī-Vāc owes her existence to four fundamental factors, to each of which he dedicates roughly one chapter: Sarasvatī’s association with the ritual goddesses Iḍā/Iḷā and Bhārati (chapter 2); Sarasvatī’s identification with the cow, who was associated with Vāc (chapters 3-4); the relationship of the cow and Sarasvatī with *dhī* (chapter 4); and the primeval Waters as the source of Vāc (chapter 5).<sup>157</sup>

As the first study on the subject, Gonda’s efforts are to be commended. His treatment of the subject, however, presents a number of significant problems which cannot be

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<sup>154</sup> 1978, p.108.

<sup>155</sup> 1983, p.26.

<sup>156</sup> 1983, pp.27, 31.

<sup>157</sup> 1985, p.66.

overlooked. Because he works in a kind of historical vacuum, jumping from one text to the next without consideration of chronological order,<sup>158</sup> his study cannot provide a picture of the gradual conceptual development of the Vedic Sarasvatī. The order in which he discusses the factors that contributed to the identification of Sarasvatī with Vāc, furthermore, is unfortunately not well thought out and hence appears somewhat random. As the trajectory is from river to speech, Gonda's first chapter is about the river goddess. He relegates a discussion of the waters, however, to whom she as a river is particularly close, to the final chapter on Sarasvatī. As he himself points out, she "owes her most important functions and qualities to her being one of the waters..."<sup>159</sup> Speech—the end of the trajectory—on the other hand, is taken up in the middle (third) chapter.

I also think Gonda overemphasizes certain points, and does not lend enough weight to others. It is odd that he does not include the recitation of hymns on Sarasvatī's banks amidst the leading factors that contributed to the identification of Sarasvatī with Vāc. Furthermore, *dhī* is not even given a chapter to itself, and is instead subsumed under the heading of the cow. As I have tried to show in my discussion above, Sarasvatī's connection with *dhī*, related to the recitation of hymns on her banks, was absolutely fundamental in the process of her transformation. The cow imagery, on the other hand, appears to lend secondary support to the Sarasvatī-*dhī*, and also Vāc, connection. As for Gonda's fourth and final factor regarding the waters as the source of Vāc, it seems to me rather unconvincing as a fundamental argument, for the waters, as we have seen, are the producers of *all* that is fixed and moves (6:50:7d), and hence not just of Vāc. There is only one instance in the

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<sup>158</sup> Even the medieval—and thus post-Vedic by far—*Bṛhaddevatā* is mixed in amidst the Vedic texts.

<sup>159</sup> 1985, p.55.

entire *R̥g Veda* (10:125:7b), it must be emphasized, in which the waters are identified as the source of Vāc. Besides this one instance, there is nothing, as far as I am aware, to indicate that the waters and Vāc should have any particular relationship.

Gonda presents his material in the form of mazes of references and quotations, with occasional and exceedingly brief—one would almost say concealed—observations and conclusions. His study is neither an easy nor a convenient read.

## 2. Atharva Veda

### a. Worldly Matters

In the *Atharva Veda*, Sarasvatī appears as a healer and a life-giver, signs of which were already evident in the *Rg Veda*, some of whose stanzas are repeated here: not only does water as such carry within it life-giving and healing properties,<sup>1</sup> but Sarasvatī was and is specifically invoked to grant progeny (RV 2:41:17d ≅ AV 7:68:1d)<sup>2</sup> and to place the embryo in a woman's womb (RV 10:184:2b = AV 5:25:3b).<sup>3</sup> In the *Atharva Veda* she is called upon, together with Agni, Savitr, and Brahmanaspati, in a prayer for the recovery of virility.<sup>4</sup> She is sought after to remedy defects in body, speech, and action,<sup>5</sup> to destroy poison,<sup>6</sup> and, together with Heaven, Earth, Indra, and Agni, to cure worms.<sup>7</sup> Already in the

<sup>1</sup> See pp.16 above.

<sup>2</sup> For RV 2:41:17d, see p.14, note 25 above.

AV 7:68:1d *prajāṃ devī rarāsva naḥ*.

<sup>3</sup> *gārbhaṃ dhehi sarasvatī*.

<sup>4</sup> 4:4:6d *dhāmur ivā tānaya pāsah*.

<sup>5</sup> 7:57:1 *yād āśāyā vādato me vicukṣubhé yād yācamānasya cārato jānām ānu yād ātmāni tanvò me viriṣṭam sārāsvatī tād ā prṇad ghr̥tēna* //

“What has gone wrong (*vi-kṣubh*) on the part of me speaking with expectation, what of [me] going about among people begging, what in myself of my body is torn apart—that may Sarasvatī fill up with ghee.” (Translation by William Dwight Whitney in 1905, vol.1, p.427.)

<sup>6</sup> 6:100:1cd *tisrāḥ sārāsvatīr aduḥ sácittā viśadūṣanam* //

“... the three Sarasvatis have given, accordant, the poison-spoiler.” (Whitney 1905, vol.1, p.354.)

The three Sarasvatis are discussed on p.46 below.

<sup>7</sup> 5:23:1cd *òte me dyāvāpr̥thivī ótā devī sārāsvatī ótau ma índraś cāgnīś ca k̥mim jambhayatām iti* //

*Rg Veda* and again here she is said to have cured Indra (RV 10:131:5d = AV 20:125:5d).<sup>8</sup> Thus she gives and sustains life: where various forms of *prāṇa* are worshipped, so is she.<sup>9</sup> And within life, her assistance—together with Mitra, Varuṇa, the middle and two ends of the Earth—is sought in matters of love.<sup>10</sup> She is also invoked in marriage ceremonies,<sup>11</sup> where the bride is asked to pay homage to her.<sup>12</sup> Connected, above all, with this world and matters of this world, she is asked to protect the invoker from the “earthly” (16:4:4):

*sūryo māhnaḥ pātv agniḥ pṛthivyā  
vāyūr antāriksād yamó manusyēbhyaḥ  
sārasvati pārthivebhyaḥ //*

Let Sūrya protect me from the day, Agni from the earth,  
Vāyu from the space in between, Yama from men,  
Sarasvatī from the earthly.<sup>13</sup>

“Worked in (*óta*) for me [are] heaven-and-earth; worked in [is] divine Sarasvatī; worked in for me [are] both Indra and Agni: to the effect ‘let them (dual) grind up the worm.’” (Whitney 1905, vol.1, p.262.)

<sup>8</sup> *sārasvati tvā maghavan abhiṣṇak //*

This incident is elaborated in great detail in the *Yajur Veda* and other texts. See pp.47ff. below.

<sup>9</sup> 6:41:2 *apānāya vyānāya prāṇāya bhūridhāyase / sārasvatyā uruvyāce vidhēma haviṣā vayām*

“To expiration, to perspiration (*vyānā*), to breath the much nourishing, to Sarasvatī the wide extending, would we pay worship with oblation.” (Whitney 1905, vol.1, p.311.)

<sup>10</sup> 6:89:3b *māhyaṃ tvā mitrāvāruṇau māhyaṃ devī sārasvati māhyaṃ tvā mādhyam bhūmyā ubhāv āntau sām asyatām //*

“Unto me let Mitra-and-Varuṇa, unto me divine Sarasvatī, unto me let the middle of the earth, let both [its] ends fling (*sam-as*) thee.” (Whitney 1905, vol.1, p.347.)

<sup>11</sup> 14:2:15b *prāti tiṣṭha virāḍ asi viṣṇur ivehā sarasvati (14:2:15ab)*

“Stand firm, *virāj* art thou; as it were, Viṣṇu here, O Sarasvatī...” (Whitney 1905, vol.2, p.756.)

<sup>12</sup> 14:2:20cd *ādhā sārasvatyai nāri pitṛbhyaś ca nāmas kuru //*

“... then, O woman, do thou pay homage to Sarasvatī and to the Fathers.” (Whitney 1905, vol.2, p.757.)

<sup>13</sup> It is not clear what the “earthly” (*pārthiva*) refers to. In the *Atharva Veda*, *pārthiva* occurs twenty-five times. Eight of the occurrences are repetitions of the *Rg Veda*: AV 7:26:1 (7:27:1); 7:51:1 (7:49:1); 8:4:23; 14:1:5; 18:1:46; 19:11:2, 4; 20:121:2b. The rest are independent, although two are identical: 2:28:3; 2:29:1; 4:1:4; 4:25:2; 9:5:14; 10:9:6; 11:7:21; 11:6:8a (11:8:8a); 14:1:3; 16:4:4; 19:9:7; 19:47:1; 20:17:12b=20:87:7b;

Sarasvatī's connection with matters of this world in the *Atharva Veda* reflects the characteristic orientation of the text itself. Furthermore, as she is on several occasions invoked together with other gods, as in the request for assistance in matters of love (6:89:3), in the prayer for the recovery of virility (4:4:6d), and in the curing worms (5:23:1cd), these functions cannot be construed as characteristically her own. Her healing faculties (i.e. the healing of Indra in 20:125:5d) and granting of progeny (5:25:3b; 7:68:1d) are by no means new functions attributed to her in the *Atharva Veda*, but are found, rather, in passages lifted directly from the *R̥g Veda*. Hence, although her involvement in matters of this world in the context of the *Atharva Veda* cannot be denied, it is, at the same time, clearly related to this context.

## b. Sarasvatī and Vāc

Of greater significance in the *Atharva Veda*, on the other hand, is Sarasvatī's identification with speech (5:7:5ab): ... *vācā śarasvatyā*... It is by way of Sarasvatī that worshippers call on *vāc* (5:10:8):

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20:36:8b, 9b; 20:70:6b. These occurrences of *pārthiva* are often in contrast with *divyā* (e.g. 9:6:14), and have to do with plants (2:29:1), animals (e.g. 2:28:3), beings—human (e.g. 14:1:3,5) or otherwise (e.g. 20:70:6)—spaces (e.g. 7:27:1 *rājas*) or worlds (e.g. 9:5:14), treasures (e.g. 20:87:7), and *utpātas* (19:9:7). (Whitney translates *utpātas* as “portents.” The meaning, however, is not entirely clear.) The greatest number of references, however, are to earthly spaces (five times: 4:1:4; 7:27:1; 18:1:46; 19:47:1; 20:70:6), to which may be added *lokā* (9:5:14; 10:9:6) and *jāgat* (20:36:9). Although the superior number of occurrences of *pārthiva* within a spacial/geographical context is clearly insufficient grounds for interpreting the passage connected with Sarasvatī in the same light, it does show a preferential use of the term, which, not insignificantly, happens to be directly in line with the *pārthivāni* (earthly [spaces]) of RV 6:61:11a, which Sarasvatī fills (*āpaprīṣi pārthivāni*...) (see p.12 above). Nevertheless, one may wonder how the earthly spaces differ from the earth which Agni protects from.



*sárasvatyā vācam úpa hvayāmahe manoyújā //*

By Sarasvatī, mind-yoked, we call unto speech.<sup>14</sup>

In RV 8:13:26d (*dhiyaṃ manoyújam //*) and 9:100:3a (*tvāṃ dhīyaṃ manoyújam*), *dhī*, with which Sarasvatī is so closely associated,<sup>15</sup> is yoked with the mind. *Sárasvatyā manoyújā* in the above *Atharva Veda* passage (5:10:8) recalls this connection, while the invocation of speech by way of Sarasvatī clearly asserts, at the very least, her closeness with *vāc*. As we have seen,<sup>16</sup> speech and inspired thought are inextricably related, as *vāc* expresses *dhī* at the verbal level. The production of speech, however, by the thoughtful (the *dhīrāḥ*) is by way of *mānas*: *yātra dhīrā mānasā vācam ákrata* (RV 10:71:2b). In the *Atharva Veda*, then, they call on speech by means of Sarasvatī, who is associated with *dhī*, and yoked with the mind, the channel, so to speak, connecting inspired thought with speech. Both in reflecting back to the *Rg Veda*, if not paralleling some of its passages, and in explicitly showing the closeness of Sarasvatī and speech, who are already identified in AV 5:7:5ab, AV 5:10:8 functions as a bridge in the conceptual development of Sarasvatī. In the *Rg Veda*, the goddess was implicitly connected with speech by way of *dhī*. AV 5:10:8ab provides almost a mirror image of the *Rg Veda*, in that what was implicit is made explicit (*vāc*-connection), while what was explicit is referred to implicitly (*dhī*-connection).

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<sup>14</sup> Whitney 1905, vol. 1, p.236.

<sup>15</sup> See pp.25-26 above.

<sup>16</sup> See pp.33-34 above.

### c. The Three Sarasvatīs

Another point of interest in the *Atharva Veda* is the mention of the three Sarasvatīs (*tisrāḥ sārāsvatīḥ*) in 6:100:1c. The three are undoubtedly the three goddesses Sarasvatī, Iḷā, and Bhāratī, who are often—in all of the Āprī hymns of the *Rg Veda*—referred to as *tisrō devīḥ* (RV 1:13:9; 1:142:9; 1:188:8; 2:3:8; 3:4:8; 5:5:8; 7:2:8; 9:5:8; 10:70:8; 10:110:8; AV 5:12:8). Although Sāyaṇa interprets the *tisrāḥ sārāsvatīḥ* either as Sarasvatī in the form of the *trayī vidyā* (i.e. *Rg, Sāma, Yajur Vedas*) or as the three goddesses, only the second option is possible because the first represents a later interpretation, not only of Sarasvatī as goddess of knowledge and mother of the Vedas, but also of the *trayī vidyā* as such.<sup>17</sup>

The reference to the goddesses as *tisrāḥ sārāsvatīḥ*, however, is not to be interpreted as an identification of the three, where Iḷā and Bhāratī merge to become two other forms of the one Sarasvatī. Rather, just as the *saptā hōtārah* (e.g. RV 8:60:16a; cf. AV 4:24:3c), for instance,<sup>18</sup> it is an elliptical plural designating three separate figures. Although Sarasvatī later comes to be identified with Bhāratī, here the plural indicates the association of the three goddesses with one another and Sarasvatī's predominance amongst them.

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<sup>17</sup> Sāyaṇa: *tisrah trisaṅkhyākāḥ sārāsvatīḥ sārāsvatyas trayirūpāḥ* [trayī-vidyā-rūpāḥ] · *yad vā idā sārāsvatī bhāratīti tisro devyah sāhacaryāt sārāsvatyā ucyante*

For the understanding of *trayī* in the sense of *trayī vidyā*, see Böhtlingk and Roth 1855-75, vol.3, p.415, under *trayī*.

<sup>18</sup> The *saptā hōtārah* are the *hōtar*, the *adhvaryū*, the *praśastār*, the *pōtar*, the *purōhita*, the *agnīdh*, and the *nēṣṭar* (Geldner 1951, vol.1, p.430, note on RV 4:9:3-5), who officiate at the sacrifice.

### 3. *Yajur Veda*

In the liturgical *Yajur Veda*, Sarasvatī finds herself in a highly ritualistic environment. Her waters are barely mentioned (VS 20:86; 34:11),<sup>1</sup> and yet their healing and life-giving properties are embodied in the physician Sarasvatī, and their sound, in her identity with Vāc.

#### a. The Sautrāmaṇī Ritual

The Sautrāmaṇī ritual appears in both the Black and the White *Yajur Veda*, and is intended to ward off various forms of evil in the sacrificer's personal life and to assure success, victory, etc.<sup>2</sup> It revolves around the mythical cure of *sutrāmaṇ-* (whose protection is good) Indra, from whose epithet it derives its name. Suffering from excessive indulgence in soma, Indra is cured by Sarasvatī and the Aśvins.

#### i. *Rg Veda* Background

The incident is already mentioned in the *Rg Veda* (10:131:5):

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<sup>1</sup> VS 20:86 = RV 1:3:12

<sup>2</sup> See Gonda 1980, pp.65-66.

*putrám iva pitárāv aśvínobh[ā  
 i]ndrāváthuḥ kávyair dámsánābhiḥ /  
 yát surámam vyápibah śácibhiḥ  
 sárasvatī tvā maghavann abhiṣṅak //*

As parents [favour their] son, so both Aśvins [have favoured  
 Indra]. O Indra! [O Aśvins!] You two have favoured [Indra] with  
 a seer's insights and wonderous powers.  
 O mighty one! When with your abilities you drank to separate  
 [the soma from] the *suráma* (mixture of the spirituous liquor  
*súrā* and soma), [then] Sarasvatī healed [you].<sup>3</sup>

Although this stanza indicates that Indra drank to separate [the soma from] the *suráma*  
 mixture, the immediately previous one ( RV 10:131:4) says the Aśvins did:

*yuvám surámam aśvinā námucāv āsuré śácā /  
 vipipāná śubhas pati indram kármasy āvatam //*

Drinking to separate the *suráma* at the place of Namuci the demon,  
 you Aśvins, lords of beauty, have helped Indra in his deeds.

So the act in the service of Indra attributed to the Aśvins in 10:131:4 is apparently repeated  
 in 10:131:5, but this time by Indra himself. At any rate, the skill-requiring task of drinking  
 so as to separate the soma from the *súrā*<sup>4</sup> implies the performance of an intentional.

<sup>3</sup> RV 10:131:5 = VS 10:34 = MS 3:11:4[146,3-4] = KS 17:19[263,13-14] = KS 38:9[111,7-8]

Translation by Werner Knobl (private communication). As Geldner notes (1951, vol.3, p.364, note on  
 10:131:5ab), the construction is a oddly confused in that Indra should appear in the accusative (*indram*)  
 instead of the vocative. As for *surámam*, Geldner explains (vol.3, p.363, note on 10:131:4a) that it can be  
*surā-ama*, either a genitive *tatpuruṣa* meaning "vigour of *súrā*" or a *bahuvrihi* to the implied soma which  
 has the strength of *súrā*, or *súrā-* with secondary suffix *-ma*. When Indra drank to separate (*vi-ápibat*) the  
*suráma*, he may have drunk the soma from out of a mixture. According to Geldner (1951, vol.3, p.364),  
*suráma* is "geschnapster (Soma)" and thus is a mix of *súrā* and soma.

VS 20:59 and TB 2:6:12:2 recount how Namuci gave Indra soma mixed with *súrā* (and with the blood of  
 Namuci according to Mahidhara). Thereby Namuci gained power over Indra, and soma became impure. To  
 restore soma, the Aśvins and Sarasvatī provided assistance. See Bloomfield 1890-93, pp.143-163.

<sup>4</sup> Not unlike the ability to separate either soma (VS 19:74) or in later texts milk from water attributed to  
 the *hamsa*. For the *hamsa* see pp.151-53 below.

controlled task, rather than a perhaps unintentional, certainly undisciplined, excessive indulgence in soma, as represented in the later accounts surrounding the Sautrāmaṇi ritual.

## ii. Myth and Ritual

The elaborate story is found in the *Yajur Veda*, most notably in the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (19-21), and the rite itself is then described in the Brāhmaṇas and the Śrauta Sūtras. It takes four days to perform (*catūrātrā*), but the main sacrifice is on the final day, when offerings of milk, the spirituous liquor *sūrā*, various animals,<sup>5</sup> and thirty-three libations of fat gravy obtained from cooking the victims are presented to Indra, Sarasvatī, and the Aśvins. The mythical story is re-enacted,<sup>6</sup> as the sacrificer takes the part of Indra and the officiants assume the roles of the twins and Sarasvatī, consuming, during the ritual, part of the oblations.<sup>7</sup>

Accompanied by the Aśvins as physicians, the physician Sarasvatī bestows on Indra his characteristic qualities (*indriyāni*) by means of *vāc*.<sup>8</sup> She weaves his inner form,<sup>9</sup> making, by means of *mānas*, a beautiful body for him.<sup>10</sup> She and the Aśvins are in his

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<sup>5</sup> A he-goat is offered to the Aśvins, a ram to Sarasvatī, and a bull to Indra.

<sup>6</sup> According to ŚB 12:7:3:6, Indra, Sarasvatī, and the Aśvins were the first performers of the Sautrāmaṇi.

<sup>7</sup> Gonda 1980, pp.65, 91.

<sup>8</sup> VS 19:12 *devā yajñām atanvata bheṣajām bhiṣajāśvīnā · vācā sārvasvatī bhiṣag indrāyendriyāni dādhatāḥ* :

<sup>9</sup> VS 19:82b = MS 3:11:9[153,5] = KS 38:3[103,8] ≡ TB 2:6:4:1b *sārvasvatī vayati pēṣo āntaram* :

<sup>10</sup> VS 19:83ab = MS 3:11:9[153,7] = KS 38:3[103,10] = TB 2:6:4:2  
*sārvasvatī mānasā peśalām vāsu nāsatyābhyām vayati darśatām vāpuḥ* :

mouth,<sup>11</sup> and she produces his *vyāná* breath and nose hairs.<sup>12</sup> As consort of the Aśvins, she bears the well-formed embryo within her womb:

*sārasvatī yōnyām gārbham antār  
aśvibhyām pātñī sūkṛtam bibharti /*<sup>13</sup>

*Aśvibhyām* can be understood either as instrumental, or as dative, or as ablative. Taken as instrumental, it can be construed with *sūkṛtam* as “well made by the Aśvins.” Taken as dative, it can be construed with *bibharti* as “she bears for the Aśvins.” Taken as ablative, it can be construed with *gārbham* as “the embryo from the Aśvins.”

Sarasvatī gives Indra his faculties (*indriyāni*)<sup>14</sup> and, through *prāṇá*, his manly energy (*viryam*).<sup>15</sup>

### iii. Sarasvatī and the Aśvins

The association of Sarasvatī and the Aśvins occurs, in the *Rg Veda*, in the above mentioned verse (10:131:5) referring to their cooperative healing of Indra and in an incantation

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<sup>11</sup> VS 19:88ab = MS 3:11:9[154,2] = KS 38:3[103,20] ≡ TB 2:6:4:4ab

*mūkham sād asya śira it sātēna jihvá pavitram aśvināsānt sārasvatī*

<sup>12</sup> VS 19:90cd = MS 3:11:9[154,7] = KS 38:3[104,4]

*sārasvaty upavákair vyānām nāsyāni bahir bādarair jajāna*

<sup>13</sup> VS 19:94ab = MS 3:11:9[155,1] = KS 38:3[104,11] = TB 2:6:4:6ab

<sup>14</sup> VS 20:58ab = MS 3:11:3[143,15] = KS 38:8[109,12] = TB 2:6:12:2ab

*ājūhvānā sārasvatīndrāyendriyāni viryam*

<sup>15</sup> VS 20:80b *prāṇēna sārasvatī viryam*

Cf. VS 20:58 above.

for safe pregnancy and delivery (10:184), where various gods, including the Aśvins and Sarasvatī (10:184:2), are asked to place the embryo in a woman's womb:

*gārbhaṃ dhehi sinivālī gārbhaṃ dhehi sarasvati /  
gārbhaṃ te aśvīnau devāv ā dhattāṃ puṣkarasrajā //*

Place the embryo, O Sinivālī; place the embryo, O Sarasvatī;  
Let the heavenly Aśvins, lotus-garlanded, place the embryo  
[into] your [womb].

While Sarasvatī in the *Rg Veda* is implicitly connected with healing by way of water, for all remedies dwell in the waters, the Aśvins have behind them a long, successful, and minutely recorded career as physicians and succourers. The inseparable twins are divine physicians famed in the *Rg Veda* for their succouring power illustrated in numerous legends. They restore sight to the blind, cure the emaciated, and mend those of whom something is broken.<sup>16</sup> They also release the aged from decrepitude by restoring their youth.<sup>17</sup>

#### iv. Sarasvatī and Indra

##### *Rg Veda*

##### *Vṛtraghñī*

Like Indra, Sarasvatī is called a Vṛtra-slayer in the *Rg Veda* (6:61:7c *vṛtraghñī*). Although *vṛtrā* may refer to enemies, as explained in Émile Benveniste and Louis Renou's

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<sup>16</sup> 10:39:3cd *andhāsya cin nāsatyā kṛśāsya cid yuvām id āhur bhiṣajā rutāsya cit //*

<sup>17</sup> 1:117:13ab *yuvām cyāvānam aśvinā jārantaṃ pūnar yuvānam cakrathuḥ śacībhiḥ //*

study of *vṛtrá* and *vṛṠragna*,<sup>18</sup> the overwhelming personality of Indra causes the term *vṛtrahán* to call to mind the god's exploits or to solicit his invocation even while being applied to another divinity. In the *R̥g Veda*, however, it is not simply a name of Indra, as is the case in subsequent texts. Traces of its independent use, according to Renou,<sup>19</sup> can be found in its application to Soma (e.g. 1:91:5b) and to the Aśvins (8:8:9, 22),<sup>20</sup> for instance.

In accord with the nature of her waters, Sarasvatī readily takes on a fierce, combative character.<sup>21</sup> In the context of the stanza in which she is called *vṛtraghnī* (RV 6:61:7), Indra's epithet fits in perfectly, reflecting her terrifying power:

*utá syá nah sárasvatī ghorá hiráṇyavartaniḥ /  
vṛtraghnī vaṣṡi suṣṡutim //*

Mais la-célèbre Sarasvatī, la terrifiante, aux rails d'or,  
tueuse d'ennemis, elle veut de nous la bonne louange.<sup>22</sup>

As *vṛtraghnī* here is the only occurrence in the feminine in the *R̥g Veda* (as against 106 occurrences of the masculine *vṛtrahán*), it identifies Sarasvatī as an especially powerful fighter, singling her out from amongst all females.

Two stanzas prior to this, she is also compared to Indra (6:61:5):

<sup>18</sup> 1934, pp.93, 115ff.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.115-16, 117. The Iranian tradition strongly suggests that Vṛtrahan was originally an independent figure unconnected with Indra. In India, the warrior-like Vṛtrahan would have passed on his traits to Indra, becoming a colourless epithet applied to various divinities. From *vṛtrahán*, Renou suggests, the figure of Vṛtra would have emerged, crystallizing around Indra in the form of a dragon, obstructor of waters.

<sup>20</sup> The twins are "most Indra-like" (1:182:2a *indrataṡā*) and are twice addressed as "you two eminent Vṛtra-slayers" (8:8:9c, 22c *vṛtrahantamā*). The context of the stanzas, however, is everything but combative. The benevolent twins are not so much fighters and slayers, but rather more the "celestial Red Cross."

<sup>21</sup> See pp.14-15 above.

<sup>22</sup> Translation by Renou in EVP vol.15, p.131. As Renou notes (EVP vol.15, p.132), *hirāṇyavartani* is an epithet usual to the Aśvins.



*yás tvā devi sarasvaty upabrūtē dhāne hité /  
índram ná vṛtratúrve //*

Celui qui t'adresse la parole, ô déesse, ô Sarasvatī, quand l'enjeu a été placé, comme (on s'adresse à) Indra quand (il s'agit de) surmonter les résistances...<sup>23</sup>

In another instance, she together with the *maruts* is asked to conquer enemies, and while she is mentioned side by side with Indra, he kills the Śaṅḍika chieftain (RV 2:30:8).<sup>24</sup> Sarasvatī and Indra are, furthermore, associated in their respective benevolent aspects, as when King Citra's generosity is said to be comparable only to theirs (RV 8:21:17).<sup>25</sup>

### *Pāvīravī kanyā*

Moreover, there is a possibility that her epithet *pāvīravī kanyā* (RV 6:49:7a) may be connected with Indra, for although his weapon, the thunderbolt, is usually referred to as a *vájra*, in one instance it is called a *pāvīrava* (RV 1:174:4b).<sup>26</sup> This would make her the

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<sup>23</sup> Translation by Renou in EVP vol. 15, p.131.

<sup>24</sup> *sārasvati tvām asmām aviddhi marūtvaṭi dhṛṣatī jeṣi sātrūn tvām cic chārdhantaṃ taviṣiyāmaṇam indro hanti vṛṣabhām śaṅḍikānām :*

<sup>25</sup> *indro vā ghéd tyan maghām sārasvati vā subhāgā dadīr vāsu . tvām vā citra dāsūṣe :*

Citra seems to have been one of several kings who lived on the banks of the Sarasvati (RV 8:21:18ab *citra id rājā rājakā id anyaké yaké sārasvatim ānu .* ).

One might also consider 6:52:6ab, where Indra comes near accompanied by Sarasvati swelling with rivers: *indro nēdiṣṭham āvasāgamīṣṭhaḥ sārasvati sindhubhiḥ pinvamānā* . ("Indra, (car c'est lui qui est) le mieux venant à l'aide, de la façon la plus proche; Sarasvati gonfle [gonflant] avec les fleuves..." EVP vol.5, p.37)

<sup>26</sup> 1:174:4ab *śēṣan nū tā indra sāsmin yōnau prāśastaye pāvīravasya mahná :*

"Qu'ils reposent donc, ces (ennemis), en un même séjour, ô Indra, pour la glorification du foudre, puissamment!" (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.17, p.51.)

daughter of Indra's thunderbolt, "la fille de la foudre" as translated by Bergaigne.<sup>27</sup>

Geldner, however, understands both *pāvīravī kanyā* (RV 6:49:7a)<sup>28</sup> and *pāvīravī* (RV 10:65:13a)<sup>29</sup> as the daughter of Pavīru, whom Grassman,<sup>30</sup> Ludwig,<sup>31</sup> and Roth<sup>32</sup> render as lightning. Likewise Renou<sup>33</sup> interprets *pāvīravī kanyā* to mean "la fille de l'éclair." Their interpretation of Pavīru as lightning seems to be based on taking *pāvīravī* and *tanyatū* (thunder) together in 10:65:13a, in which case the daughter of Pavīru is thunder which arises from lightning (Pavīru) and thus makes her the daughter of lightning. *Pāvīravī* and *tanyatū*, however, need not be taken together, for they appear amidst a list of divine figures, of which they may well be two separate ones: *pāvīravī tanyatūr ékapād ajó divó dhartá sindhur ápaḥ samudriyaḥ / víšve devásaḥ śṛṇavan vácāmsi me sárasvati sahá dhībhiḥ púrandhyā //*

At any rate, the possible connection with Indra is only if the *pāvīrava* is taken as his weapon (RV 1:174:4b). It is, after all, Indra who releases the rivers by slaying Vṛtra with his *vájra* (e.g. RV 1:61:10a-c).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> 1963, vol.1, p.252.

<sup>28</sup> 1951, vol.2, p.150.

<sup>29</sup> 1951, vol.3, p.239.

<sup>30</sup> 1873, pp.795, 809.

<sup>31</sup> 1876, vol.1, p.232, no.216 for 6:49:7a; vol.1, p.247, no.227 for 10:65:13a.

<sup>32</sup> Böhlingk and Roth 1855-75, vol.4, p.696.

<sup>33</sup> EVP vol.5, p.32.

<sup>34</sup> *asyéd evá sávasā śuśántam vi vṛšcad vājreṇa vṛtrám indraḥ : gá ná vrāṇá avānir amuñcat...*

"C'est par sa seule force qu'Indra a décheté du foudre Vṛtra qui soufflait. Les rivières, enfermées comme des vaches, il les libéra..." (Translation by Renou in EVP vol.17, p.24.)

## The Rivers as Indra's Wives

Nevertheless, the rivers are Indra's, the bull's, wives, rather than his daughters (RV 5:42:12b):

*dāmūnaso apāso ye suhāstā vṛṣṇaḥ pātnir nadyò vibhvataṣṭāḥ /  
sārasvati brhaddivótā rākā daśasyāntir varivasyantu śubhrāḥ //*

Les maîtres de maison actifs-à-l'oeuvre, (les R̥bhu) aux bonnes mains, les Rivières épouses du taureau (Indra), façonnées par Vibhvan, Sarasvatī (venue) du haut du ciel, ainsi que Rākā, les brillantes (déesses), qu'elles se montrent larges, (nous) honorant-dignement!<sup>35</sup>

This stanza presents some difficulties in that Sarasvatī appears to be mentioned twice: as a river, she is necessarily one of Indra's wives, and yet her name appears in the second half of the stanza as if she were not intended to be included amongst the rivers. According to Sāyaṇa, her mention may refer either to the river of that name or to her as the goddess Speech.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the *R̥g Veda* poet wished to single her out as the greatest of rivers and placed her, as a goddess, together with Rākā, another goddess. As spouse of Indra, it is indeed appropriate that his epithet *vṛtrahān* in the feminine form (6:61:7c *vṛtraghñī*) should be applied to her, and even more so only to her, since she is being singled out from amongst all rivers in 5:42:12.

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<sup>35</sup> Translation by Renou in EVP vol.5, p.23.

<sup>36</sup> *sarasvati etannāmikā nadī vāg devī vā* (*Rig-Veda-Samhitā: The Sacred Hymns of the Brāhmins together with the Commentary of Sāyaṇāchārya*, 1890-92, vol.2, p.585).

## *Vīrápatnī*

In the same stanza (RV 6:49:7) in which Sarasvatī is called *pāvīravī kanyā*, she is also identified as *vīrápatnī*, “whose husband is a hero.” Could this be the same *vīrápatnī* as the river mentioned in RV 1:104:4c in a hymn to Indra?

*añjasī kuliśī vīrápatnī páyo hinvānā udábhīr bharante //*

Añjasī, Kuliśī, Vīrapatnī apportent le lait avec leurs eaux,  
s’incitant (à agir).<sup>37</sup>

It is, however, entirely unclear who the *virá* in question might be, and even whether the *vīrápatnī* of 1:104:4a is Sarasvatī. Raghunath Atri’s<sup>38</sup> suggestion that it refers to her is an over-interpretation based on insufficient evidence. Even if one were to understand the *virá* in 1:104:4a to be Indra, since the hymn is dedicated to him, the rivers in general—and not just Sarasvatī (even though she is singled out from amongst them in 5:42:12)—as noted above in 5:42:12b, are the bull’s wives.

Thus *vīrápatnī* cannot be interpreted as defining Sarasvatī’s relationship to Indra. As for *pāvīravī kanyā*, it may or may not connect her with Indra. Within the context of the *R̥g Veda*, it may at best be said that as a river, she is his wife.

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<sup>37</sup> Translation of 1:104:4cd by Renou in EVP vol. 17, p.39.

<sup>38</sup> 1977, p.17.

## *Yajur Veda*

### Mother-consort

In the *Yajur Veda*, however, Sarasvatī's specific relationship to Indra is more clearly defined. In the Sautrāmaṇī, as we have seen,<sup>39</sup> she functions as his mother (or surrogate mother), giving him rebirth. On the other hand, she is also, together with Idā and Bhārati, Indra's consort (VS 20:343 ≡ MS 3:11:1[140,10-11] = KS 38:6[108,3-4] = TB 2:6:8:3):

*tisrō devīr haviṣā vārdhamānā  
indram juṣānā jānayo nā pātñiḥ /  
āchinnam tāntum pāyasā sārasyatī  
idā devī bhārati viśvātūrtiḥ //*

The three goddesses growing by means of oblation, enjoying Indra like wives,<sup>40</sup> Sarasvatī, heavenly Idā, and all-conquering Bhārati with their swelling milk [enjoying] the unbroken thread (warp of the loom) [of sacrifice]...

Although the above stanza only likens the three goddesses to Indra's consorts, in two other passages they are identified as such:

VS 28:8  
*... tisrō devīḥ... indrapatñiḥ...*

VS 28:18ab  
*devīs tisrās tisrō devīḥ pātīm indram avardhayan /*

Sarasvatī is thus both mother and consort to Indra. Ambiguity in her relationship to a male figure resurfaces in another form in epic and Puranic lore, where she simultaneously

<sup>39</sup> See p.50 above.

<sup>40</sup> Literally, "women who are wives."

assumes the roles of daughter and consort in her relationship to Brahmā,<sup>41</sup> derived from the connection of Vāc and Prajāpati in the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>42</sup> Had it been possible to define her relationship with Indra in the *R̥g Veda* in terms of *pāvīravī kanyā* and *virāpamī*, the parallels would have been very interesting.

Sarasvatī, however, is not only the consort of Indra in the *Yajur Veda*, but also that of the Aśvins, and, as such, carries Indra's newly-fashioned body in her womb (VS 19:94ab).<sup>43</sup> This is indeed a new development, for in the *R̥g Veda* (10:131:5a), the relationship of the twins to Indra is likened to that of parents to a son: *putrām iva pitārāv aśvinobhā*. With the elaboration of the incident in the *Yajur Veda*, Sarasvatī becomes the mother figure, and thus the consort of the Aśvins. Already in the *R̥g Veda* she was called most motherly (2:41:16a), invoked to grant progeny (2:41:17d), and requested to place the embryo in a woman's womb (10:184:2b).<sup>44</sup> As a river, her connection with life-giving waters, her very being, is far greater than that of the Aśvins. Indra is thus regenerated and reborn of the waters of life embodied in Sarasvatī's womb.

## b. Sarasvatī and Vāc

The physician Sarasvatī, as noted above, bestows on Indra his characteristic qualities

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<sup>41</sup> See pp.131-35 below.

<sup>42</sup> See pp.70ff. below.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted and discussed on p.50 above.

<sup>44</sup> These passages are quoted on pp.13-14 above.

by means of *vāc* (VS 19:12cd).<sup>45</sup> In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, with the fully established identification of Sarasvatī and Vāc, it says the Aśvins cured Indra by means of speech, for Sarasvatī is speech (5:5:4:16): *átha yát sārasvató bhávati / vāg vai sárasvatī vācá vá enam aśvināv abhişajyatām tátho evainam eṣá etád vācaivá bhişajyati tásmāt sārasvató bhavati //*

In the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (9:30), Sarasvatī is either the controller of speech (*vācó yantúr*), or speech itself (*vācó*), who is the controller (*yantúr*):

*sārasvatyai vācó yantúr yantriye dadhāmi.*

I place [you] in the control of the controller[,] of speech, of Sarasvatī.<sup>46</sup>

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5:2:2:13) explains the passage as follows:

*sārasvatyai vācó yantúr yantriye dadhāmīti vāg vai sárasvatī tád enam vācá evá yantúr yantriye dadhāti //*

‘I place thee in the leading of Sarasvatī Vāc, the leader,’ [VS 9:30b] for Sarasvatī is Vāc: he thus places him in the leading of Vāc, the leader.<sup>47</sup>

Although there are *Yajur Vēda* passages wherein Sarasvatī and Vāc are perceived as distinct from one another (e.g. VS 8:9:27c *vācam vişṇum sárasvatim*), there are others,

<sup>45</sup> Quoted on p.49, note 8 above.

<sup>46</sup> The dative *sārasvatyai* is used here as a genitive, as in the *Brāhmaṇas*. See Whitney 1889, p.104, no.307h; p.134, no.365d.

Cf. VS 18:37c *sārasvatyai vācó yantúr yantrēṇā*

“I consecrate [*abhişīncāmi*] you by the control of the controller[,] of speech, Sarasvatī.”

<sup>47</sup> Translation by Julius Eggeling in 1882-1900, vol.41, p.39.

such as VS 10:30 (*sārasvatyā vācā*) and VS 21:58 (*vācam sārasvatīm*),<sup>48</sup> where the two are clearly identified. In the Aśvamedha (Horse Sacrifice) dealt with in VS 22-25, the Maina bird speaking like a human [being] is offered to Sarasvatī (*sārasvatyai śāriḥ puruṣavāk*),<sup>49</sup> as is the tip of the tongue of the sacrificial horse (*sārasvatyā agrajihvām*).<sup>50</sup> Thus the Sarasvatī-Vāc connection/identification is evidently there, but not yet solidly established, as in the Brāhmaṇas.

### c. Sarasvatī and the Ewe

An interesting new development in the *Yajur Veda* is Sarasvatī's association with the ewe (f. *meṣī́*) or the ram (m. *meṣā́*). While the ewe is offered to her in the Black *Yajur Veda* in order to obtain her help in matters of speech, for Sarasvatī is speech,<sup>51</sup> the ram is presented to her during the Sautrāmaṇī (VS 21:40 *meṣām sārasvatyai*).<sup>52</sup> VS 24:4 refers to three kinds of ewes<sup>53</sup> offered to Sarasvatī: *phalgūr lohitorñī palakṣī́ tāḥ sārasvatyāḥ*. Furthermore, according to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13:2:2:4), a ewe is presented to her in

<sup>48</sup> See also MS 2:3:5[32,3] (... *vāk sārasvatī*...) and KS 11:8[154,1] (... *vāk sārasvatī*...).

<sup>49</sup> VS 24:33. Cf. TS 5:5:12:1.

<sup>50</sup> VS 25:1.

<sup>51</sup> MS 2:3:5[32,3]; KS 11:8[154:1].

<sup>52</sup> See also VS 21:41 (quoted in the following paragraph in the main text), 44, 46-47, 59-60; MS 3:11:2[143,2] (... *meṣām sārasvatyai*...); TS 1:8:21e (... *sārasvatām meṣām*...).

<sup>53</sup> According to Mahidhara, "she-goats": *phalgūḥ apuṣṭāśarirā lohitorñī raktaromavati palakṣī́ śvetā palakṣāśabdo valakṣārtha śvetaparyāyah tāś tisro 'jāḥ sārasvatyah*... This follows ŚB 12:7:2:7 (... *sārasvatī́r āvir*...) and 5:5:4:1 (*āvir mahlā́ sārasvatī́ bhavati*). Eggeling (1882-1900, vol.41, p.129), however, translates *āvir mahlā́* as a "ewe with teats in the dewlap."



the Aśvamedha sacrifice: *sārasvatīm meṣīm adhāstād dhānvoh* / <sup>54</sup>

During the Sautrāmaṇī, the *hōtar* worships Sarasvatī, offering the omentum of a ram for her enjoyment (VS 21:41): *hōtā yakṣat sārasvatīm meṣāsya vapāyā médaso juṣātām havir hōtar yāja* / According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (12:7:1:12), the ram became hers because it was given to her by the gods as a reward for healing Indra:

*té sārasvatīm abruvan / tvām vai bhāiṣajyam asi tvām imām  
bhīṣajyēti sābravīd āstu me bhāgā iti tè 'bruvan yā eṣō 'viḥ sā te  
bhāgā iti tāthēti tāsmāt sārasvatō meṣō bhavati //*

They (the gods) said to Sarasvatī, “Verily, thou art healing medicine: heal thou this one!” She replied, “Let there be a guerdon for me!” They spake, “That ram there shall be thy guerdon!” She said, “So be it!” And therefore the ram is sacred to Sarasvatī.<sup>55</sup>

Her association with the ram in this context is clearly on the basis of Indra’s connection, if not identification, with it. Already in the *Rg Veda*, Indra takes its form (8:2:40a-c):

*itthā dhīvantam adrivaḥ kāṅvām médhyātithim /  
meṣō bhūtō 'bhī yān nāyaḥ //*

You have, O Lord of the Pressing Stone, (listened to) the descendant of Kaṅva, Medhātithi, when you abducted (him to heaven), having become a ram.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “... a ewe for Sarasvati beneath the (horse’s) jaws...” (Eggeling 1882-1900, vol.44, p.300.)

<sup>55</sup> Eggeling 1882-1900, vol.44, p.216.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. 1:51:1ab *abhī tyām meṣam puruhūtām ṛgmīyam indraṃ girbhīr madatā vāsvo arnavām* “Ce fameux Bélier maintes fois invoqué, Indra digne de la strophe, enivrez le de chants, lui qui est un flot de richesse...” (EVP vol.17, p.14)

1:52:1ad *tyām sū meṣām mahayā svarvidam... éndraṃ vavṛtyām ávase suvṛktibhiḥ* “Ce fameux Bélier, je veux le magnifier, lui qui procure le soleil... je voudrais faire tourner vers (moi)... Indra, afin qu’(ils m’)aident, —avec de beaux hymnes.” (EVP vol.17, p.16)

In the *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* (3:234), as Wendy Doniger points out,<sup>57</sup> this verse is elaborated into the story of the appearance of Indra as Medhātithi's ram at the latter's sacrifice:

*teṣāṃ ha smendro medhātīther meṣasya rūpaṃ kṛtvā somaṃ  
vratayati / taṃ ha sma bādhanṭe medhātīther no meṣas somaṃ  
vratayatīti / sa u ha smaīṣāṃ svam eva rūpaṃ kṛtvā somaṃ  
vratayati / tato ha vā idam arvācīnaṃ medhātīther meṣa ity  
āhvyanti /*

Indra, having taken the form of the ram of Medhātithi, used to drink (as a *vrata*) their soma. They drove him away, (saying), "Medhātithi's ram drinks our soma." Indra, having taken his own form, used to drink the soma. Since then they call [on] Indra, "ram of Medhātithi."

In VS 19:90 (≡ MS 3:11:9[154:6] = KS 38:3[104.3] = TB 2:6:4:5) a ram is used like a wool strainer for vigour in Indra's nose (*āvīr nā meṣó nasī vīryāya*). According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (12:7:1:3), the ram is, in fact, Indra's *vīryā*, which flowed out of his nostrils after he had drunk soma:

*nāsikābhyāṃ evāśya vīryāṃ asravat /  
só 'viḥ paśūr abhavan meṣāḥ*

From the nostrils flowed his vigour.  
That became a sheep, the animal, namely a ram.

The ram is a traditional symbol of virility often associated with fertility cults.<sup>58</sup> In the Varuṇapraghāsa ritual performed at the beginning of the rainy season—the season "which begins the cycle of fertility"<sup>59</sup>—a ram and a ewe made of unbaked dough are offered into

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<sup>57</sup> O'Flaherty 1985, p.60.

<sup>58</sup> Litvinskii 1987, p.233.

<sup>59</sup> Jamison 1996, p.92.

the fire.<sup>60</sup> As Stephanie Jamison explains,<sup>61</sup> they represent the sacrificer's wife and her "lover," and the ritual allows the transfer of the sexual force of animals into the householder's family, so a child can be born. In the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* story of Ahalyā (1:48:6-10), when Indra is castrated for sexual transgression, he is made whole again with a ram's testicles:

*ayam meṣaḥ savrṣanaḥ śakro hy avrṣanaḥ kṛtaḥ /  
meṣasya vrṣanau grhya śakrāyāśu prayacchata //*

*aphalas tu kṛto meṣaḥ parām tuṣṭim pradāsyati /  
bhavatām harṣanārthāya ye ca dāsyanti mānavāḥ //*

*agnes tu vacanam śrutvā pitrdevāḥ samāgatāḥ /  
utpātya meṣavrṣanau sahasrākṣe nyavedayan //*

*tadā prabhṛti kākutstha pitrdevāḥ samāgatāḥ /  
aphalān bhuñjate meṣān phalais teṣām ayojayan //*

*indras tu meṣavrṣanas tadā prabhṛti rāghava /  
gautamasya prabhāvena tapasā ca mahātmanaḥ //*

Śakra has been emasculated. But here is a ram whose testicles are intact. Take the ram's testicles and give them to Śakra at once.

The castrated ram will give you the greatest satisfaction, as will those men who offer one for your pleasure.

When the divine ancestors assembled there heard Agni's words, they tore out the ram's testicles and gave them to thousand-eyed Indra.

And from that time onward, Kākutstha, the assembly of the divine ancestors eats castrated rams, reserving their testicles for Indra.

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<sup>60</sup> *āmapeṣānām meṣapratikṛti bhavataḥ : meṣam adhvaryuḥ karoti meṣim pratiprasthātā striyāḥ strivyāñjanāni / puṁsaḥ puṁvyāñjanāni : (Āpastambha Śrauta Sūtra 8:5:42 - 8:6:2).*

<sup>61</sup> Jamison 1996, pp.94-95.

And so, from that time onward, Rāghava, through the power of the great Gautama's asceticism, Indra has had a ram's testicles.<sup>62</sup>

Although Sarasvatī's association with the ram is based on Indra's identification with it, she is also connected with the ram in its traditional virility symbolism. She is, in a sense, the other side of the equation: while the ram represents virility, Sarasvatī bestows fertility. She grants beings progeny (RV 2:41:17d), placing the embryo in a woman's womb (RV 10:184:2b). By virtue of her waters, she is a healer and life-giver, who gives birth (rebirth) to Indra. Semen, it might be added, is not infrequently compared to water, as in TS 6:5:8:6.<sup>63</sup>

Sarasvatī's connection with the ram has persisted through the ages, as can be seen in surviving Northeast Indian sculptures, primarily from the eleventh or twelfth century, where he appears as her mount.<sup>64</sup> Even in recent times, ram sacrifices have continued to be offered to Sarasvatī in some parts of the Dacca district.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Translation by Robert P. Goldman in 1984, p.217.

<sup>63</sup> *apā úpa prá vartayati réta evā tát siñcaty úrúnó 'pa prá vartayaty úrúnā hi rétaḥ sicyáte* "He [the *néṣtar*] causes water to follow [sic!] along [the thigh of the sacrificer's wife]; verily thus he pours seed; along the thigh he causes it to flow, for along the thigh is seed poured." (Translation by Keith in 1914, vol.2, p.544. Bracketed-portions are mine.)

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, K. Bhattacharyya 1983, figs.8-10.

<sup>65</sup> Bhattasali 1929, p.187.

## 4. Brāhmaṇas

### a. *vāg vai sārāsvatī*

#### i. Sarasvatī as Speech

Sarasvatī is identified with speech already in the Saṃhitās, as we have seen.<sup>1</sup> The Brāhmaṇas and the Brāhmaṇa passages of the *Maitrāyaṇī*, *Kāṭhaka*, and *Taittirīya Saṃhitās* emphatically, consistently, and repeatedly assert this identity: *vāg vai sārāsvatī*.<sup>2</sup> Even when the water of the Sarasvatī river is used for consecration, the individual is thereby said to be sprinkled with speech (MS 4:3:9[49.8-9]):

*vācā vā etām abhi śiñcanti yām abhiśiñcanti vāk sārāsvatī  
sārāsvatīr āpo yāt sārāsvatībhiḥ sūyate yāvaty evā vāk tāyā  
sūyate //*

Him whom they consecrate (by sprinkling) they consecrate with speech. Sarasvatī is speech. The waters are Sarasvatī's. The fact that he is consecrated by Sarasvatī's (waters), as much is he consecrated by speech.<sup>3</sup>

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11:2:6:3) Sarasvatī pairs with her male counterpart Sarasvat, as speech with mind: *mānaś caivāśya vāk cāghārau sārāsvāmś ca sārāsvatī ca*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> AV 5:7:5ab (*vācā sārāsvatyā*); VS 10:30 (*sārāsvatyā vācā*). See pp.44, 60 above.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. MS 2:5:2[49,4]; KS 12:13[175,12]; TS 2:1:2:6; AB 2:24:8; KB 5:2:8; ŚB 4:2:5:14.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ŚB 5:3:4:3 (= 5:3:5:8) *vāg vai sārāsvatī vācaivainam etād abhiśiñcati*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ŚB 7:5:1:31 (=11:2:4:9) *māno vai sārāsvān vāk sārāsvatī*.

It is Sarasvatī who placed speech in created beings (*sārasvaty evā sṛṣṭāsu vācam adadhāt*).<sup>5</sup>

The faculty of speech of the chronically ill, the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* explains, goes back to

her and it is then restored to him by way of an offering to Sarasvatī (2:3:11:1-2):

*agnim vā etāsya śārīraṃ gacchati... sārasvatim vāg... yāsya jyóg  
āmāyati yó jyógāmayāvī syād yó vā kāmāyeta sárvaṃ āyur iyām  
iti tasmā etām iṣṭim nír vaped āgnevám aṣṭákapālam... sārasvatám  
carim... agnér evāsya śārīraṃ niṣkriṇāti... [1] ... sārasvaténa  
vācam dadhāti... [2]*

Of him, the body goes to Agni... the speech to Sarasvatī... he who has been sick for a long time. He who may have been sick for a long time or who should desire “I would go the full length of [my] life,” for him he (the priest) should offer this *iṣṭi* (wish offering in the form of a cake made of rice, barley, and pulse) on eight potsherds dedicated to Agni... a bowl of porridge dedicated to Sarasvatī... He thus redeems his body from Agni... [1] ... and by [the bowl] dedicated to Sarasvatī, he (the priest) puts speech [back into him]... [2]

Appropriately, the tip of the tongue of the sacrificial horse, as already noted in the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (25:1), is offered to Sarasvatī during the Aśvamedha.<sup>6</sup>

There is also a custom wherein a person unable to speak (or to speak properly) offers a ewe to Sarasvatī, for she is Speech. In return, Sarasvatī bestows speech on the individual, who is then able to speak well. As the *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* describes, “he from whom speech draws away should offer a ewe to Sarasvatī, [for] Sarasvatī is speech, [and thus] it is Sarasvatī who abandons him.”<sup>7</sup> The individual may actually have the ability to speak, but, presumably owing to some other impediment, is unable to do so (TS 2:1:2:6-7):

<sup>5</sup> KS 35:20 [67,11] = KpS 47:18: [63,18] = MS 1:10:5 [145,16]

<sup>6</sup> See p.60 above.

<sup>7</sup> KS 12:13 [175,11-12] *sārasvatim meṣim ā labheta yāsmād vāg apakrāmed vāg vai sārasvatī sārasvaty etāsmād āpa krāmati...*

*sārasvatīm meṣīm ā labheta yā īśvaró vācó vāditoḥ sán vācam  
ná vāded vāg vai sārasvatī sārasvatīm evā svēna bhāgadhēyenópa  
dhāvati sāivāsmin [6] vācam dadhāti pravaditā vācó bhavati...  
[7]*

He who, though being able to speak, would not speak should offer a ewe dedicated to Sarasvatī, [for] Sarasvatī is speech. It is to Sarasvatī that he has recourse with her own share. She places speech in him, [and] he would speak.<sup>8</sup>

Within a general sacrificial context, whatever defect knowingly or unknowingly may have occurred through omission is removed by means of speech, of Sarasvatī, says the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* (1:11:9[170,21-171,3]):

*... vāg vai sārasvatī vācā yajñāḥ sántato vācāivā yajñām sántanoti  
yād vai yajñāsya vidvān ná károti yac cávidvān antaréti tāt  
chidrām tād vācāivā sārasvatyā kalpayati...<sup>9</sup>*

Sarasvatī is speech. Through speech the sacrifice is made continuous. It is through speech that he (the sacrificer) makes continuous the sacrifice. That which one who knows does not perform in the [process of the] sacrifice or that which one who does not know omits, that error is rectified through speech, through Sarasvatī.

Through Sarasvatī, therefore, because she is speech, the sacrifice is performed uninterruptedly and thus successfully.

Conversely, Sarasvatī may be invoked for negative effects on an adversary's speech. One who is about to litigate regarding a field or cattle should offer a milchcow that has

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<sup>8</sup> TS 2:1:2:6 = TS 3:4:3:3-4

I translate *pravaditā vācó bhavati* as "he would speak," following Kielhorn (1898, p.19 [repr. 1969, p.296]), and in line with *īśvaró vāditoḥ sán vācam ná vāded* "though being able to speak, would not speak."

<sup>9</sup> MS 1:11:9[170,21-171,3] ≅ KS 14:9[208,17-19]

ceased to give milk (*dhenuṣṭari*) to Sarasvatī so that the adversary's speech may be averted or diverted by means of *vāc*. explains the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* (2:5:4[52.11-13]):

*sārasvatīm dhenuṣṭarīm ā labheta yāh kṣētre paśūṣu vā vivādeta  
vāg vai sārasvatī vācāivaiśām vācam vṛikte*

Likewise, in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (3:3:9), the officiant, it is said, should recite the Sarasvatī mantras in confusion to deprive the patron of a sacrifice of speech:

*yaṃ kāmayeta vācainam vyardhayāniti sārasvatam asya lubdham  
śamsed ṛcam vā padam vāṭiyāt tenaiva tal lubdham vācavainam  
tad vyardhayati*

If he desire of a man, 'Let me deprive him of speech,' he should recite for him (the triplet) to Sarasvatī in confusion; he should pass over a verse or a line; thereby is it confused; verily thus he deprives him of speech.<sup>10</sup>

## ii. Speech as Knowledge

Vāc, however, as we have seen, has never been merely speech.<sup>11</sup> In the Brāhmaṇas she is that which is embodied in and communicated through speech: she is knowledge. Above all, she is knowledge in the form of the Vedas. Vāc is the mother of the Vedas (*védānām mātā*).<sup>12</sup> She is also the Vedas themselves (ŚB 6:5:3:4):

*māhiṣi hī vāk tryālikhitā bhavati tredhāvihitā hī vāg ṛco  
yājūṃṣi sāmāny ātho yād idam trayam vāco rūpam...*

<sup>10</sup> Translation by Keith in 1920, p.167.

<sup>11</sup> See pp.36-37 above.

<sup>12</sup> TB 2:8:8:5. Cf. ŚB 5:5:5:12 *etād vai sahasram vācāḥ prajātam yād eṣā trayo vedaḥ...* "the three Vedas are the thousandfold progeny of speech."



... for the cow Vāc is delineated as threefold. Vāc is divided into three kinds: *ṛc*, *yajus*, *sāman*, which is the threefold form of Vāc...<sup>13</sup>

Vāc's territory, however, does extend beyond the Vedas to embrace all forms of knowledge. As all waters meet in the ocean, explains the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14:5:4:11),<sup>14</sup> all sciences (*vidyā*) merge in Vāc:

*sá yáthā sárvasām apām samudrá ekāyanám...  
evám sárvasām vidyānām vág ekāyanám //*

All that is to be known is known through Vāc, says sage Yājñavalkya to king Janaka in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14:6:10:6):

*ṛgvedó yajurvedáh sāmavedò 'tharvāngirása itihāsáh purānám  
vidyā upaniśadaḥ ślókāḥ sūtrāṇy anuvyākhyānāni vyākhyānāni  
vācāivā samrāt prā jñāyante...*

Through Vāc alone, O sovereign, are known the *Rg Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sāma Veda*, the [mantras of the] Atharvan- and Aṅgiras-priests (= *Atharva Veda*), history, ancient lore, the sciences, the Upaniṣads, verses, aphorisms, explanations, [and] commentaries.<sup>15</sup>

And *vāg vai sárasvatī*. While Sarasvatī in the *Rg Veda* presided over *dhī*, when inspired thought was translated into speech in the form of recitation, and transmitted as knowledge from generation to generation, Sarasvatī as Vāc became a source of knowledge.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. ŚB 10:5:1:2 *sá vá eṣá vák tredhāvihitá / ṛco yājūmṣi sāmāni...*

<sup>14</sup> ŚB 14:5:4:11 = ŚB 14:7:3:12 ≅ BAU 2:4:11 = BAU 4:5:12

<sup>15</sup> ŚB 14:6:10:6 ≅ BAU 4:1:2

## b. Prajāpati and His Daughters

### i. Prajāpati and Vāc

The *Rg Veda* notion of Vāc as all-pervading creator is redefined in the Brāhmaṇas and the Brāhmaṇa passages of the *Yajur Veda* in relation to the creator Prajāpati. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* comment on a passage in the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (9:1), where the Lord of Speech (Vācaspati) is mentioned, it says that Vācaspati means Prajāpati: *prajāpatir vai vācāspatiḥ* (ŚB 5:1:1:16).<sup>16</sup> Prajāpati made himself swell with speech, and he made her his follower: *vācaivā tāt prajāpatiḥ pūnar ātmānam āpyāyayata... vācam āmukām ātmāno 'kuruta...* (ŚB 3:9:1:7). Speech is Prajāpati's creation or offspring, for she is second to him, but she is also his consort, with whom he unites to create beings, the *Kāthaka Saṃhitā* explains (27:1[137,8-10]):

*prajāpatir vā idam āsīt taṣya vāg dvitīyāsīt tāṃ mithunam sam  
abhavat sā garbham adhatta... semāḥ prajā asṛjata sā prajāpatim  
eva punaḥ prāviśat...*

There was Prajāpati. Speech was his second. He united with her, [and] she conceived... She emitted these beings, [and] re-entered Prajāpati.

If Prajāpati is to couple with anyone or anything, it must necessarily be with his own offspring, for he is the creator of all and exists alone prior to creation. Prajāpati is also

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<sup>16</sup> *Vācāspati* appears already in the *Rg Veda* as an epithet of Soma for instance (9:26:4c; 9:101:5c). Originally two independent words, *vācās* and *pāti*, it is traditionally considered a compound, although the preservation of the two accents suggests two separate words.

sacrifice,<sup>17</sup> and therefore, as Sylvain Lévi explains,<sup>18</sup> naturally has speech as his helper, since rite is inseparable from formula. It is thus specifically through speech, in one form or another, that Prajāpati chooses to procreate,<sup>19</sup> as the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (7:6:2) indicates:

*sa ādīdhīta garbho vai me 'yam antar hitas  
taṃ vācā prajanayā iti*

He thought intently: “This embryo of mine is placed inside [me].  
That I shall engender through speech.”

Sometimes instead of speech it is by means of specific words that Prajāpati creates, as in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11:1:6:3):

*sā bhūḥ iti vyāharat sēyāṃ pṛthivyā bhavad bhūva iti tād idāṃ  
antārikṣam abhavat svāḥ iti sāsāu dyāuḥ abhavat...*

He uttered *bhūḥ*, [and] that (*bhūḥ*) became this earth. [He uttered] *bhūvaḥ*, [and] that (*bhūvaḥ*) became this intermediary space. [He uttered] *svāḥ*, [and] that (*svāḥ*) became yonder sky.

Thus when Prajāpati utters words, it is those very words that transform themselves into the earth, the intermediary space, and the sky. Pronounced speech becomes creation, and therefore creation is speech in a particular form—speech that has taken form. Likewise in the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*, Prajāpati creates the universe by pronouncing. When he

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. MS 3:6:5[65.3] *yajñó vai prajāpatih;* ŚB 1:7:4:4 *sā vai yajñā evā prajāpatih;* AB 7:7:2 *prajāpatir yajñah.*

<sup>18</sup> 1898, pp.21-22.

<sup>19</sup> There are indeed passages where Prajāpati is said to create or procreate alone (e.g. TB 2:2:9:1-10). My study, however, is not on Prajāpati as such, and therefore I discuss only the passages where he appears either with Vāc or another of his daughters, in so far as this father-daughter relationship bears on the Puranic Brahmā-Sarasvati relationship. For a study of Prajāpati, see Lévi 1898, pp.13-35, for instance.

pronounces, he divides all-pervading speech<sup>20</sup> into three sounds (PB 20:14:2):

*prajāpatir vā idam eka āsīt tasya vāg eva svam āsīd vāg dvitīyā  
sa aikṣatemām eva vācam vi srjā iyaṃ vā idam sarvaṃ vibhavanty  
eṣyatīti sa vācam vy asrjata sedam sarvaṃ vibhavanty ait  
sordhvodātanod yathāpāṃ dhārā santataivaṃ tasyā eti tṛtīyam  
acchinat tad bhūmir abhavad abhūd iva vā idam iti tad bhūmer  
bhūmitvaṃ keti tṛtīyam acchinat tad antarīksam abhavad antareva  
vā idam iti tad antarīksasyāntarīksatvaṃ ho iti tṛtīyam ūrdhvaṃ  
udāsyat tat dyaus abhavad adyutat iva vā ada iti tad divo  
divatvaṃ //*

Prajāpati was here alone. Only speech was his own, speech his second. He considered: “Let me emit this speech. She will go on pervading all this.” He emitted speech, and she went on pervading all this. She extended upwards like a continuous stream of water. Saying “a,” he cut a third of her. That became the earth. “This has come into existence (*abhūt*) as it were.” [he said]. That is why the earth is called *bhūmi*. Saying “ka,” he cut a third [of her]. That became the middle region. “This is in the middle (*antarā*) as it were.” [he said]. That is why the middle region is called *antarīkṣa*. Saying “ho,” he threw upwards a third [of her]. That became the sky. “That yonder has lit up (*adyutat*) as it were. [he said]. That is why the sky is called *dyaus*.”

Thus there are different ways in which Prajāpati joins with his offspring Vāc to create: he unites with her as his consort (KS 27:1[137.8-10]; PB 7:6:2-3) and she then emits beings, or he pronounces either words or sounds (speech), which take form (ŚB 11:1:6:3; PB 20:14:2).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Cf. ŚB 6:1:1:9 ... *vāg evāsyā sāsṛjyata sēdam sārvaṃ āpnot...*

<sup>21</sup> Another possibility is found in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, where beings are emitted *after* he utters a particular formula (2:33:5): *prajāpatir vā idam eka evāgra āsa so 'kāmayata prajāveya bhūyān syām iti sa tapo 'tapyata sa vācam ayacchat sa samvatsarasya parastād vyāharad dvādaśakṛtvo dvādaśapadā vā eṣā nivid etām vāva tām nividam vyāharat tām sarvāṇi bhūtāny anv asṛjyanta* “Prajāpati was here all alone in the beginning. He desired: ‘May I procreate. May I become more.’ He heated himself. He restrained speech. After a full year he spoke twelve times. This [well-known] invitation formula (*nivid*) has twelve verses. It is this *nivid* which he uttered. After that (*nivid*) all beings were emitted.”

## ii. *Rg Veda* Background

The theme of the union of the father with his daughter occurs already in the *Rg Veda*. In fact, if we carefully compare the relevant *Rg Veda* passages with the Brāhmaṇa accounts of Prajāpati and his daughter, as we shall do, it becomes amply clear that the Brāhmaṇa stories are derived from the *Rg Veda* stanzas. The Brāhmaṇa accounts, in turn, form the basis for the Puranic Brahmā-Sarasvatī relationship, as we shall see. Hence these *Rg Veda* stanzas and their Brāhmaṇa derivatives are of vital importance in understanding the mythology that grew up around Sarasvatī by the time of the Purāṇas.

In past scholarship dealing specifically with Brahmā and Sarasvatī or Prajāpati and his daughter, some of the relevant *Rg Veda* and Brāhmaṇa passages have been referred to, summarized, and at most a line or so has been quoted.<sup>22</sup> Many of the Brāhmaṇa accounts have been taken up—or rather listed—in the context of Brāhmaṇa studies,<sup>23</sup> while the *Rg Veda* stanzas have been discussed in Vedic studies.<sup>24</sup> As far as I am aware, all of the relevant Vedic passages have never been systematically discussed side by side in order to show their connection with one another.<sup>25</sup> It is precisely this task, then, which I would like to take up here.

Macdonell cautiously suggests that RV 1:71:5 and 10:61:5-7 “seem” to be the basis

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<sup>22</sup> Dixit 1943-44; Kantawala 1958-59; Dange 1963; Kantawala 1980-81.

<sup>23</sup> See Lévi 1898, pp.20-23, for instance.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, Oldenberg 1909, vol.1, p.74; Geldner 1951, vol.1, p.93n.; Dange 1979, pp.142-145.

<sup>25</sup> At best, Dange in 1963 briefly summarized a few of the Vedic and Puranic passages. Although he claimed to have taken up “all the accounts where the myth of Prajāpati and his daughter occurs” (p.43), this was not the case. He neither quoted nor translated any of the passages in question.

for the myth of Prajāpati and his daughter.<sup>26</sup> Sadashiv Ambadas Dange refers to Macdonell, but takes only 10:61:5,7 as “the probable origin of this myth.”<sup>27</sup> S.G. Kantawala, on the other hand, does not speak of probabilities, but simply claims the “germs of the incestuous relation between a father and a daughter” as depicted in the *Matsya Purāna* to be traceable to RV 1:71:5 and 10:61:5-9.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, in referring to the *Rg Veda* passages as the “germs” from which the Brahmā-Sarasvatī myth has arisen, he too is being cautious, identifying links in a rather vague, distant way. I suspect what he had in mind here was the Puranic inheritance of the father-daughter incest *theme* from Vedic literature, rather than direct links between the relevant passages.

Let us turn then these *Rg Veda* stanzas.

1:71:5  
*mahē yāt pitrā im rāsam divé kār*  
*āva tsarat prśanyāś cikītvān /*  
*srjād āstā dhr̥ṣatā didyūm asmai*  
*svāyām devō duhitāri tvīṣim dhāt //*

When he (Agni) had prepared [seminal] fluid for the great father Heaven, he (Heaven), being aware of flirtations<sup>29</sup> came down stealthily. The archer boldly shot his arrow at him, when the god (Heaven) had put his energy into his own daughter.

This stanza has been interpreted in various rather different ways. He who comes down

<sup>26</sup> 1897, p.119.

<sup>27</sup> 1963, p.46.

<sup>28</sup> 1980-81, p.219. See also Kantawala 1958-59, p.39. The *Matsya Purāna* myth referred to by Kantawala is discussed below on pp.131-35.

<sup>29</sup> The feminine noun *prśani*, touching or caressing, may come from root *spars*, to touch (Mayerhofer 1996, vol.2, pp.163-64). See also EVP vol.16, p.137: “gestes d’amour pour attirer,” properly “attouchements.” The word appears in three passages of the *Rg Veda* (1:71:5b; 10:61:8d; 10:73:2a), in the last of which, according to Renou, it means courtesan.

stealthily is Heaven according to Oldenberg<sup>30</sup> and Renou.<sup>31</sup> the archer according to Geldner.<sup>32</sup> The one referred to as *prśanyās cikītvān* is then interpreted by Oldenberg as Heaven who is aware of the females, by Renou as Heaven who is skilled at flirting, and by Geldner as the archer who is aware of the flirting (of Heaven with his own daughter). In Oldenberg's understanding, therefore, father Heaven comes down stealthily to approach the females, but is driven away by the archer's arrow, and thus turns to his own daughter. According to Geldner and Renou, on the other hand, on the basis of their understanding of *prśanyāḥ* here as flirtations,<sup>33</sup> Heaven's intention has always been with his own daughter. Despite the difficulties presented by this stanza, what is essential for us here is the incestuous nature of the relationship of the father with his own daughter, and the shooting of an arrow at him by an archer.

The incest theme recurs in RV 10:61:5-7, with the main features appearing in stanza 7:<sup>34</sup>

10:61:7  
*pitā yāt svām duhitāram adhiṣkān*  
*kṣmayā rétaḥ samjagmānō ni śiñcat /*  
*svādhyò [']janayan brāhma devā*  
*vāstoṣ pātīm vratapām nīr atakṣan //*

When the father had jumped on his own daughter, he spilled his semen on the earth when making love to her. The gods of good intention produced *brāhman*, [and from that *brāhman*] they

<sup>30</sup> 1909, vol. I, p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> EVP vol. 12, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> 1951, vol. I, p. 93n.

<sup>33</sup> As mentioned in note 29 above, there is one instance (RV 10:73:2a) in which Renou understands *prśanī* to mean courtesan.

<sup>34</sup> RV 10:61:5-6 describe the sexual act.

fashioned out the Lord of the Sacrificial Ground (*vāstoṣ páti*)  
who protects observances .

*Vāstoṣ páti*, who appears in 10:61:7d, is, according to Oldenberg,<sup>35</sup> the guardian spirit of the place. Geldner, on the other hand, refers to Sāyaṇa, who believes it is Rudra.<sup>36</sup> Clearly on the basis of later accounts of Prajāpati/Brahmā's union with his own daughter, Renou understands the archer in 1:71:5c to be Rudra.<sup>37</sup> Although neither the archer nor *vāstoṣ páti* can definitely be connected with Rudra in the *Rg Veda*,<sup>38</sup> later, *vāstoṣ páti* does indeed come to be identified with Rudra, as in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (3:4:10:3), for example: *rudrāḥ khālu vái vāstoṣpatīḥ*. Rudra also appears in the *Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā* (4:2:11[35,11-15]), *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1:7:4:1ff.), and *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* (261-62) accounts of Prajāpati's union with his daughter. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (3:33:2-3), reference is made to him as Bhūtapati as well as Paśupati, on whom lordship over cattle is bestowed. Rudra, who is Bhūtapati already in the *Atharva Veda* (2:14:4; 11:2:1; 11:6:21), is referred to as Paśupati in the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (24:3), *Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā* (4:2:11[35,13-15]), *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5:3:3:7), and other texts. In this connection, it is not without interest that *vāstoṣ páti*, together with Soma, is called on in the *Rg Veda* (7:54:2ab) to confer prosperity in cattle and horses: *vāstoṣ pate pratāraṇo na edhi gayasphāno gōbhir áśvebhir indo* / In the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* account of the incestuous union (8:2:10), Rudra or Paśupati are not referred to, but cattle are mentioned.

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<sup>35</sup> 1912, vol.2, p.265 on RV 10:61:7.

<sup>36</sup> 1951, vol.3, p.228.

<sup>37</sup> EVP, vol.12, p.17.

<sup>38</sup> In RV 7:54:2ab (quoted in main text), *vāstoṣ páti* seems to be identified with Soma, who is here referred to as *indu*, "drop." At least in this hymn, *vāstoṣ páti* is clearly not Rudra.



There is one other passage in the *Ṛg Veda* noted by Dange, wherein the father-daughter incest is also mentioned:

3:31:1  
*śāsad vāhnir duhitūr naptvām gād  
vidvām ṛtāsya dīdhitim saparyān/  
pitā yātra duhitūh sékam ṛñjān  
sām śagmyèna mānasā dadhanvé //*

(Agni) the conveyer (of the sacrifice) went to the granddaughter, (daughter) of the daughter, instructing (her), knowing the truth, cherishing the insight, when the father, directing his (seminal) flow for the daughter, with an able mind let (it) run.

*Ṛta* is truth and order. Agni who cherishes his own insight into it is thus comparable to *vāstoṣ pāti* who protects the observances (*vratapā*) in 10:61:7d.

### iii. Prajāpati and Uṣas or Dyaus

In the Brāhmaṇas, as we have seen, Prajāpati unites with his daughter Vāc as consort. He also takes other offspring as his consort, namely Uṣas (Dawn) and Dyaus (Sky). Although the Puranic Brahmā-Sarasvatī relationship is a kind of continuation of that of Prajāpati and Vāc by way of name change, for Prajāpati becomes Brahmā, and Sarasvatī-Vāc are one and the same already in the Brāhmaṇas, Prajāpati's relationships with his other daughters play a significant role in shaping the Brahmā-Sarasvatī myth. They are also the connecting links with the *Ṛg Veda* passages discussed above, from which they are clearly derived. Let us examine then the Brāhmaṇa myths of Prajāpati and Uṣas or Dyaus.

There are five Brāhmaṇa accounts of Prajāpati with Uṣas or Dyaus as daughter-consort:

- 1) *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (4:2:12[35.11-15])
- 2) *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1:7:4:1-3)
- 3) *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (3:33)
- 4) *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (8:2:10)
- 5) *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* (3:262)

To these may be added a sixth from the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (6:1:1-12), where Prajāpati's incestuous desire for his daughter is passed on to his offspring. From among Uṣas and Dyaus, Uṣas, it should be noted, is the more prominent of the two, with Dyaus appearing as an alternative possibility in the *Śatapatha* (1:7:4:1) and *Aitareya* (3:33) *Brāhmaṇa* accounts.

*Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (4:2:12[35.11-15])

In this account, Prajāpati and his daughter take animal forms as if to reduce the act to an animal level.

*prajāpatir vai svām duhitāram abhy ākāmāyatośāsam  
sā rohid abhavat tām řśyo bhūtvādhy ait*

Prajāpati desired his own daughter Uṣas. She became a red deer, [and he.] having become a buck, went on top of her. [35.11-12]

What followed is derived directly from RV 10:61:7d and 1:71:5c, in that order:

*tāsmā āpavratam achadayat tām āyatayābhiparyāvartata*

To him (Rudra) it seemed a perversity. He (Rudra) turned round to him (Prajāpati) with an [arrow] aimed at (him). [35.12-13]

*Vāstoṣ páti* of RV 10:61:7d was characterized as protecting the observances (*vratapá*).

Here, one who comes to be called Paśupati and Rudra [35.14-15] perceived Prajāpati's union with his daughter Uṣas to be against *vrata* (*āpavrata* [opposite of *ānuvrata*]). Thus, like the archer in RV 1:71:5c who shot his arrow at Heaven, Rudra aimed his arrow at Prajāpati. The alarmed creator tried to stop him, but failed:

*tāsmād vā abibhet sò 'bravit paśūnāṃ tvā pātiṃ karomy ātha  
me māsthātād vā aṣyaitān nāma paśupātir iti tāṃ  
abhyāyatyāvidhyat sò 'rodīt tād vā aṣyaitān nāma rudrā iti*

He (Prajāpati) was afraid of him. He (Prajāpati) said: "I will make you the lord of cattle. So do not shoot at me." Therefore he is called Paśupati. Having aimed at him (Prajāpati), he (Paśupati) pierced him. He (Prajāpati) cried. That is why he (Paśupati) is called Rudra .

#### *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1:7:4:1-3)

In this account, Prajāpati's daughter Uṣas becomes interchangeable with Dyaus, whose name has now crept into the story, and the transformation into animal forms is omitted.

*prajāpatir ha vai svām duhitāram abhi dadhyau /  
dīvaṃ vośasaṃ vā mithunya enayā syām iti tāṃ sām babhūva //*

Prajāpati set his mind on his own daughter, either Sky or Dawn.  
"May I pair with her," (he wished). He made love to her. (1:7:4:1)

The sense of the sinfulness of Prajāpati's act, which was attributed to the one about to become Paśupati-Rudra in the *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā* (4:2:11[35,12-13]), is here assigned to the gods. They call on the lord of cattle to punish him (1:7:4:2-3):

*tād vai devānām āga āsa / yā itthām svām duhitāram asmākam  
svāsāram karotīti // té ha devā ūcuh / yò 'yām devāḥ paśūnām  
īṣṭe 'tisamdhām vā ayām carati yā itthām svām duhitāram  
asmākam svāsāram karōti vīdhyemām iti tām rudrò 'bhyāyātva  
vivyādha tāsya sāmī rétaḥ prá caskanda táthén nūnām tād āsa //*

That indeed was a sin for the gods: “He who acts thus towards his own daughter, our sister, [commits a sin].” [2] Those gods then said to this god who is lord of cattle: “An act of transgression he commits who acts thus towards his own daughter, our sister. Pierce him.” Rudra, having aimed at (him), pierced him. In the middle (of the act), his semen spurted forth. Thus indeed it was. [3]

### *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (3:33)

In this account, the interchangeability of the daughter’s identity is explained as based on divergent opinions. While some said she was Dyaus, others said she was Uṣas: *prajāpatir vai svām duhitaram abhy adhyāyad divam ity anya āhur uṣasam ity anye*. Here, as in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, therefore, there is an awareness of different versions of the story. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* account then follows the *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*, in that Prajāpati takes the form of a buck and Dyaus or Uṣas that of a deer (*tām ṛśyo bhūtvā rohitam bhūtām abhy ait* ). As in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the gods seek to punish him for his act. Instead of calling on the one who is already “lord of cattle” (ŚB 1:7:4:3), however, they produce a being of dreadful form who asks for this title as a boon for piercing Prajāpati. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* gods thus bestow on him that which the *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā* Prajāpati granted in fear and in vain to the one who was preparing to shoot at him. A bribe so as not to act has become advance payment for requested services:

*taṃ devā apaśyann akṛtaṃ vai prajāpatiḥ karoti te tam aīchan  
ya enam āriṣyaty etam anyonyasmin nāvindamś teṣāṃ yā eva  
ghorataṃs tānva āsaṃs tā ekadhā samabharamś tāḥ sambhṛtā  
eṣa devo 'bhavat tad asyaitad bhūtavan nāma [1] bhavati vai sa  
yo 'syaitad evaṃ nāma veda [2] taṃ devā abruvann ayaṃ vai  
prajāpatir akṛtaṃ akar imāṃ vidhyeti sa tathety abravīt sa vai  
vo varam vṛnā iti vṛnīṣveti sa etam eva varam avṛṇīta paśūnām  
ādhipatyam tad asyaitat paśuman nāma [3] paśumān bhavati yo  
'syaitad evaṃ nāma veda [4]*

The gods saw him (Prajāpati). "Prajāpati does what is not done."<sup>39</sup> They sought one who would get at him. They could not find this (god) amongst one another. Their most dreadful forms they gathered into one. Brought together those (forms) became (*abhavat*) this god. Therefore this name of his (i.e. Bhūtapati) contains (the word) *bhūta*. [1] He thrives who thus knows this name of his. [2] To him the gods said: "Prajāpati here has done what is not done. Pierce him." "So be it," he said. "Let me choose a boon from you." "Choose," (they said). He chose this boon: overlordship of cattle (*paśu*). Therefore this name of his (i.e. Paśupati) contains (the word) *paśu*. [3] As an owner of cattle he thrives, if he thus knows this name of his. [4]

When the being (Rudra) then pierces him, Prajāpati goes flying into the air. His semen gushes out and becomes a pond.<sup>40</sup>

*Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (8:2:10)

This account is very short, omitting the reaction of the gods and Rudra's punishment.

Cattle are made out of Prajāpati's spilled semen so that it is not spoiled:

<sup>39</sup> *Akṛtam* means "that which has not been done," implying "that which should not be done."

<sup>40</sup> *taṃ abhyāyatyāvīdhyat sa viddha ūrdhva udaprapatat.. [5] tad vā idam prajāpate retaḥ siktam adhāvat...*

*prajāpatir uṣasam adhy ait svām duhitaram tasya retah parāpatat  
tad asyām ny aśicyata tad aśrīnād idam me mā duṣad iti tat sad  
akarot paśūn eva //*

Prajāpati went on top of his own daughter Uṣas. His semen flew away. It was poured on this one (the earth). He made it perfect, (thinking): “let this of me not be spoiled.” He made it (something) real, namely cattle.

### *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* (3:262)

As the gods in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* account (3:33:1) produced Bhūtapati/Paśupati by bringing together their most dreadful forms, in the *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* they created Rudra from what in themselves was crude. Their initial purpose for fashioning him out, however, was not to punish Prajāpati for his transgression, but rather to make themselves fit to perform a sacrificial session by removing the crude part from within themselves. The *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* story thus begins just as the gods are commencing the session:

*devā vai sattram upayanto 'bruvan yan nah krūram ātmanas  
tan nirmimāmahai / mā sakrūrā upagāmeti / tad yad eṣām  
krūram ātmana āsit tan nirmāya śarāvayoh sammārjam  
nyadadhur / atha sattram upāyāms / tata eṣo 'khalo devo  
'jāvata / tad yac charāvābhvyām ajāyata tad asyaitan nāma /  
eṣa ha vāva so 'gnir jajñe / na hainam eṣa hinasti ya evam  
veda /*

Starting a sacrificial session, the gods said: “That [part] of us which is crude, let us give form to. Let us not start with (that which is) crude.” Having given form to that [part] of themselves which was crude, they wiped it clean and placed it between two vessels, [one covering the other]. Then they started the session. Thereupon this dangerous<sup>41</sup> god was born. Because he was born

<sup>41</sup> The adjective *akhala* is probably a misspelling of *aghalā* (from *aghā* n. evil), which appears in AV 8:8:10c (*mṛtyōr yé aghalā dūtāḥ* “the dangerous messengers who are of death”), in ŚB 12:7:3:20 where *aghalā devātā* is Rudra, and four times in JB 2:266:12ff. qualifying dangerous wild animals, like the tiger

from the two vessels (*śarāva*), that is why he has this name (i.e. *śarva*, a name of Śiva). That Agni was really born as this one. This one does not harm him (the sacrificer), if he knows thus.

When this Rudra-Agni then inquired as to why the gods had created him, they replied, leaving their initial purpose of “self-purification” behind, that it was for supervision, so he would kill one who might transgress: *aupadraṣṭryāyety abruvan yo 'tipādayāt tam hanāsā iti* / It is only then that the story of Prajāpati and his daughter—in this case Uṣas and no other—is told. As in the *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā* and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, they take animal forms. Supervisor Rudra-Agni then recalls the purpose of his existence and pierces Prajāpati:

*prajāpatir hoṣasam svām duhitaram abhy adhyāyat / sāsmāi rohid bhūtvātiṣṭhat / tāṃ pṛṣato bhūtvāskandat / sa aikṣatāsmāi vai māṃ devā ajījanann aupadraṣṭryāya / ati vā ayaṃ pādayati hantainam vidhyānīti / tam avidhyat / sa viddha etad rūpaṃ pratyasyordhvodakrāmat //*

Prajāpati set his mind on Uṣas, his own daughter. She, having become a deer, stood still for him. He, having become a buck, jumped on her. He (Rudra-Agni) reflected: “For this have the gods produced me, for supervision. This one (Prajāpati) transgresses. Let me pierce him.” He pierced him. Pierced, he threw off this (buck) appearance and rose upwards.

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(*aghalās śimhā aghelās śārdūlā aghalā ṛkṣā ṛkṣikā aghalā ahayo jagarāḥ*). Hence it has the sense, particularly in the *Jaminiya Brāhmaṇa*, of dangerous rather than evil. The “dangerous god” in our passage is Rudra, as the ŚB makes clear. Caland (1931, p.166, note 3), however, understands *akhala* to mean “not-wicked,” and thus to be a euphemism like *śivā* “the friendly one” because he is unfriendly. According to this understanding, therefore, the name Rudra is not used so as not to invoke his “wicked” presence, for by naming, as we have seen on p.71 above, that which is denoted by the name comes into existence.

The *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* account has a different twist on the story. Here the issue of Prajāpati's incest is avoided altogether by passing the incest on, so to speak, to his offspring. It is not entirely passed on, however, because although they are aroused by their sister Uṣas, they never actually commit incest with her, as Prajāpati did with his daughter.

*prajāpatiḥ prajātikāmas tapo 'tapyata / tasmāt taptāt  
pañcājāyanta / agniḥ vāyur ādityaś candramā uṣāḥ pañcamī /  
tān abravīd yūyam api tapyadhvam iti / te 'dikṣanta / tān dikṣitāms  
tepanān uṣāḥ prajāpatyāpsarorūpaṃ kṛtvā purastāt pratyud ait /  
tasyām eṣāṃ manaḥ sam apatat / te reto 'siñcanta / te prajāpatiḥ  
pitaram etyābruvan / reto vā asicāmahai<sup>42</sup> tan no māmuyā bhū  
iti / sa prajāpatir hiraṇmayam camasam akarot... tasmin retaḥ  
sam asiñcat /*

Prajāpati, desiring offspring, heated himself. From him being heated, five [beings] were born: Agni, Vāyu, Āditya, Candramas, and Uṣas as fifth. He said to them: “You also, heat yourselves.” They consecrated themselves. Facing them being consecrated, [i.e.] having heated themselves, Prajāpati's daughter Uṣas rose up in the east, having taken the form of an *apsaras*. Their mind fell in (love) with her all at once (*sam*). They spilled their semen. They came to Prajāpati their father and said: “We have spilled our semen. Let this (semen) of us not become in that (bad) way.”<sup>43</sup> Prajāpati made a golden cup... into that he poured it (the semen of Agni, Vāyu, Āditya, and Candramas) together.

Thus there is a shift away from any blameworthy action on the part of the creator. The incestuous union of the father with his daughter does persist in the Purāṇas, and Prajāpati's

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<sup>42</sup> The hybrid form *asicāmahai*, beginning as a root-aorist but ending as a subjunctive, cannot be correct. As Keith (1920, p.377n) points out, it should be the aorist *asicāmahi*.

<sup>43</sup> The *amuyā bhū* “become in that way” is identical with *pāpāyā amuyā bhū* “become in that bad way,” which occurs less frequently. In the *R̥g Veda*, *amuyā* occurs on its own four times (1:32:8a; 4:18:1d; 5:34:5c; 10:89:14d) and three times with *pāpāyā* (*pāpāyāmuyā*) (1:29:5b; 10:85:30b; 10:135:2b).



union with either Vāc, Uṣas, or Dyaus forms the basis for the Puranic Brahmā-Sarasvatī relationship, where Prajāpati-turned-Brahmā falls in love with his daughter Sarasvatī and takes her for his consort. Concern about the impropriety of incest, however, remains an issue, and it is addressed, rather at length, as we shall see, in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (4:1-11).<sup>44</sup>

### c. The Barter for Soma

The Brāhmaṇas and the Brāhmaṇa passages of the *Yajur Veda Saṃhitās* include seven accounts of a myth wherein Soma is stolen by *gandharva* Viśvāvasu, and then bought back by the gods by means of Vāc:

- 1) *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (3:7:3[77.14ff.])
- 2) *Kāthaka Saṃhitā* (24:1[90.3ff.])
- 3) *Kapiṣṭhala Kātha Saṃhitā* (37:2[227.16ff.])
- 4) *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (6:1:6:5-6)
- 5) *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (1:27)
- 6) *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3:2:4:1-7)
- 7) *Vādhūla Brāhmaṇa* (Caland 1927, p.158 [repr. 1990, p.458])<sup>45</sup>

This myth presents a number of interesting points, two of which I would like to focus on here: the appearance of Vāc in the form of a woman or a girl and the first signs of her connection with music. These two aspects, furthermore, extend their impact onto Sarasvatī, with whom Vāc, as we have seen, is identified already in the Saṃhitās and then repeatedly

<sup>44</sup> See pp.134-35 below. The Puranic account which most closely follows the Brāhmaṇas is *Brahma Purāṇa* (102:2cd-8ab), where the transformation into animal forms is maintained.

<sup>45</sup> A critical edition of the basic texts (Brāhmaṇa or Anvākhyāna, Śrautasūtra, and Gṛhyasūtra) of the Vādhūla school is being prepared by Professor Ikari Yasuke 井狩弥介 of the Kyōto Daigaku Jinbunkagaku Kenkyūjo 京都大学人文科学研究所 (Institute for Research in Humanities at Kyoto University). In collaboration with Professor Michael Witzel, he is also preparing an annotated translation of the entire *Vādhūla Brāhmaṇa*. As far as the story of the Barter for Soma is concerned, Professor Ikari's working critical edition of it (4:29), which he most kindly showed me, is largely the same as Caland's.

in the Brāhmaṇas and the Brāhmaṇa passages of the Saṃhitās,<sup>46</sup> where this myth occurs. Hence the appearance of the *vinā* in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* version of the story could hardly have been without significance for the subsequent *vinā*-bearing Sarasvatī.

I will discuss here the seven Brāhmaṇa accounts of the Barter for Soma and conclude with a brief description of the account in the *Brahma Purāṇa* (105:1-18) derived from the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* version.

i. *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (3:7:3[77,14ff.])

As the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* recounts, *gandharva* Viśvāvasu stole Soma from Gāyatri and kept it for three nights (3:7:3[77,14-15]). The gods then said [77, 16-17]:

*strīkāmā vai gandharvā vācam evā sambhṛtya yāthā yoṣid  
anapakṣeyātameva tāyā nīskriṇāméti*

The *gandharvas* desire women. Having prepared Speech—as a young woman of undiminishing youth [would be, so she was prepared]—with her let us barter him out.<sup>47</sup>

And so it was that Vāc was exchanged for Soma. The gods, however, were not satisfied, it would seem, for they then decided to reclaim Vāc (*ānvṛtīyāmahā iti*).<sup>48</sup> This was the birth

<sup>46</sup> See p.65 above.

<sup>47</sup> Speech is likened to a woman already in RV 10:71:4cd: *utā tvah pāśyan nā dadarśa vācam utā tvah śṛṇvān nā śṛṇoty enām utō tvasmai tanvām ví sasre jāyéva pātva usatī suvāsāh* // “Someone, though watching, has not seen Speech. Someone, though listening, does not hear her. But to some (other) one she has opened (her) body, as a desiring wife, beautifully attired, (would open herself) to her husband.”

<sup>48</sup> According to Ingrid Kühn (1970, pp.91-93), who discusses the forms of *ānu-ṛtīyāmahai* (MS 3:7:3 [78,1]) and *ānu-ṛtīyanta* (MS 3:7:3[78,1]; KS 24:1[90,9]; KpS 37:2[228,3]) in the context of our myth, the meaning here is that after (*ānu*) the legitimate barter of Vāc for Soma, the gods contested it.

of untruth (*tād anṛtasya jānma*), for, as Ingrid Kühn points out,<sup>49</sup> the gods' contestation of a legitimate barter was illegitimate. "Let us invoke (her) separately," they said,<sup>50</sup> and a wooing competition between the *gandharvas* and the gods ensued: the gods invoked her with song (*gāthām devā āgāyan*) while the *gandharvas* uttered a charm (*brāhma gandharvā avadan*). She then turned to the gods (*sā devān upāvartata*).

A reading of *brāhman* as truth formulation<sup>51</sup> would suggest that Vāc chose music over the Vedas—entertainment over knowledge—which is precisely the understanding of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3:2:4:5-6).<sup>52</sup> The *gandharvas*, however, are not known to have any particular connection with, or knowledge of, the Vedas.<sup>53</sup> They do not, furthermore, "recite" (*śams*), as would be appropriate for a hymn or a prayer, but they "utter" or "pronounce" (*vad*). On the other hand, one might argue, Vāc represents all forms of knowledge (ŚB 14:5:4:11) and embodies the Vedas in particular (ŚB 6:5:3:4), and thus the proclamation (if not recitation) of the Vedas would be a logical choice in competing for the goddess of knowledge. Her function in this myth, however, is not in the form of goddess of knowledge, but rather as a woman: the *gandharvas* are not said to desire *knowledge*, in

<sup>49</sup> Kühn 1970, p.92.

<sup>50</sup> Although it would seem to be the gods who say this to the *gandharvas* (*tē 'bruvan vihvayāmahā iti*), in the KS (24:1[90,9-10]) and the KpS (37:2[228,4]) it is the *gandharvas* who suggest this: *tē gandharvā abruvan vihvayāmahā iti*.

<sup>51</sup> See Thieme 1952, pp. 118-119 [repr. 1971, pp. 127-128]. Although Thieme does not discuss this *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* passage, he does take up the parallel *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* passage (6:1:6:6) in note 3 of p.119 [repr. p.128], interpreting *brāhman* as truth formulation, either in the sense of mystical truths or as the threefold (*ṛc, sāman, yajus*) knowledge, in light of ŚB 3:2:4:5 (*vedān evā prōcire*). *Brāhman* in the sense of incantation, spell, or charm, on the other hand, is prevalent in the *Atharva Veda*, as in 4:37:11, for instance.

<sup>52</sup> See pp.93-94 below.

<sup>53</sup> Kühn (1970, p.92) believes the gods use a trick in choosing to sing, for song is the domain of the *gandharvas*. By the time of the *Mahābhārata*, the *gandharvas* are indeed musicians (see Hopkins 1915, p.154), but this does not seem to have been the case in Vedic texts. At most, the *Atharva Veda* (4:37:7ab) mentions the "dancing" *gandharva: anṛtyataḥ... gandharvāsya...*

which case Speech as goddess of knowledge would have been sent to them; they are said to desire *women*,<sup>54</sup> and thus Vāc in the form of a “young woman of undiminishing youth,” much like an *apsaras*, the usual spouse of a *gandharva*,<sup>55</sup> is exchanged for Soma. Consequently it is a woman whom the gods and the *gandharvas* vie for, and the means they resort to in order to win her over are chosen accordingly. As a man might use a line, speak some “magical” or captivating words to catch a woman’s attention, recite poetry or serenade her to win her heart, the *gandharvas* resort to a charm and the gods to a song. The use of charms to win a woman’s love was not uncommon, as evidenced in the *Atharva Veda* (2:30; 3:25; 6:8-9, 82, 102, 139).<sup>56</sup> Hence the consequences of her choice are then explained in terms of what *a woman* loves (MS 3:7:3[78.4-6]):

*tāsmāt vivāhé gāthā gīyate tāsmāt gāvant striyāḥ priyās tād yā  
evam vidvān gāthām gāyan hāstaṃ grhlāti sām hi jīryataḥ sāvam  
āyur ito nārtim nītas*

Therefore a song is sung at a wedding. Therefore one who sings is dear to a woman. That is why one knowing thus, singing a song, marries. Then the two (the married couple) age together. They live their whole lifespan. They do not get into difficulty.

Thus for a man the road to happy matrimony is by way of song—tragic indeed the fate of the tone-deaf!

As for the Soma barter, the text concludes (MS 3:7:3[78.6-7]):

<sup>54</sup> Cf. AV 4:37:11d *gandharvāḥ sacate striyāḥ* .

<sup>55</sup> AV 2:2:5cd *tābhyo gandharvāpatnibhyo 'psarābhyo 'karaṃ nāmaḥ* .  
AV 4:37:7b *gandharvāsyaṅpsarāpatēḥ* .

<sup>56</sup> Likewise charms were used to win a man (AV 2:36; 6:60,89,130-32).

*tād āhur á vai sá púnar agachan náivá kím caná  
somakráyañtí //*

About that [Soma barter] they say: “She (Vāc) did come back.  
There is no female with whom one barter for Soma.”

The gods were indeed clever in invoking her with song, for in this way, she was only temporarily exchanged for Soma. It should be noted here that a woman’s love of music, or the conception of the author(s) that all women love music, is not under judgement—much less under criticism—in this passage. It is appropriate to Vāc as speech, for speech is meaningful sound, which in song is set to music.

ii. *Kāthaka Samhitā* (24:1[90,3ff.]) and *Kapiṣṭhala Kātha Samhitā* (37:2[227,16ff.])

The *Kāthaka* and *Kapiṣṭhala Kātha Samhitā* accounts are almost identical, apart from a line not included in the *Kāthaka Samhitā* and a passage of the *Kāthaka Samhitā* corrected by Raghu Vira in his edition of the *Kapiṣṭhala Kātha Samhitā* in accordance with his reading of the *Kapiṣṭhala Kātha Samhitā*.

When the gods asked the *gandharvas* to return Soma to them, the *gandharvas* refused. The gods then considered bartering him back with a cow, but ultimately decided to send a woman, for the *gandharvas* desire women. “Having made speech a woman, let us release magic [with that woman],” they said (*vācam striyaṃ kṛtvā māyām upāvāsrjāmeti*).<sup>57</sup> Having done so, they then claimed Vāc back: “Soma is ours. She with whom one barter for Soma

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<sup>57</sup> KpS 37:2[228,1]. Schroeder’s edition of the *Kāthaka Samhitā* does not include this line. The action itself, however, is mentioned in both texts: (*te* in KpS) *vācam striyaṃ kṛtvā māyām upāvāsrjan* (KS 24:1[90,7-8] = KpS 37:2[228,1-2]).

is ours” (*asmākam somo 'smākam somakrayaṇīti*).<sup>58</sup> The *gandharvas* suggested a wooing competition, and Vāc chose the singing gods over the charm-pronouncing *gandharvas*. It was then concluded (KpS 37:2[228,6-8] ≡ KS 23:10[90,11-13]):

*tasmād gāyantam stri kāmāyate na brahma vadantam / adruhyad  
dhi sā brahmaṇe / tasmād āhur akṛitaḥ somo na somakrayaṇy  
asti / devān hi sā punar upāvartateti /*

Therefore a woman desires one who sings, not one who pronounces a charm, for she (Vāc) betrayed the charm. Therefore they say: “Soma is not bartered for. There is no female with whom one barter for Soma because she returned to the gods.”

Unlike the *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*, the *Kāthaka* and *Kapishthala Kaṭha Samhitās* say nothing about weddings and the life awaiting a man who sings. As if in abbreviated form, it is simply stated that a woman desires one who sings. On the other hand, the failure of the charm is noted. Speech “betrayed” the charm in that a charm is supposed to work, and in her case it did not. She frustrated it in not allowing it to have its intended effect on her. The final conclusion matches that of the *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*: Vāc was never really bartered away for Soma. The bartering was an illusion, a kind of magic (*māyā*) released by the gods upon having made Vāc a woman (KS 24:1[90,7-8]; KpS 37:2[228,1-2]). And this magic of the gods proved to be more powerful than the charms of the *gandharvas*.

### iii. *Taittirīya Samhitā* (6:1:6:5-6)

In the *Taittirīya Samhitā*, the gods made Vāc into “a one-year-old female” (*stri*

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<sup>58</sup> KS 24:1[90,9] = KpS 37:2[228,3-4]

*ékahāyani*). Once bartered for Soma, she took the form of a deer and ran away from the *gandharvas* (*sá rohid rūpam kṛtvā gandharvébhyaḥ* [5] *apakrámya*). She did not, however, return to the gods: she simply stood (*atiṣṭhat*)—between the gods and the *gandharvas*, it would seem. This time upon the suggestion of the gods (*té devā abruvan*), the two camps competed in summoning her. She chose the singing gods.

*brāhma gandharvā ávadann ágāyan devāḥ sá devān gáyata  
upāvartata tásmād gáyantam striyaḥ kāmayante kāmukā enam  
striyo bhavanti yá evam véda*

The *gandharvas* uttered a charm. The gods sang. She turned to the singing gods. Therefore women desire one who sings. Women are sure to<sup>59</sup> desire him who knows thus (6:1:6:6).

#### iv. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (1:27:1)

The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* account is unlike any of the others in that Vāc appears as goddess of knowledge. She is the controlling hand at the center of all activity: it is she who knows what to do when the gods and the seers consider how they might have Soma come to them, it is she who reassures them of her return when they resist bartering her away, and it is she who is then seemingly exchanged for Soma.

*somo vai rājā gandharveṣv āsīt tam devās ca ṛṣayaś  
cābhyadhyañyan katham ayam asmān somo rājā gacched iti sá  
vāg abravīt strikāmā vai gandharvā mayaiiva striyā bhūtayā  
pañadhvam iti neti devā abruvan katham vyaṃ tvad ṛte syāmeti  
sābravīt krīṇitaiva yarhi vāva vo mayārtho bhavitā tarhy eva vo  
'ham punar āgantāsmīti tatheti tayā mahānagnyā bhūtayā somam  
rājānam akrīṇan //*

<sup>59</sup> For the possible shades of meanings connected with the suffix *-uka-*, see Delbrück 1968, §123, p.182.

King Soma was amidst the *gandharvas*. The gods and the seers set their minds on him: “How might this King Soma come to us?” She, (i.e.) Vāc, said: “The *gandharvas* desire women. With me as a woman, barter [for Soma].” “No,” said the gods. “How could we be without you?” She said: “Do barter. As soon as your aim will be [attained] through me, I will come back to you.” “So be it.” With her as a *mahānagnī*, they bartered for King Soma.

The gods bartered, knowing there was no actual barter, for, as Vāc had assured them, as soon as they had Soma, she would return to them. While in the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* she was given the form of a young woman of undiminishing youth (*yoṣid anapakṣeyātāmā*), in the *Kāthaka* and *Kapiṣṭhala Kaṭha Saṃhitās* a woman (*strī*), and in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* a one-year-old female (*strī ékahāyaṇī*), in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* she herself took the form of a *mahānagnī*.<sup>60</sup> Keith translates this term literally as “great naked one,”<sup>61</sup> which might suggest a goddess, for she is called great, appearing in naked form like a celestial prostitute. This fits the context in that Vāc is indeed a goddess, around whom, as noted above, all activity revolves in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* account. She may not, however, be naked, for a *nagnikā*, as Thieme explains,<sup>62</sup> is a girl just before puberty. She is naked only in the sense that she does not yet have pubic hair. This would be more in line with the form Vāc is given in the other accounts, in most of which her youth or infancy are stressed.<sup>63</sup> A *mahānagnī*, therefore, may be a pre-pubescent goddess.

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<sup>60</sup> In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3:2:4:3), as we shall see, she is given the form of a young woman (*yoṣit*).

<sup>61</sup> Keith 1920 [repr. 1971], p.128.

<sup>62</sup> Thieme 1963, p.178 [repr. 1971, p.443].

<sup>63</sup> *Strī* in the *Kāthaka Saṃhitā* and *Kapiṣṭhala Kaṭha Saṃhitā* is not necessarily a fully grown woman. It may simply denote the feminine gender, as in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* where a “one-year-old woman” would be a contradiction in terms.



v. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (3:2:4:1-7)

In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, the gods sent Vāc to the *gandharvas*, knowing that she would return to them together with Soma (3:2:4:3):

*té hocuḥ / yoṣṭkāmā vai gandharvā / vācam evāibhyaḥ  
prāhinaṅvāma / sá naḥ sahá sómenāgamiṣyati / tébhyo vācam  
prāhiṅvant / sàinānt sahá sómenāgacchat //*

They said: “The *gandharvas* desire young women. Let us send Vāc to them. She will come [back] to us with Soma.” They sent Vāc to them. She came [back] to them with Soma.

The *gandharvas*, however, came after her, saying to the gods: “Soma is yours, but Speech is ours.” (3:2:4:4 *sómo yuṣmákam vág evāsmákam iti*) presumably understanding that Vāc had been bartered for Soma. The clever gods agreed, but added a condition: “So be it,” said the gods, “but since she has come here, do not lead her [away] forcibly, as it were. Let us invoke her separately” (*táthéti devá abruvann ihò céd āgān mainām abhiśáheva naiṣṭa vihvayāmahā iti*). As in the other accounts, a wooing competition then ensued. In this case, however, the gods not only sang, but also played a musical instrument (3:2:4:5-6):

*tásyai gandharvāḥ / védān evá prócira iti vai vayam vidméti  
vayam vidméti // átha devāḥ / viṅām evá sṛṣṭvā vādáyanto  
nigáyanto niṣedur iti vai te vayam gāsyāma iti tvā  
prāmodayiṣyāma iti...*

For her the *gandharvas* proclaimed the Vedas, (saying every time) “... Thus we know!” “... Thus we know!” [5] Then the gods produced a *viṅā* and sat down playing (it) and singing (to the sound of it). “... Thus we will sing for you.” “... Thus we will

amuse you.” (they said every time).

Here the charm (*bráhma*) is understood to be truth formulation in the form of the Vedas, and thus it is not simply a woman whom the *gandharvas* address, but it is the goddess of knowledge whom they seek to impress. As elsewhere the gods sing, but they are now accompanied by the *vinā*. This marks the very first mention of the *vinā* in connection with Vāc, for whose enjoyment it is and will continue to be played. She will choose to remain with the gods, and thus also with the *vinā*. This connection is particularly significant, for the *vinā* will become Sarasvatī’s supreme emblem, dominant amongst her attributes, and thus represented in so many of her images.

In this wooing competition, knowledge and music are vividly set against one another. Following the recitation of each hymn or passage the *gandharvas* repeat that they know (the Vedas), and after each song the gods assure Vāc that they will continue to sing for her and thus to amuse her. Emphasis on the contrast between knowledge and music paves the way for a rather critical assessment of Vāc’s choice. Whereas the remarks of the *Maitrāyaṇī*, *Kāthaka*, *Kapiṣṭhala Kātha*, and *Taittirīya Saṃhitās* appear in the form of generalizations on what women desire (and thus the challenges faced by a man!), those of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* proceed to label as *mógha* the things to which Vāc and consequently all women are drawn (3:2:4:6):

*sá deván upāvavarta sá vai sá tán mógham upāvavarta yá  
stuvádbhyaḥ śámsadbhyo nṛttám gītám upāvavarta tásmād ápy  
etárhi móghasamhitā evá yóṣā evám hí vág upāvavarta tám u hy  
ànyá ánu yóṣās tásmād yá evá nṛtyati yó gáyati tásminn evaitá  
nimiślatamā iva //*

She turned to the gods. She who turned away from those who praised and recited to dance and song turned to something deceptive. Therefore even now women are connected with deceptive things, for Speech thus turned to [the gods], and because other women [follow] after her. Therefore it is to him who dances, him who sings, that these (women of the day) are rather closely attached.

Although nothing was said about dance prior to this, it is now added to singing. Vāc turned to these deceptive things (*mógha*) which lead astray (*mohayanti*). She as a woman chose the singing gods, being drawn to what is deceptive, and her choice then determined the nature of all women, for they only follow in her footsteps.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* portrays Vāc in a twofold form representing polar opposites: as goddess of knowledge she is all-knowing, and yet in the form of a woman she is connected with deceptive things, and hence with delusion and ignorance. This polar tension is particularly evident in the wooing competition. Although what the *gandharvas* actually seek is Vāc as a woman, with their proclamation of the Vedas they address the goddess of knowledge. Even though the real aim of the gods is Speech as goddess of knowledge, with their *vīṇā* and song they pursue a deception-drawn, music-loving woman. They each aspire for their desired object in a roundabout way. The gods, however, are more clever, for they address her in a method appropriate to her form at that given time. They made her a woman, and thus they appeal to her as a woman.

vi. *Vādhūla Brāhmaṇa* (Caland 1927, p.158 [repr. 1990, p.458])

The *Vādhūla Brāhmaṇa*, which belongs to the Taittirīya Śākhā, contains an account

of the Barter for Soma consisting in a word-for-word repetition of *Taittirīya Samhitā* 6:1:6:6 treated above,<sup>64</sup> with the insertion of four stanzas (in bold below): two of the stanzas are supposed to be the *brāhman* which the *gandharvas* pronounce, and the other two, the *gāthā* of the gods.

*brahma gandharvā avadann agāyan devā ye ha pūrve janā  
 āsur iti brahma gandharvā avadan yebhyaḥ pūrvavaho hitam /  
 śiṛṣaṇvāms tebhyo gandharvaḥ purā* <sup>65</sup> *devebhyaḥ ātapat // ye  
 ha pūrve janā āsuḥ pūrve pūrvatarebhyaḥ / mūrdhanvāms  
 tebhyaḥ saubhruvaḥ purā* <sup>66</sup> *sūryād utātapad iti yā strīṇām  
 prathamā varyetiti gāthām devā agāyan yasyām viśvam idaṃ  
 jagat / tām adya gāthām gāsyāmi yā strīṇām uttamam yaśaḥ //  
 sarasvati predam ava subhage vājīnīvati / tām tvā viśvasya  
 bhūtasya pragāyāmasya agrata iti sā devān gāvata upāvartata  
 ta[smād gāyantam striyaḥ kāmāyante kāmukā enam striyo]*<sup>67</sup>  
*bhavanti ya evaṃ veda*

The *gandharvas* uttered a *brahman*. The gods sang (a *gāthā*).

“Those people who existed previously,” the *gandharvas* recited, “[and] those who were conveying benefit previously to them, for (all of) them the *gandharva* with the head heated [it] before the gods. Those people who existed previously [and] those previous to the more previous, for (all of) them the son of Subhrū with the head heated [it] also before the Sun.”

“The *gāthā* which is the first and the choice one of women,” the gods sang, “in which this whole world [exists], which is the highest glory of women, that (*gāthā*) I will sing today. Further this, O Sarasvatī, fortunate one, rich in prizes. As such we will sing (praise) you at the beginning, before every being.”

She turned to the singing gods. There[fore women desire one who sings. Women are sure to desire] him who knows thus.

<sup>64</sup> See p.91 above.

<sup>65</sup> Caland has *puro*, but probably it is *purā* as in the following stanza. This is confirmed by three of the manuscripts used by Ikari, and it is, therefore, the reading he adopts for his critical edition.

<sup>66</sup> Although both Caland and Ikari have *purā*, this seems to be a scribal error under the influence of the *pi* of *purva* occurring repeatedly in these two stanzas. As in the first stanza, it should read *purā*.

<sup>67</sup> The square brackets are mine, indicating the abbreviated part supplied by Caland from the *Taittirīya Samhitā*. As Ikari’s edition shows, the manuscript actually reads *ta=bhavati*.

As Caland points out,<sup>68</sup> these stanzas appear in different sequence and with variants within one and the same wedding song found in the *Kāṭhaka Grhya Sūtra* (25:23). The two stanzas uttered by the *gandharvas*, which are almost identical to one another, are variations on stanza 3 of the wedding song, while the *gāthā* of the gods consists of stanza 2 followed by stanza 1, with minor variations. The fact that these stanzas appear in a wedding song is entirely in line with the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* account which refers quite specifically to marriage (3:7:3[78,4-6]), and with most of the other accounts which identify the kind of man women desire (KS 24:1[90,11]; KpS 37:2[228,6]; TS 6:1:6:6; ŚB 3:2:4:6). These stanzas also reveal that in the *Vādhūla Brāhmaṇa* account, a *brāhman* is not a charm, but a Vedic passage, as in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, while a *gāthā* is not a song, but rather a technical term for a kind of stanza. *Brāhman* and *gāthā* thus belong to the same category here. The sense of the story, however, is partly lost if the gods and the *gandharvas* compete for Vāc in the same manner.

Another point of interest in the stanzas of the *Vādhūla Brāhmaṇa* account is the appearance of Sarasvatī, whom the gods invoke in the second stanza of their *gāthā*. The epithets she is given here are commonly attributed to her in the *Rg Veda*: Sarasvatī is called *subhagā* in RV 1:89:3d, 7:95:4b,6b, and 8:21:17b, and *vājīnīvati* in 1:3:10b, 2:41:18b, 6:61:3d,4b, and 7:96:3b. Although the well-established identification of Sarasvatī and Vāc in the *Brāhmaṇas* renders the invocation of Sarasvatī here natural, the use of Sarasvatī's *Rg Veda* epithets makes her presence overshadow that of Vāc.

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<sup>68</sup> Caland 1929.

vii. *Brahma Purāṇa* (105:1-18)

The *Brahma Purāṇa* includes an account of this myth based on the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* version. Here, as connecting threads are tied together and further mythological links are incorporated, the name Sarasvatī is sometimes used instead of Vāc, the narrator is her father-spouse Brahmā, and the story is related as an incident which took place at Soma Tīrtha (105:1).

When the gods are distressed as to how they might regain Soma, they approach Brahmā and are answered by Vāc—his “better half.”<sup>69</sup> As in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, her suggestion that she should be exchanged for Soma, since women are dear to the *gandharvas*, is met with opposition. The gods argue that they can remain neither without Soma, nor without Vāc (105:5cd). She assures them of her return and tells them to prepare a sacrifice on the banks of the Gautamī river, where she can be exchanged for Soma (105:6b-8ab). While the sages perform the sacrifice, Indra suggests to the *gandharvas* to barter Soma in exchange for Sarasvatī (105:11cd-13). Although Soma and Sarasvatī are exchanged and thus Sarasvatī belongs to the *gandharvas*, she remains near the gods, coming to them in secret (105:15-16ab):

*somo 'bhavac cāmarāṇāṃ gandharvāṇāṃ sarasvatī /  
avasat tatra vāgīśā tathāpi ca surāntike //*

*āyāti ca raho nityam upāśu kriyatām iti /*

And Soma belonged to the immortals (gods), Sarasvatī to the *gandharvas*. (Although) the goddess of speech dwelt there, even

<sup>69</sup> Brahmā made Sarasvatī from half of his body, as the *Matsya Purāṇa* recounts (3:30-32). See pp.131-32 below.

so she also [dwelt] near the gods.

And she always used to come secretly. “Let it (the barter for Soma) be done silently.”

If, despite Sarasvatī’s secret visits to the gods, it should happen to look as if a barter actually took place in this version of the myth, Brahmā makes it quite clear that it was not the case (105:17cd-18ab): “Then Soma belonged to the gods, and Sarasvatī also (belonged to them). The *gandharvas* had neither Soma, nor Sarasvatī” (*tato 'bhavad devatānām somaś cāpi sarasvatī // gandharvānām naiva somo naivāsic ca sarasvatī /*). The gods were the winners and the *gandharvas* were the losers.

We are not told in what specific form Sarasvatī was apparently bartered away, but clearly it was as a woman (105:8ab). As in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, the wooing competition is left out, and thus also the concluding remarks generated by Vāc’s choice. Right from the outset, she confronts the opposition of the gods by assuring them of her return. While in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* she promised to come back as soon as they had obtained Soma, in the *Brahma Purāṇa* she fulfills her promise by coming to them secretly. Although the gods are supposed to be the outright winners, in possession of both Soma and Vāc, in the *Brahma Purāṇa* their command of Sarasvatī is hardly complete, given that she is openly with the *gandharvas* and secretly with them. The gods in the *Brāhmaṇa* accounts appear to have fared somewhat better.

The two points of particular interest in the myth of the Barter for Soma—the appearance of Vāc in the form of a woman or a girl and the first signs of her connection with music in

general and the *viṇā* in particular—on which I have focused here take on materialized form in Sarasvatī images. Having appropriated the *viṇā*, the goddess of knowledge is represented as a beautiful woman playing upon it. It is noteworthy that both the feminine form and the connection with music initially arise in less than optimal circumstances: the female form is imposed upon Vāc so that she may be bartered away, a song is sung for her so that she as a woman may be lured back, and in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the *viṇā* and song to which she turns are deceptive things with which she forms a link and sets the standard for all women to follow. In order to complete the illusion of the barter, the illusory female form intended to delude the *gandharvas* is herself subject to delusion. The beautiful Sarasvatī with her *viṇā* thus finds some of her roots in the muddy environment of deception and delusion in the context of illusion, but like the lotus, she continues to grow and bloom long after the origins of her beauty and music are entirely forgotten.

#### **d. The River Sarasvatī**

##### **i. Sacrificial Session along the Sarasvatī**

Despite the Brāhmaṇas' overwhelming emphasis on Sarasvatī's identity with Vāc, she as a river is far from forgotten. The Brāhmaṇas continue to proclaim the sacredness of her waters and the auspiciousness of performing sacrifices on her banks. As we have seen, already in the *Rg Veda* (3:23:4) the Sarasvatī had been identified as amongst the best places on earth to establish one's sacred fire. The river Sarasvatī is the path that leads to the



gods (*devayānaḥ pānthāḥ*), says the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (7:2:1:4).<sup>70</sup> Therefore they who perform a sacrifice lasting six nights to reach heaven (TS 7:2:1:1 *ṣadrātrā*) go along the Sarasvatī. The *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (25:10)<sup>71</sup> describes a sacrificial session (*sattra*) to be carried out at various stages along the river from the place where it disappears in the sands, Vinaśana, to its source, Plakṣa Prāsravaṇa (25:10:16):

*catuṣcatvāriṃśad āśvināni sarasvatyā vinaśanāt plakṣaḥ  
prāsravaṇas tāvad itaḥ svargo lokaḥ sarasvatisammitenādhanā  
svargaṃ lokaṃ yanti*

Forty days on horseback from the place where the Sarasvatī disappears (Vinaśana) [is] the “fig tree of the flowing forth [of the Sarasvatī]” (Plakṣa Prāsravaṇa). That far from here is the heavenly world. They go to the heavenly world by a way commensurate with the Sarasvatī.<sup>72</sup>

The sacredness of the river in the eyes of her worshippers, therefore, is beyond doubt.

## ii. Kavaṣa Ailūṣa

*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (2:19)

The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* recounts how seers were performing a *sattra* on the Sarasvatī. Thinking that a certain Kavaṣa Ailūṣa was “the son of a slave woman, a gambler, a non-*brāhmaṇa*” (*dāsyāḥ putraḥ kitavo 'brāhmaṇaḥ*), they drove him out into the desert.

<sup>70</sup> TS 7:2:1:4 *sarasvatyā yānty eṣā vai devayānaḥ pānthās tāṃ evānvā rohanti...* “They go with Sarasvatī. This is the path that goes to the gods; verily they mount upon it.”

<sup>71</sup> Cf. JB 2:297-99.

<sup>72</sup> The rituals to be carried out at the various stages along the river are explained in the Śrauta Sūtras (fifth to the second century B.C.E.). See *Śāṅkhyāyana Śrauta Sūtra* 13:29; *Lāṭyāyana Śrauta Sūtra* 10:15.

saying: “Let thirst strike him there. Let him not drink the water of the Sarasvatī” (*atrainam pipāsā hantu sarasvatyā udakam mā pād iti*). As he was in the desert, afflicted by thirst, he saw the Aponaptriya (“child of the waters”) hymn (RV 10:30). “Forth among the gods, let there be speeding for the *brāhmaṇa*” (*pra devatrā brahmaṇe gātur etv*).<sup>73</sup> Thereby he went to the abode of the waters, which rose up after him, and Sarasvatī flowed all around him (2:19:1).<sup>74</sup> That is why they call this place Parisāraka, for this is where Sarasvatī flowed all around (*parisasāra*) him: *tasmād dhāpy etarhi parisarakam ity ācakṣate yad enam sarasvati samantam parisasāra* (2:19:2). The seers then understood they had been mistaken. Recognizing that the gods knew Kavaṣa Ailūṣa, they called on him. Having performed the Aponaptriya hymn, they too attained the abode of the waters, and the text adds, of the gods (2:19:3).<sup>75</sup>

### *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (12:3)

The *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* includes another version of this myth. While the Mādhyama seers were performing a *sattra* on the Sarasvatī, Kavaṣa sat down with them to eat, but they objected: “You are the son of a female slave. We will not eat with you” (*dāṣyā vai tvam putro 'si na vyaṃ tvayā bhakṣayiṣyāma iti*). Kavaṣa became angry and left. He recited a hymn of praise to Sarasvatī, who then followed after him: *sarasvatim etena sūktena tuṣṭāva*

<sup>73</sup> RV 10:30:1a.

<sup>74</sup> *tenāpām priyaṃ dhāmopāgacchat tam āpo 'nūdāyaṃs tam sarasvati samantam paryadhāvat //*

<sup>75</sup> *te vā ṛṣayo 'bruvan vidur vā imaṃ devā upemaṃ hvayāmahā iti tatheti tam upāhvayanta tam upahūyāitad aponaptriyaṃ akurvata pra devatrā brahmaṇe gātur etv iti tenāpām priyaṃ dhāmopāgacchann upa devānām //*

*taṁ heyam anveyāya*. The seers came after him: “O seer, homage to you. Do not harm us. You indeed are the best of us, you whom this one (Sarasvatī) follows” (*rṣe namaste 'stu mā no hiṁsiḥ tvam vai naḥ śreṣṭho 'si yaṁ tveyam anvetiti*). Thus they dispelled Kavaṣa's anger. The *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* concludes that this is the greatness of Kavaṣa, the one who came to know this (Aponaptrīya) hymn: *sa eṣa kavaṣasyaiva mahimā sūktasya cānuveditā*.

Thus the Brāhmaṇas glorify Sarasvatī as river and as Vāc. Through Vāc, Sarasvatī is connected with knowledge and music, and, for the first time, with the *viṇā*.

## II. EPIC AND PURANIC SARASVATĪ

### Introduction

The epics and the Purāṇas belong to an entirely different category of religious literature than the Vedas. Although, like the Vedas, they were transmitted orally, unlike the Vedas, their transmission did not require word for word, syllable for syllable, precision, which would in fact have been contrary to the spirit and custom of the wandering bards. Stories were retold over and over again, but each time a little differently in accordance with the mood and inspiration of the storyteller and the response of his audience. The intention was to amuse and convey certain moral/ethical/spiritual values, drawing in the listeners by recounting stories they had probably heard countless times already. The bards had full liberty to change the stories to some degree, expanding, embellishing, or abridging, deviating to other topics, etc. Thus dating the epics and the Purāṇas, legends of which would have existed in some form two thousand or more years ago, perhaps reaching as far back as the *Rg Veda* in some cases, is a very difficult task to say the least. The *Mahābhārata* (Mbh) in its present form is generally accepted to date from about 400 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.<sup>1</sup> In the case of individual Purāṇas, the dates assigned to them can range over a period of a thousand or more years. Clearly, as they stand today in printed form, the texts have undergone revisions and include countless insertions. Although there are critical editions of the epics, most of the Purāṇas have yet to be critically edited. Even critical editions, it

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<sup>1</sup> See van Buitenen 1973, p.xxv.

should be added, do not necessarily represent “the” text itself, for not only are they subject to the choices made by the editors,<sup>2</sup> but, especially in the case of the Purāṇas, there are manuscripts that have not been consulted, others that have been lost, and then, as a living oral tradition, there is the material which was never committed to writing—and, one might even argue, which continues to be produced.<sup>3</sup> Epic and Puranic texts, however, abound in details regarding the conceptual and iconographic development of Sarasvatī, amongst countless other topics, and thus, despite sometimes extreme looseness of time frame, must necessarily be carefully studied.

It will be noted that although reference to secondary sources was often made within the context of Vedic literature, it is not the case in the Epic and Puranic Sarasvatī. In contrast with the complexity of the Vedic language, that of the epics and the Purāṇas is comparatively much simpler. From a linguistic point of view, therefore, there are fewer problems to be discussed. Analyses and studies of themes contained in the texts tend to be descriptive and interpretative. In terms of studies in direct connection with the epic or Puranic Sarasvatī, they are largely descriptive and repetitive of one another, and thus it is preferable here to resort above all to the primary sources.

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<sup>2</sup> On the choices made by the editors of the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, see, for instance, Biardeau 1977, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> On the Purāṇas, see Ludo Rocher’s introduction in 1986.

## 1. *Mahābhārata*

In the *Mahābhārata*, Sarasvatī appears above all as a sacred river, along which pilgrimages are made. She is also represented as goddess of speech and knowledge. In relation to others, she is depicted as daughter, wife, and mother.

### a. Mythology of the River

#### i. Sacred River

#### Geography

This best of rivers and greatest of streams (*nadīnām uttamā nadī*)<sup>4</sup> is described as embanked by *śāla* groves<sup>5</sup> and woods with all kinds of trees and creepers.<sup>6</sup> In stark contrast with the *Ṛg Veda*'s mighty, uncontrollable flood, bursting the ridges of mountains with her strong waves,<sup>7</sup> she has become "the safe, brimming Sarasvatī of tranquil waters" (... *prasannasalilām śivām / ... paripūrṇāṃ sarasvatīm //*).<sup>8</sup> Dhaumya, the of the Pāṇḍavas,

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<sup>4</sup> Mbh 3:82:56b. Cf. RV 2:41:16a *nadītame*.

<sup>5</sup> 3:26:1d *sarasvatīśālavaneṣu*.

<sup>6</sup> 3:98:13ab *sarasvatyāḥ pare pāre nānādrumatatāvṛtam*. See also, for example, Mbh 3:88:2ab: *sarasvatī punyavahā hradīni vanamālīni /*

<sup>7</sup> RV 1:3:12a; 6:61:2ab. See p.11 above.

<sup>8</sup> 3:179:15. Transl. by van Buitenen in 1975, p.570. There is one instance (3:130:3ab) where she is described as billowing: *eṣā sarasvatī punyā divyā codhavatī nadī /*

speaks of her idyllically as “Sarasvatī of holy currents, full of lakes<sup>9</sup> and embanked by woods,” lending her former impetuosity to the Yamunā (3:88:2):

*sarasvatī punyavahā hradinī vanamālīnī /  
samudragā mahāvegā yamunā yatra pāṇḍava //*

As in the description of the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*,<sup>10</sup> her source is identified as Plakṣa [Prasavaṇa],<sup>11</sup> and she is said to disappear in the sands at Vinaśana.<sup>12</sup> She reappears, however, at Camasodbheda, Śivodbheda, and Nāgodbheda.<sup>13</sup> As in the *Ṛg Veda*, she debouches in the ocean.<sup>14</sup> Sage Lomaśa, who has been delegated by Indra to guide Yudhiṣṭhira on a pilgrimage tour (*yātrā*) of the *tirthas*, explains that she can be seen at the Cāmasa Spring, where all ocean-bound rivers converge into her: *eṣa vai camasodbhedo yatra drśyā sarasvatī / yatraīnām abhyavartanta divyāḥ puṇyāḥ samudragāḥ //* (3:130:5). Amongst the holiest confluences are that of the Sarasvatī and the Aruṇā, known as the Goddess’s Ford (Devī Tīrtha)<sup>15</sup> and that of the Sarasvatī and the Ganges.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. Lake Dvaita (3:174:21cd): *sarasvatīm etya nivāsakāmāḥ saras tato dvaitavanam pratiyuh //*

<sup>10</sup> PB 25:10. See p.101 above.

<sup>11</sup> Mbh 3:82:5c *plakṣād devi srutā*.

<sup>12</sup> 3:130:3cd *etad vinaśanam nāma sarasvatyā viśām pate*. Cf. 3:80:118

<sup>13</sup> 3:80:119ef *camase ca śivodbhede nāgodbheda ca drśyate*. See also 3:130:5ab quoted in the main text on this page.

<sup>14</sup> RV 7:95:2b. See p.11 above. Mbh 3:80:79ab *tato gatvā sarasvatyāḥ sāgarasya ca saṃgame*

<sup>15</sup> 3:81:131 *tato gacchen naraśreṣṭha tīrtham devyā yathākramam / sarasvatyāruṇāyās ca saṃgamam lokaviśrutam //*

<sup>16</sup> 3:82:34 *gaṅgāyās ca naraśreṣṭha sarasvatyās ca saṃgame / snāto ’śvamedham āpnoti svargalokam ca gacchati //*

## Mythology and Dharma of Geography

Epic stories provide mythological accounts for the geographical features of the river. The responsibility for the disappearance of the river in the sands, a natural, geographical phenomenon, for instance, is assigned to the Niṣādas. They are a wild non-Aryan tribe described as man-eaters (2:28:44c),<sup>17</sup> hunters, fishermen, and thieves,<sup>18</sup> in disdain for whom Sarasvatī entered the earth so as not to cross their lands, lest they should know her (3:130:3c-4d):

*etad vinaśanam nāma sarasvatyā viśāṃ pate //*

*dvāram niṣādarāṣṭrasya yeṣāṃ dveṣāt sarasvati /  
praviṣṭā pṛthiviṃ vira mā niṣādā hi mām viduḥ //*

Because of the impure, unrighteous, “adharmic” Niṣādas, then, the river Sarasvati chooses to disappear in the sands.

Likewise the river changes her course for the sake of the pure-minded. So as to be seen by the ṛṣis of the Naimiṣa forest, for instance, she turns eastwards (9:36:35):

*yatra bhūyo nivavṛte prānmukhā vai sarasvatī /  
ṛṣiṇām naimiṣeyāṇām avekṣārthaṃ mahātmanām //*

Subsequently, however, the large number of seers crowded on her banks find themselves in need of a broader *tīrtha* (9:36:48). In order to accommodate them, the river, out of compassion, turns westwards: *ṛṣiṇām puṇyatapasām kāruṇyāñjanamejaya // tato nivṛtya rājendra teṣām*

<sup>17</sup> *niṣādān puruṣādāmś ca.*

<sup>18</sup> Monier-Williams 1899, p.581.



*arthe sarasvatī / bhūyaḥ pratīcyabhimukhī susrāva saritām varā // (9:36:51cd-52).*

What we have here is clearly more than just stories woven around geography. The myths have a didactic purpose. They convey not only where Sarasvatī moves to, but why. When she does not wish to be seen by the unrighteous Niṣādas, she enters the earth. When she wishes to be seen by the righteous Naimiṣa seers, she changes her course. When her banks become overcrowded with ṛṣis, she changes course again to provide them with more space for the performance of their *tapas*. The choices she makes, then, are on the basis of *dharma* versus *adharmā*. She does not choose which direction she wishes to move in, but, more importantly, presumably in the author(s)'s view, she chooses the direction and facilitation of *dharma* and the avoidance of *adharmā*. As goddess of knowledge, discrimination between righteousness and unrighteousness, purity and impurity, *dharma* and *adharmā* is naturally and necessarily ascribed to Sarasvatī.

### Inhabitants and Pilgrims

Many, many seers, then, dwelt on the banks of the Sarasvatī. Amongst the sages of great renown were Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra (9:41:4),<sup>19</sup> and Dadhīca (3:98:12d-13a),<sup>20</sup> all of whom had their hermitages on her banks. There were also *yakṣas*, *vidyādharas*, demons, gods, and other classes of beings<sup>21</sup> who engaged in ascetic practices and performed sacrifices on the Sarasvatī:

<sup>19</sup> *āśramo vai vasiṣṭhasya sthāṇutīrthe 'bhavan mahān pūrvataḥ paścimaś cāsīd viśvāmitrasya dhimataḥ //*

<sup>20</sup> *dadhīcasyaśramam yayuḥ // sarasvatyāḥ pare pāre...*

<sup>21</sup> See 9:36:20-21 and 9:41:5, for instance.

*tām yakṣagandharvamahārṣikāntām āyāgabhūtām iva devatānām /*

... [Sarasvatī] beloved of seers, Gandharvas, and Yakṣas, the sacrifice ground of the Gods themselves... (3:174:24ab)<sup>22</sup>

They performed various rites, including Sārasvata *yajñas* (3:129:21ab).<sup>23</sup> People also went on lengthy pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*) along the river, against its course. In accordance with Dakṣa's pronouncement, they came by the thousands to die there in order to attain heaven (3:130:1-2):

*iha martyās tapas taptvā svargam gacchanti bhārata /  
martukāmā narā rājann ihāyānti sahasraśaḥ //*

*evam āśīḥ prayuktā hi dakṣeṇa yajatā purā /  
iha ye va mariṣyanti te vai svargajito narāḥ //*

Thus when Kṛṣṇa died, his sixteen thousand wives drowned themselves in the Sarasvatī and having been reborn as *apsarases*, they attained their lord (18:5:21).<sup>24</sup>

## ii. Pilgrimage Expanded

### Pilgrimage Accounts

The *tīrthayātrā* along the Sarasvatī described in the *Mahābhārata* is far more extensive

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<sup>22</sup> Translation by van Buitenen in 1975, p.560.

<sup>23</sup> *iha sārasvatāir yajñair iṣṭavantaḥ surarṣayaḥ .*

<sup>24</sup> *ṣoḍaśastrisahasrāṇi vāsudevaparigrahaḥ : nyamajjanta sarasvatyām kālena janamejaya tās cāpy  
apsaraso bhūtvā vāsudevam upāgaman .:*

than the one in the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (25:10).<sup>25</sup> Numerous *tīrthas* are included in its course, and according to some manuscripts (passage excluded from the critical edition), there are *tīrthas* at every step, numbering in the hundreds and thousands: *tathā tīrthāny anekasaḥ / sahasraśatasamkhyāni prathitāni pade pade /*<sup>26</sup>

There are two lengthy pilgrimage accounts in the *Mahābhārata* :

1. In the Vana Parvan (3:80-153), Yudhiṣṭhira, having heard Pulastya's (as reported by Nārada) and Dhaumya's descriptions of numerous *tīrthas*, including some on the Sarasvatī, sets out with sage Lomaśa. Reflecting a shift from complex, costly rituals to the simpler practice of visiting sacred places, Pulastya explains the merit acquired from pilgrimage to these sites, often in terms of the Vedic ritual equivalent: while, for instance, by bathing at the Śrikuñja Tīrtha on the Sarasvatī, one attains the reward of the Agniṣṭoma (3:81:91 *śrikuñjam ca sarasvatyām tīrtham bharatasattama / tatra snātvā naro rājann agniṣṭomam phalam labhet //*), by bathing at the confluence of the Ganges and the Sarasvatī, one obtains a Horse Sacrifice and goes to heaven (3:82:34 *gaṅgāyās ca naraśreṣṭha sarasvatyās ca saṃgame / snāto 'śvamedham āpnoti svargalokaṃ ca gacchati //*). Lomaśa, on the other hand, recounts many legends associated with the *tīrthas*.
2. The Śalya Parvan (9:34-54) includes an account of Baladeva's pilgrimage specifically along the Sarasvatī, and is thus of greater relevance for our study. Here Vaiśampāyana describes to Janamejaya what *tīrthas* Baladeva and his extensive entourage visited, and the legends associated with these *tīrthas*.<sup>27</sup> The Vedic ritual equivalent of bathing in a particular *tīrtha* is also sometimes incorporated into the story itself. At the Udayāna (Well) Tīrtha (9:35), for instance, the sage Trita is said to have fallen into a pit near the Sarasvatī (9:35:24c-25d),<sup>28</sup> and, having been left there by his brothers Ekata and Dvita (9:35:27),<sup>29</sup> he mentally performed a Soma sacrifice

<sup>25</sup> See p.101 above.

<sup>26</sup> See critical edition, passage 224 in note on 9:36:35.

<sup>27</sup> For a list of the *tīrthas*, see Indras 1967, pp.73-78.

<sup>28</sup> *tathā kūpo 'vidūre 'bhūt sarasvatyās taṭe mahān // atha trito vṛkaṃ drṣṭvā pathi tiṣṭhantam agrataḥ tad bhayād apasarpan vai tasmin kūpe papāta ha*

<sup>29</sup> *taṃ jñātvā patitam kūpe bhrātarāv ekatadvitau / vṛkatrāsāc ca lobhāc ca samutsrjya prajāgmatuḥ //*

(9:35:32-35).<sup>30</sup> The gods appeared (9:35:39b-d),<sup>31</sup> and no sooner had he asked that henceforth one who bathes in this well should attain the equivalent of drinking soma, that the Sarasvatī river rose up from the bottom of the well and lifted him to the surface (9:35:45cd-46ab).<sup>32</sup> The usual pattern in this pilgrimage account is that the name of the *tīrtha* is given and a myth connected with the name is told in brief. Then Janamejaya asks questions to elicit a far more detailed account of the myth, which Vaiśampāyana then provides.

I do not propose to recount and discuss every myth associated with every *tīrtha* along the Sarasvatī river, but rather to focus on three of the stories which present new or modified features and thus reflect changes in the conception of Sarasvatī: the Saptasārasvata Tīrtha myth (9:37), the curse of Sarasvatī at the Sthāṇu Tīrtha (9:41-42), and the story of her son Sarasvat who dwelt at Sarasvat Tīrtha (9:50).

### Saptasārasvata Tīrtha

It will be remembered that in the *R̥g Veda* (6:61:10b), Sarasvatī was called *saptāsvasṛ*. None of her sisters was named, however. In the *Mahābhārata* we find seven Sarasvatīs, each given a different name and location, and yet seven forms of the one Sarasvatī (9:37:3-4):

*rājan sapta sarasvatyo yābhir vyāptam idaṃ jagat /  
āhūtā balavadbhir hi tatra tatra sarasvatī //*

<sup>30</sup> *pāmsugras te tataḥ kūpe vicintya salilam munih / agniṃ saṃkalpayāmāsa hotre cātmanam eva ca tatas tāṃ virudham somam saṃkalpya sumahātapāḥ / r̥co yajūṃṣi sāmāni manasā cintayan munih / grāvānaḥ śarkarāḥ kṛtvā pracakre 'bhiṣavam nr̥pa / ājyam ca salilam cakre bhāgāms ca tridivaukasām somasyābhiṣavam kṛtvā cakāra tumulam dhvanim / sa cāvīśad divam rājan svarāḥ śaikṣas tritasya vai samavāpa ca tam yajñam yathoktam brahmavādibhiḥ //*

<sup>31</sup> *sahitāḥ sarvadevatāḥ / prayayus tatra yatrāsau tritayajñāḥ pravartate //*

<sup>32</sup> *yaś cehopaspr̥set kūpe sa somapaḡatim labhet / tatra cormimatī rājann utpapāta sarasvatī //*

*suprabhā kāñcanākṣī ca viśālā mānasahr̥dā /  
sarasvatī oghavatī suveṇur vimalodakā //*

O King, there are seven Sarasvatīs which cover this universe, for wherever Sarasvatī was invoked by the strong, there [she appeared]:

Suprabhā, Kāñcanākṣī, Viśālā, Mānasahr̥dā, Oghavatī, Suveṇu, Vimalodakā [are the] Sarasvatī.

Always in connection with a sacrifice, invoked by Brahmā she appeared as **Suprabhā** at Puṣkara (9:37:12)<sup>33</sup> and as **Vimalodā** in the Himavat mountain (9:37:26c-f);<sup>34</sup> called on by the seers of Naimiṣa she appeared there as **Kāñcanākṣī** (9:37:16cd,18a);<sup>35</sup> remembered at a Gaya sacrifice she appeared as **Viśālā** at Gaya (9:37:19cd-20ab);<sup>36</sup> invoked by Auddālaka she appeared as **Mānasahr̥dā** at Kosala (9:37:22.23cd);<sup>37</sup> revered by the royal seer King Kuru, she, as **Suveṇu**, came to Kurukṣetra (9:37:24);<sup>38</sup> and called on by Vasiṣṭha she appeared as **Oghavatī** at Kurukṣetra (9:37:25).<sup>39</sup> All seven join at Saptasārasvata Tīrtha (9:37:27).<sup>40</sup>

The theme of the multiple forms of the one Sarasvatī is connected with her *Ṛg Veda*

<sup>33</sup> *tac chrutvā bhagavān prītiḥ sasmārātha sarasvatīm / pitāmahena yajatā āhūtā puṣkareṣu vai / suprabhā nāma rājendra nāmnā tatra sarasvatī //*

<sup>34</sup> *vimalodā bhagavati brahmaṇā yajatā punaḥ / samāhūtā yayau tatra punye haimavate girau //*

<sup>35</sup> *te samāgamyā munayaḥ sasmarur vai sarasvatīm //... naimiṣe kāñcanākṣī tu...*

<sup>36</sup> *āhūtā saritāṃ śreṣṭhā gayayajñe sarasvatī // viśālāṃ tu gayeṣv āhūr ṛṣayaḥ samśitavratāḥ //*

<sup>37</sup> *uttare kosalābhāge punye rājan mahātmanaḥ / auddālakena yajatā pūrvam dhyātā sarasvatī //... manohradeti vikhyātā sā hi tair manasā hr̥tā //*

<sup>38</sup> *suveṇur ṛṣabhadvipe puṇyā rājarṣisevitā / kuroś ca yajamānasya kurukṣetre mahātmanaḥ // (I follow the Malayalam manuscript here for puṇyā rājarṣisevitā.)*

<sup>39</sup> *oghavatī api rājendra vasiṣṭhena mahātmanā / samāhūtā kurukṣetre divyatoyā sarasvatī //*

<sup>40</sup> *ekibhūtās tatas tās tu tasmims tīrthe samāgatāḥ / saptasārasvataṃ tīrtham tatas tatprathitam bhuvī //*

identity as one of the *āpas*, of whom she appeared as the representative in RV 10:30:12.<sup>41</sup> Above all, however, it arises from the sacredness in which she was held and which therefore enabled her to function as their representative. “All rivers are the Sarasvatī,” says the *Mahābhārata* (12:255:39a *sarvā nadyaḥ sarasvatyaḥ*). And in the Saptasārasvata Tīrtha myth, sevenfold specifics are provided. To this list may be added the Aruṇā, as recounted in the story surrounding the Sthāṇu Tīrtha (9:42:24cd).<sup>42</sup>

In the continuing play on the numeral seven, a sub-story is told about the sage Maṅkaṇaka. Seeing a beautiful woman bathing naked in the river, his seed fell into the Sarasvatī (9:37:30 *snāyantīm rucirāpāṅgīm digvāsasamaninditām / sarasvatyaṃ mahārāja caskande viryam ambhasi //*).<sup>43</sup> He picked it up and placed it into a jar, wherein it divided into seven parts, from which seven seers were born, from whom in turn sprang the *maruts* (9:37:31 *tad retaḥ sa tu jagrāha kalāṣe vai mahātapāḥ / saptadhā pravibhāgaṃ tu kalāśastham jagāma ha / tatra ṛṣayaḥ sapta jātā jajñire marutāṃ gaṇāḥ //*). This story would make Sarasvatī, therefore, the mother of seven seers.

Thus what we find in the story of the Saptasārasvata Tīrtha is the expansion of the *saptāsvasṛ* concept, in that names are given and locations identified. We also find the conception of Sarasvatī as mother, a theme appearing also in the Sarasvat Tīrtha legend, as we shall see.

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<sup>41</sup> See p. 16 above.

<sup>42</sup> For the Sthāṇu Tīrtha myth, see pp. 115-119 below.

<sup>43</sup> Given the main story of the Saptasārasvata Tīrtha, where Sarasvatī plays the central role, one wonders if this naked woman could not be Sarasvatī herself in human form, as L.C.D.C. Priestley suggests (personal communication).

## Sthāṇu Tirtha

In the Sthāṇu Tirtha, it is said, Śiva (Sthāṇu) performed austerities (9:41:5)<sup>44</sup> and Skanda was installed as commander of the celestial army (9:41:7).<sup>45</sup> Viśvāmitra, furthermore, brought Vasiṣṭha to this *tirtha* by the power of his *tapas* (9:41:8).<sup>46</sup> It is the last of these stories which is told here.

Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha were performing austerities everyday. Seeing Vasiṣṭha's energy (*tejas*), Viśvāmitra was overcome with jealousy and resolved to have the Sarasvatī bring Vasiṣṭha before him so that he could kill him (9:41:9-11).<sup>47</sup> She appeared before him in human form, pale and trembling (9:41:14-15):

*tata enam vepamānā vivarṇā prāñjalīś tadā /  
upatasthe munivaram viśvāmitram sarasvatī //*

*hatavīrā yathā nārī sābhavadduḥkhitā bhṛśam /  
brūhi kiṃ karavāṇīti provāca munisattamam //*

Then pale and trembling Sarasvatī appeared with joined palms before the best of sages Viśvāmitra.

Afflicted with grief like a woman whose husband has been slain, she asked [that] foremost of sages: "Tell [me] what is to be done."

When asked to bring Vasiṣṭha to him, she began to tremble like a creeper in the wind

<sup>44</sup> *yatra sthāṇur mahārāja taptavān sumahat tapaḥ yatrāsya karma tad dhoram pravadanti maṇiṣiṇaḥ //  
yatrestvā bhagavān sthānuḥ pūjayitvā sarasvatīm // sthāpayamāsa deveśo liṅgākārām sarasvatīm //*

<sup>45</sup> *tatra sarve surāḥ skandam abhyaṣiṅcan narādhipa // senāpatyena mahatā surārivinibarhanam //*

<sup>46</sup> *tasmīn sarasvatītirthē viśvāmitro mahāmuniḥ // vasiṣṭham cālayāmāsa tapasogreṇa tac chrīnu //*

<sup>47</sup> *viśvāmitravasiṣṭhau tāvahanyahani bhārata // spardhām tapaḥkṛtām tivrām cakratus tau tapodhanau //  
tatrāpy adhikasamtāpo viśvāmitro mahāmuniḥ // dṛṣtvā tejo vasiṣṭhasya cintām abhijagāma ha // tasya buddhir  
iyam hy āsīd dharmanityasya bhārata // iyam sarasvatī tūrṇam matsamīpam tapodhanam // ānāyīṣyati vegena  
vasiṣṭham japatām varam // ihāgatam dvijaśreṣṭham haniṣyāmi na samśayah //*

(9:41:17cd *viviyathe suvirūḍheva latā vāyusamiritā //* ). In fear she went to Vasiṣṭha (9:41:18),<sup>48</sup> who told her to do as Viśvāmitra had ordered, lest the latter curse her (9:41:23).<sup>49</sup> As she was bearing him away, Vasiṣṭha praised her thus (9:41:29-31):

*pitāmahasya sarasaḥ pravṛttāsi sarasvati /  
vyāptam cedam jagat sarvam tavaivāmbhobhir uttamaiḥ //*

*tvam evākāśagā devi megheṣṭsṛjase payaḥ /  
sarvāś cāpas tvam eveti tvatto vayam adhimahe //*

*puṣṭir dyutis tathā kīrtiḥ siddhir vṛddhir umā tathā /  
tvam eva vāṇi svāhā tvam tvayy āyat tam idam jagat /  
tam eva sarvabhūteṣu vasasiha caturvidhā //*

You have arisen from the Grandfather's lake, O Sarasvatī, and you fill this entire universe with your highest waters.

Pervading space itself, O goddess, you arise in the clouds [as] moisture. All waters are you alone. Because of you we learn.

You are prosperity, splendour, glory, success, growth, Umā. You indeed are Speech. You are *svāhā*. This world is dependent on you. Fourfold you dwell in all beings.

Having brought Vasiṣṭha to Viśvāmitra (9:41:32cd),<sup>50</sup> as Viśvāmitra was looking for a weapon to slay Vasiṣṭha, she bore Vasiṣṭha to the other shore (9:41:34a-d)<sup>51</sup> to protect him. Viśvāmitra became angry and cursed her to turn to blood (9:41:35-36).<sup>52</sup> For one year,

<sup>48</sup> *tathāgatām tu tāṃ dr̥ṣṭvā vepamānām kṛtāñjalim // viśvāmitro 'bravīt kruddho vasiṣṭam śighram ānaya //*

<sup>49</sup> *trāhy ātmānam saric chreṣṭe vaha māṃ śighragāmiṇi // viśvāmitraḥ śaped dhi tvāṃ mā kṛthās tvam vicāraṇām //*

<sup>50</sup> *vegenovāha tam vipraṃ viśvāmitrāśramam prati .*

<sup>51</sup> *tam tu kruddham abhipreksya brahmahatyābhayān nadī // apovāha vasiṣṭam tu prācīm diśam atandritā*

<sup>52</sup> *tato ' pavāhitam dr̥ṣṭvā vasiṣṭam ṛṣisattamam // abravīd atha saṃkruddho viśvāmitro hy amarṣaṇaḥ // ... śonitam vaha kalyāni rakṣogṛāmaṇisammataṃ //*



her waters flowed mixed with blood (9:41:37cd).<sup>53</sup> In memory of the incident, the *tirtha* was called Vasiṣṭhāpavāha “Carrying Away Vasiṣṭha” (9:41:39ab).<sup>54</sup>

What is interesting here is Sarasvatī’s appearance in human form. She also appears to Śvetaketu in this form (3:132:2ab): *sākṣād atra śvetaketur dadarśa sarasvatīm mānuṣadeharūpām* / When the sage Tārksya addresses her (1:184:2-3), furthermore, as we shall see, he calls her beautiful-limbed (1:184:2c *cārusarvāṅgi*). In the Brāhmaṇas,<sup>55</sup> it will be remembered, Vāc had appeared before the *gandharvas* as a beautiful woman so as to get back the soma. Vāc as a beautifully attired, passionate woman, however, was known already in the *Rg Veda* (10:71:4cd).<sup>56</sup> The earliest surviving image of Sarasvatī, an inscribed sculpture from about the third century C.E.,<sup>57</sup> clearly shows she was depicted in human form amongst the Jains during at least the latter half of the lengthy period of composition of the *Mahābhārata* (ca. 400 B.C.E. - 400 C.E.).

Another interesting point here is the perception of Sarasvatī as frightened. A smallness in spirit is thus attributed to her. On the geographical level, it parallels the river’s decrease in size and volume, as it acquires a description as safe and brimming (3:179:16).<sup>58</sup> In the context of this myth, her considerably weakened personality is tied in with the prevalent conception of the extraordinary power of *tapas*. (It may well also have something to do with her gender.) At the cost of her own power as a goddess, that of the sages—through

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<sup>53</sup> *avahac choṇitonmīśraṃ toyam saṃvatsaram tadā* :

<sup>54</sup> *evam vasiṣṭhāpavāho loke khyāto janādhipa*

<sup>55</sup> See pp.85-99 above.

<sup>56</sup> See p.86, note 47 above.

<sup>57</sup> See pp.166-71 below.

<sup>58</sup> See p.106 above.

their austerities—is highlighted, as she trembles before them in fear of their curses. She who in the *R̥g Veda* was an uncontrollable, mighty flood, an all too powerful mother-goddess figure, before whom her worshippers trembled,<sup>59</sup> is here for the first time portrayed as weak, afraid, and vulnerable. Threatened by Viśvāmitra, she finds herself at a loss as to what to do: in the confusion engendered by fear, the hitherto fearless goddess, who presides over knowledge, loses, in addition, the power of discrimination vital to knowledge. She runs from one sage to the other, desperately trying to avoid being cursed by either one. And then, when she realizes Vasiṣṭha understands her predicament and will not curse her, she good-naturedly yet foolishly tries the impossible: to protect Vasiṣṭha while obeying Viśvāmitra and thus to avoid the latter’s curse. Predictably, Viśvāmitra does not appreciate her well-intentioned cat-and-mouse game, and she is ultimately cursed to turn to blood.

Given that the function of these myths is to glorify the *tirthas* alongside this most sacred of rivers, surely their author(s) intended to show Sarasvatī in the best possible light, despite the overwhelming power of the sages’ *tapas*. It is regrettable, however, that they inadvertently robbed her of her discrimination and hence knowledge, over which she presides, in the process. Had she fearlessly refused to involve herself in Viśvāmitra’s petty jealousy and been cursed at the outset, her glory and greatness would not have been reduced.

Despite appearing as a frail, frightened figure, misguidedly attempting to do what is right, in memory of who she was in the past, Vasiṣṭha praises Sarasvatī as a great goddess, on whom the universe depends. In other words, the portrayal of Sarasvatī in this myth is

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<sup>59</sup> See p. 14 above.

entirely uneven, recalling the past while incorporating the ideology of subsequent times.

The story then continues in 9:42, wherein some seers, shocked to find innumerable demons drinking Sarasvatī's water mixed with blood at the Vasiṣṭhāpavāha Tīrtha, rescue the Sarasvatī (9:42:6-7).<sup>60</sup> When the river is purified, however, the demons are afflicted with hunger (9:42:14d).<sup>61</sup> Out of compassion for them, Sarasvatī assumes a new form called Aruṇā (9:42:24cd),<sup>62</sup> significantly meaning "reddish-brown," for demons drink blood. Having bathed in this river, the demons attain heaven (9:42:25ab).<sup>63</sup>

### Sarasvat Tīrtha

At the Sarasvat Tīrtha, sage Sarasvat taught the Vedas to other sages (9:50:3cd).<sup>64</sup> As Vaiṣampāyana recounts, sage Dadhīca performed such austerities that Indra began to fear him (9:50:5a-6b).<sup>65</sup> A beautiful *apsaras* called Alambusā was sent to distract him (9:50:7).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *athāgamyā mahābhāgās tat tīrtham dāruṇam tadā dr̥ṣṭvā toyam sarasvatyāḥ śonitena pariplutam piyamānam ca rakṣobhir bahubhir nṛpasattama tān dr̥ṣṭvā rākṣasān rājan munayaḥ saṁśitavratāḥ paritrāṇe sarasvatyāḥ param yatnam pracakrire //*

According to a passage not included in the critical edition (no.256 following 9:42:12), it is only after worshipping Śiva that they rescue her: *ārādhya paśubhartāram mahādevam jagatpatim mokṣayāmasus tāṁ devīm saric chreṣṭām sarasvatim //*

<sup>61</sup> *rākṣasāḥ kṣudhayārditāḥ //*

<sup>62</sup> *aruṇāmānyāmāsa svām tanuṁ puruṣarṣabha //*

For the theme of the multiple forms of the one Sarasvatī, see pp.112-114 above.

<sup>63</sup> *tasyām te rākṣasāḥ snātvā tanūs tyaktvā divam gatāḥ //*

<sup>64</sup> *vedān adhyāpayāmāsa purā sārāvato munih //*

<sup>65</sup> *āsīt pūrvam mahārāja munir dhimān mahātapāḥ dadhīca iti vikhyāto brahmacāri jitendriyaḥ tasyātītapasaḥ śakro bibheti satatam vibho //*

<sup>66</sup> *pralobhanārtham tasyātha prāhiṇotpākāśāsanah divyām apsarasaṁ punyām darsaniyām alambusām //*

Seeing her, his vital seed dropped into the Sarasvatī (9:50:9a-c),<sup>67</sup> and in time she gave birth to a boy (9:50:11ab).<sup>68</sup> Dadhīca called him Sarasvat (9:50:21)<sup>69</sup> and proclaimed (9:50:22-23):

*eṣa dvādaśavārṣikyām anāvṛṣṭyām dvijaṛṣabhān /  
sārasvato mahābhāge vedān adhyāpayiṣyati //*

*puṇyābhyas ca saridbhyas tvam sadā puṇyatamā śubhe /  
bhaviṣyasi mahābhāge matprasādāt sarasvati //*

During a twelve-year drought, Sarasvat will teach the Vedas. O fortunate one, to the best of the twice-born.

And, O fortunate Sarasvatī, through my grace you will always be the most sacred of holy rivers, O beautiful one.

And so it happened, at least with Sarasvat. During the drought, Sarasvatī fed her son fish (9:50:37),<sup>70</sup> and after the twelve-year period, when the famished seers had lost knowledge of the Vedas (9:50:40ab),<sup>71</sup> Sarasvat taught them (9:50:48b-d).<sup>72</sup>

In the *Rg Veda*, it will be remembered, Sarasvat was Sarasvatī's male counterpart, connected or identified with Apāṃ Napāt, the son of the waters (1:164:52).<sup>73</sup> Here he becomes her son. As mother, she takes on a role already familiar in a general sense in the

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<sup>67</sup> *tām divyavapuṣaṃ drṣṭvā tasya rṣer bhāvitātmanaḥ / retuḥ skannaṃ sarasvatyām ...*

<sup>68</sup> *susuve cāpi samaye putraṃ sā saritām varā :*

<sup>69</sup> *tavaiva nāmnā prathitaḥ putras te lokabhāvanah / sārasvata iti khyāto bhaviṣyati mahātapāḥ //*

<sup>70</sup> *na gantavyamitaḥ putra tavāhāram ahaṃ sadā / dāsyāmi matsyapravarānuṣyatām iha bhārata :*

<sup>71</sup> *teṣāṃ kṣudhāparitānāṃ naṣṭā vedā vidhāvatām :*

<sup>72</sup> *munayas te vidhānataḥ / tasmād vedān anuprāpya punar dharmam pracakrire //*

<sup>73</sup> See p.10 above.

*Ṛg Veda* (2:41:16a)<sup>74</sup> and in a more specific way in the *Yajur Veda*'s healing of Indra (VS 19:94ab).<sup>75</sup> She plays, however, an almost passive role in that she functions as a carrier of Dadhica's seed, which falls into her simply because she is there. The sage, steeped in austerities, is roused by another, and Sarasvatī, out of devoted respect for him (9:50:12ef),<sup>76</sup> carries his seed. Acting as a surrogate rather than a real mother, she does not develop possessive maternal instincts towards the child, and therefore readily offers the infant to Dadhica after birth. Although the sage is delighted and blesses Sarasvatī and Sarasvat, as a celibate, solitary ascetic intent on continuing his austerities, he is not about to start raising a child, like an ordinary householder. Hence Dadhica names the surrogate mother as the actual mother, returning the child to her. She, in turn, joyfully accepts Sarasvat and lovingly raises him, keeping him alive throughout the twelve-year drought.

With a sage as father and a riverine goddess of knowledge, identified through Vāc with the Vedas, as mother, Sarasvat cannot but become a sage himself (9:50:36b *muniḥ sārsvatas tadā /*). Kept alive by Sarasvatī during the drought, he then becomes, one might say, her mouthpiece, her vehicle to teach the Vedas to countless sages. As a vehicle, his personality is left undescribed, and as *her* vehicle, his name is simply a reflection of hers. His very *raison-d'être* in this myth is to teach the Vedas so that they may be preserved in the world, a purpose appropriate to the goddess of knowledge. Devoid of personal traits, he simply conveys the texts. As Sarasvatī represents knowledge, Sarasvat is the means of preserving the knowledge.

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<sup>74</sup> See p.13 above.

<sup>75</sup> See p.50 above.

<sup>76</sup> *brahmarṣe tava putro 'yaṃ tvadbhaktiā dhārito mayā //*

## b. Goddess of Knowledge

### i. Sarasvatī and Vāc

In the *Mahābhārata* Sarasvatī is celebrated as goddess of knowledge. In contrast with the Brāhmaṇas, here the connection with knowledge is direct in that she no longer requires the intermediary of Vāc: she does not preside over knowledge *because* she is Vāc; she presides over it *because* she is Sarasvatī. In the Brāhmaṇas, it was Vāc who was called mother of the Vedas (TB 2:8:8:5).<sup>77</sup> In the *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, Nārāyaṇa says to sage Nārada (12:326:5cd):

*vedānām mātaram paśya matssthām deviṃ sarasvatīm //*

Behold goddess Sarasvatī, the mother of the Vedas, established in me.

This represents yet another step in the process of the identification of Sarasvatī and Vāc. The two have become one, and “Vāc” as a separate name now falls further and further into the background. Although Sarasvatī is indeed called Vāc (e.g. 12:306:6cd)<sup>78</sup> as well as Vāṇī (e.g. 3:132:2)<sup>79</sup> in the *Mahābhārata*, Vāc increasingly becomes simply speech as a function of Sarasvatī. Becoming speech, Sarasvatī enters the body (12:306:6cd *sarasvatīha vāgbhūtā śarīram te pravekṣyati //*), and as speech, dwells in the tongue (12:231:8d

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<sup>77</sup> See p.68 above.

<sup>78</sup> See Sanskrit original below.

<sup>79</sup> 3:132:2 *sākṣād atra śvetaketur dadarśa sarasvatīm mānuṣadeharūpām : vetsyāmi vāṇīm iti sampravṛttāṃ sarasvatīm śvetaketur babhāṣe //*

*jihvāyām vāk sarasvatī //* ). Hence Bhīṣma, in veneration of Viṣṇu, says “... goddess Sarasvatī is [your] tongue” (6:61:56b *devī jihvā sarasvatī /* ). When she appears to sage Yājñavalkya, she is adorned with vowels and consonants, sounding the syllable Om: *tataḥ pravṛtātīśubhā svaravyaṅjanabhūṣitā / omkāram āditaḥ kṛtvā mama devī sarasvatī* (12:306:14).

## ii. Instructing Tārksya

There is one *adhyaḥ* (3:184) in particular where Sarasvatī appears as goddess of knowledge. Here, sage Tārksya approaches her for instruction in dharma and ritual worship (3:184:2-3):

*kiṃ nu śreyaḥ puruṣasyeha bhadre  
katham kurvan na cyavate svadharmāt /  
ācakṣva me cārusarvāṅgi sarvaṃ  
tvayānuśiṣṭo na cyadeyaṃ svadharmāt //*

*katham cāgnim juhuyāṃ pūjaye vā  
kasmin kāle dharmo na naśyēt /  
etat sarvaṃ subhage prabravīhi  
yathā lokān virajāḥ samcareyam //*

What, good lady, is best for a man here on earth?  
What way should he act lest he stray from his Law?  
Pray tell me, woman of beautiful limbs:  
Instructed by you I won't stray from my Law.

How should one make offerings into the fire,  
How worship and when, lest his Law be impaired?  
Propound all this to me, fair woman,  
So that I may roam the worlds without passions.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Translation by van Buitenen in 1975, p.580.

Although she begins by speaking of knowing *Brahman* and of constant and undistracted study and purity (3:184:5ab),<sup>81</sup> *mokṣa* is hardly the goal. She describes celestial cities and which offerings lead to which realms (3:184:5c-10).<sup>82</sup> She speaks of purity at the physical and caste levels, as well as the purity which comes from knowing the Vedas (3:184:13).<sup>83</sup> This is connected with her stipulation that only a priest who knows the texts (a *śrotriya*) may perform the Agnihotra (3:184:14).<sup>84</sup> She then describes the result of the Agnihotra (3:184:15).<sup>85</sup>

Tārksya recognizes her vast knowledge in the “outcome of rites,” and asks who she is (3:184:16).<sup>86</sup> Sarasvatī explains that she has risen from the Agnihotra to resolve the doubts

<sup>81</sup> *yo brahma jānāti yathāpradeśam svādhyāyanityah śucir apramattah*

<sup>82</sup> *sa vai puro devapurasya gantā sahāmaraiḥ prāpnuyāt pritiyogam . tatra sma ramyā vipulā viśokāḥ supuṣpitāḥ puṣkarīnyah supunyaḥ* (vv. 5c-6b)... *param lokam gopradās tvāpnuvanti dattvānadvāham sūryalokam vrajanti . vāsam dattvā* (vv.8a-c)...

“... [he] shall go to the cities of God’s city and find delight amidst the Immortals. There are lovely and vast and sorrow-free and holy flowering lotus lakes... The givers of cows reach the highest heaven, those who give an ox gain the world of the sun; giving lodging...” (Van Buitenen translation in 1975, p.580. Since I do not divide the translation into separate lines according to *padas* in the notes, as van Buitenen does, I have replaced his capitalized letters at the beginning of each *pada* with small case.)

<sup>83</sup> *na cāsucir nāpy anirniktapānir nābrahmavij juhuyān nāvipaścit . bubhukṣavaḥ śucikāmā hi devā nāśraddhadhānād dhi havir juṣanti* //

“An impure man, one with unwashed hands, not knowing the *Veda*, nor wise, may not offer; for the Gods when they hunger demand one to be clean, and take no food from the unbeliever.” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.581.)

<sup>84</sup> *nāśrotriyaṃ devahavye niyuñjyān mogham parā siñcati nādṛṣo hi . apūrṇam aśrotriyam āha tārksya na vai nādṛg juhuyād agnihotram* //

“A *śrotriya* priest [should] be engaged for the rite, any other will throw the oblation away: none but an accomplished *śrotriya*, Tārksya, I say, may offer the *agnihotra*.” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.581.)

<sup>85</sup> *gavām lokam prāpya te punyagandham paśyanti devam paramam cāpi satyam* // (3:184:15cd)

“They... will go to the fragrant world of the cows and behold the God who is highest and true.” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.581.)

<sup>86</sup> *kṣetrañābhūtām paralokabhāve karmodaye buddhimatipraviṣṭām . prajñām ca devīm subhage vimṛśya*



of the priests (3:184:17ab): *agnihotrād aham abhyāgatāsmi viprarsabhānām samśayacchedanāya* / Her territory within the ritual context, therefore, is knowledge.

Tārksya then praises her celestial body (3:184:18) and she speaks of the origin of beauty (3:184:19-20).<sup>87</sup> He then asks her for teachings regarding final release (3:184:21),<sup>88</sup> and she talks of study, gifts, vows, and yoga (3:184:22cd).<sup>89</sup> Then, quite suddenly, she begins to describe the tree of paradise from which rivers of offerings flow (3:184:23-24).<sup>90</sup> This may perhaps be intended to integrate her as a river into the cosmic sacrificial realm, in which she plays the role of teacher, for she is, after all, the goddess of knowledge.

The context, therefore, is ritual instruction imparted by the goddess of knowledge. The specified prerequisite for success in this realm is purity. Apart from knowledge, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the beauty of Sarasvatī. Her appearance in human

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*prcchāmi tvām kā hy asi cārurupe* :

“I think of you, who are my guide in matters celestial, piercingly wise of the outcome of rites, as an insightful Goddess, and ask you, beautiful lady, who are you?” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.581.)

<sup>87</sup> Quoted on p.126 below.

<sup>88</sup> *ācakṣva me tam paramam viśokam mokṣam param yam praviśanti dhirāḥ* (3:184:21cd)

“Propound to me the superior bliss of final release, which the wise secure.” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.582.)

<sup>89</sup> *svādhyāyadānavratapunyayogais tapodhanā vīśokā vimuktāḥ* :

“... and with study, gifts, vows, and holy Yoga the ascetics find freedom beyond all grief.” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.582.)

<sup>90</sup> *tasyātha madhye vetasaḥ punyagandhaḥ sahasraśākho vimalo vibhāti tasya mūlāt saritaḥ prasaravanti madhūdakaprasravaṇā ramānyāḥ śākhām śākhām mahānadyaḥ samyānti sikatāsamāḥ dhānāpūpā māmsaśākāḥ sadā pāyasakardamāḥ* :

“In the middle of it, a fragrant cane tree of a thousand branches stands pure and effulgent: from its roots well up and flow the rivers, the lovely streams of the honeyed water. [23] The great rivers flow from branch to branch like falling sand, those rivers of grain and cakes, meat and potherbs, with the mud of milk and rice. [24]” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.582.)

form occurs in other instances, as noted above,<sup>91</sup> but what distinguishes this passage from the others is not only the frequency of references to the beauty of her form (3:184:2c, 12b, 16d, 18c),<sup>92</sup> but the consequent underlying tension thereby created within the context. The sage Tārksya, although he requests instruction in dharma “... so that I may roam the worlds without passions” (3:184:3d)<sup>93</sup> is unable to refrain from mentioning her beautiful form—and to make it even more direct, addressing her in terms of it—on four out of five occasions when he speaks in this *adhyāya*. Following Tārksya’s initial request to Sarasvatī, the narrator-sage Mārkaṇḍeya also comments that Tārksya is filled with love: *evam prṣṭā prītyuktena tena* (3:184:4a). Following the latter’s fourth reference to Sarasvatī’s beautiful form, in this final instance as a surpassingly lovely celestial body (3:184:18c *rūpaṃ ca te divyam atyantakāntam*),<sup>94</sup> the fair goddess decides it is time to address the topic herself (3:184:19-20):

*śreṣṭhāni yāni dvīpadām varīṣṭha yajñesu vidvann upapādayanti /  
tair evāhaṃ sampravṛddhā bhavāmi āpyāvitā rūpavati ca vipra //*

*yac cāpi dravyam upayujyate ha vānaspatyam āyasam pārthivam vā /  
divyena rūpeṇa ca prajñayā ca tenaiva siddhir iti viddhi vidvan //*

I have grown on the choicest of gifts, O sage,  
Most eminent man, which the offerers bring  
When they make their oblations at their rites;  
They filled me and made me beautiful, priest.

<sup>91</sup> See, for instance, pp. 115 above.

<sup>92</sup> If *subhagā* is here understood as “beautiful,” then three more instances can be added: 3:184:3c, 16c, 18d.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted on p. 123 above.

<sup>94</sup> 3:184:18ab is equally suggestive: *na hi tvayā sadṛśī kāścid asti vibhrājase hy atimātram yathā śriḥ*. “There is no woman the equal of you, for you shine as radiantly as Śrī.” (Van Buitenen 1975, p.581.)

Whatever is used as an offering gift,  
Be it wooden or iron or made of clay,  
Know, sage, that a man by that gift prevails  
In celestial beauty as well as wisdom.<sup>95</sup>

Beauty, therefore, arises from sacrifice and is imparted both to the worshipper and the worshipped. Together with wisdom, it is attained by the sacrificer. Having heard Sarasvatī's admonition in the form of a ritually-contextualized explanation, Tārksya no longer addresses her—one might even suggest, no longer dares to address her—in terms of her form.

As opposed to the above-mentioned *Mahābhārata* passages where Sarasvatī appears as a woman or as mother to Sarasvat in entirely non-sexual contexts, she is portrayed here as a beautiful woman, capable of arousing even a sage. In her enchanting beauty she comes closer to Vāc in the Brāhmaṇa myth of the Barter for Soma.<sup>96</sup>

### c. Sarasvatī as Daughter, Wife, and Mother

In the *Mahābhārata* Sarasvatī appears as daughter, wife, and mother. In relation to Brahmā, she is a daughter: *ṛtā brahmasutā sā me satyā devi sarasvatī* // (12:33:10cd).<sup>97</sup> As a river, her source is Plakṣa [Prasavaṇa].<sup>98</sup> It is also said, however, that she was born from the Grandfather's Lake: *pitāmahasya sarasaḥ pravṛttāsi sarasvatī* / (9:41:29ab). *Pitāmaha*

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<sup>95</sup> Translation by van Buitenen in 1975, p.582.

<sup>96</sup> See pp.85-99 above.

<sup>97</sup> She is, however, also produced, together with the Vedas, from the mind of Kṛṣṇa in 6:63:5cd (*sarasvatīm ca vedāṃś ca manasaḥ sasrje 'cyutaḥ* etc.). Yet she is no more his daughter than the Vedas are his sons.

<sup>98</sup> See p.107 above.

is the paternal grandfather, an epithet of the same Brahmā. In the Brāhmaṇas, it will be remembered, Vāc was the daughter of Prajāpati.<sup>99</sup> who in post-Vedic mythology becomes Brahmā. We will have occasion to return, in the Purāṇas, to the fully developed relationship of Sarasvatī and Brahmā, derived from that of Vāc and Prajāpati.

Sarasvatī is wife to Manu (5:115:14d),<sup>100</sup> as well as to sage Matināra, whom she chooses as husband following his twelve-year sacrifice on her banks (1:90:25-26).<sup>101</sup> She then bears Matināra a son called Taṃsu (1:90:26, 28).<sup>102</sup> She is also, as we have seen, a kind of surrogate mother to Sarasvat, born of the seed of Dadhica, fallen into the Sarasvatī (9:50:9-11).<sup>103</sup>

At the level of relationships, then, there are some new developments in the epic. Of overwhelming importance is her relationship with Brahmā, which finds further, extensive development in the Purāṇas, as we shall see.

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<sup>99</sup> See pp.70-72 above.

<sup>100</sup> 5:115:14 *yathā bhūmyāṃ bhūmipatir urvaśyāṃ ca purūravāḥ... sarasvatyāṃ yathā manuḥ //*

<sup>101</sup> 1:90:25-26ab *matināraḥ khalu sarasvatyāṃ dvādaśavārsikam satram ājahāra // nivṛtte ca satre sarasvaty abhigamya taṃ bhartāraṃ varayāmāsa //*

<sup>102</sup> 1:90:26cd *tasyāṃ putram ajanayat taṃsum nāma //*  
1:90:28ab *taṃsum sarasvatī putram matinārād ajījanat //*

<sup>103</sup> See pp.119-21 above.

## 2. Purāṇas

### Introduction

Rather than discussing each Purāṇa individually, it is more convenient to consider their stories and iconographic descriptions thematically and comparatively, beginning with the accounts of the Purāṇas which according to general consensus are earliest. As the aim of this study is to trace Sarasvatī's migration eastwards through China to Japan, and as the third Chinese translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, the Buddhist text through which Sarasvatī made her way to China and Japan, was completed in 703, I will focus here on the Purāṇas generally assigned to a period prior to the eighth century.

The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (MkP), composed in western India near the river Narmadā, is dated to a period between the third and the seventh century C.E.<sup>1</sup> According to Pargiter's study:

- a) third century or earlier: chapters 45-81, 94-137
- b) between the third and the sixth century: chapters 1-44
- c) sixth or perhaps fifth century: *Devī Māhātmya* in chapters 81-93

The *Matsya Purāṇa* (MP), composed and circulated by people living around the river Narmadā, has been assigned dates ranging from the fourth century B.C.E. to 1250 C.E. by Kantawala,<sup>2</sup> narrowed down to a period from the fourth century B.C.E. to the

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<sup>1</sup> Hazra 1940, pp.8-13; Kane 1962, p.903 (fourth to sixth century); Pargiter 1904, pp.xiii-xx. For more extensive references, see Rocher 1986, pp.191-96.

<sup>2</sup> 1964, p.8.

third century C.E. by Ramachandra Dikshitar.<sup>3</sup> and to 200–400 C.E by Kane.<sup>4</sup> Rajendra Chandra Hazra<sup>5</sup> assigned different dates to each of the chapters or groups of chapters (I list here only the ones in which Sarasvatī appears):

- a) last quarter of the third or first quarter of the fourth century  
C.E.: chapters 3–4
- b) 550–650: chapters 66, 260–61
- c) earlier than 750, if not 700: chapter 171
- d) 600–900: chapter 101
- e) 700–1075: chapter 183
- f) earlier than 1100: chapter 13

With reference to chapter 3, its date may be pushed a little further back, for, as V.S. Agrawal points out,<sup>6</sup> Brahmā's fifth head (3:40) appears exclusively in images of the first to the third century. My discussion of the contents of the *Matsya Purāṇa* will center largely on chapters 3, 4, 66, and 260–61 [a) - b) above].

The *Vāyu Purāṇa* is assigned to about the fourth to the fifth century.<sup>7</sup> It may originally have been identical with the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*.

Some of the proposed dates for the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, compiled in southern Kashmir or northern Punjab, are 400–500,<sup>8</sup> 450–650,<sup>9</sup> and 600–1000.<sup>10</sup>

My discussion of Sarasvatī in the early Purāṇas will address the Brahmā-Sarasvatī

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<sup>3</sup> 1951–55, p.1.xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> 1962, pp.899–900.

<sup>5</sup> 1940, pp.50–51, 176–77.

<sup>6</sup> 1963, pp.51–52.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Kane 1962, p.907. For further references, see Rocher 1986, pp.243–45.

<sup>8</sup> Hazra 1958, p.212.

<sup>9</sup> Priyabala Shah in her edition of *khaṇḍa* 3 of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. 1958, p.xxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Kane 1962, p.910. Rocher 1986, pp.250–52 provides more extensive references.

myth, the names of the goddess, her worship, and her iconography.

### a. Brahmā and Sarasvatī

As noted above,<sup>11</sup> Sarasvatī is Brahmā's daughter in the *Mahābhārata* (12:33:10cd). In the Purāṇas she becomes also his consort. The Brahmā-Sarasvatī relationship is based on that of Prajāpati and his daughters, especially Vāc, in the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>12</sup> Brahmā is Prajāpati (MP 3:33d), and Sarasvatī is Vāc. The Puranic account which most closely follows the Brāhmaṇas is not found in what is considered amidst the earliest Purāṇas, but in the *Brahma Purāṇa* (102:2cd-8ab).<sup>13</sup> The longest Puranic account appears in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (3:30-44), which we will examine here.

For the purpose of creation, we are told, Brahmā produced Sāvitrī from half of his body, calling her also Śatarūpā, Sarasvatī, Gāyatrī, and Brahmāṇī (MP 3:30-32):

*sāvitrīm lokasṛṣṭyartham hṛdi kṛtvā samasthitāḥ /  
tataḥ sañjapatas<sup>14</sup> tasya bhittvā deham akalmaṣam //*

*strirūpam ardhm akarod ardhm puruṣarūpavat /  
śatarūpā ca sākhyātā sāvitrī ca nigadyate //*

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<sup>11</sup> See p.127 above.

<sup>12</sup> See pp.70-85 above.

<sup>13</sup> The *Brahma Purāṇa* contains portions from different periods and has passages borrowed from the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa*, and from other Purāṇas. See Rocher 1986, p.155. Unlike in the *Rg Veda* and in the Brāhmaṇas, in the *Brahma Purāṇa* version of the myth, Śiva intercepts before Brahmā is able to pair with his daughter. By threatening the creator, he averts the *āpavrata* and thereby succeeds in protecting the dharma.

<sup>14</sup> As L.C.D.C. Priestley suggests, *sañjapatas* might be a misprint for *sañjayatas*.

*sarasvaty atha gāyatrī brahmāṇī ca parantapa /  
tataḥ svadehasambhūtām ātmajām ity akalpayat //*

In order to create the world, he who was evenly-postured (?) established Sāvitrī in his heart. Then he whispered [something] and split his pure body [in two].

Half he made in the form of a woman, half in the likeness of a man. She is named Śatarūpā and is called Sāvitrī.

Sarasvatī, Gāyatrī, and Brahmāṇī, O enemy-burner. [And] so he made [her] out of himself, from his own body.<sup>15</sup>

Brahmā fell in love with Sāvitrī (3:33), and even when his sons protested, he could see nothing but her face (3:34).<sup>16</sup> As she circumambulated him, he did not wish to keep turning around and around, ashamed as he was of his passion before his sons, and so faces appeared on the sides and back of his head (3:36a-38b):

*atha pradakṣiṇaṃ cakre sā pitur varavarṇinī /  
putrebhyaḥ lajjitasyāsya tadrūpālokanecchayā //*

*āvīrbhūtaṃ tato vaktraṃ dakṣiṇaṃ pāṇḍugandavat /  
vismayasphuradoṣṭhaṃ ca pāścātyam udagāt tataḥ /...*

*caturthaṃ abhavat paścād vāmaṃ kāmāsarāturaṃ /*

Then that lovely woman circumambulated her father, but he was ashamed of his desire to stare at her beauty in the presence of his sons.

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<sup>15</sup> In TB 2:3:10:1 Prajāpati has Sītā Sāvitrī as offspring: *prajāpatis sōmaṃ rājānam asṛjata . tāṃ trāyo veda ānvasṛjyanta / tān hāste 'kuruta . ātha ha sītā sāvitrī / sōmaṃ rājānam cakame / śraddhām u sā cakame / sā ha pitāram prajāpatim ūpasasāra* . Sarasvatī as daughter of Brahmā is also mentioned in MkP 23:30d, and in a number of other, later Purāṇas.

<sup>16</sup> 3:33-34 *dr̥ṣṭvā tāṃ vyathitas tāvat kāmabāṇārdito vibhuḥ / aho rūpam aho rūpam iti cāha prajāpatiḥ // tato vasiṣṭhapramukhā bhaginīm iti cukruśuḥ brahmā na kīñcid dadṛṣe tanmukhālokanād ṛte* . (I have corrected *tanmukhālokaṃ ādṛte* to *tanmukhālokanād ṛte* in 3:34d.) “When he looked at her, the lord Prajāpati was smitten with the arrows of love. Disturbed, he cried out, “Oh what beauty! Oh what loveliness!” (Translation by Dimmitt and van Buitenen in 1978, p.35.) “Then [the seers,] led by Vasīṣṭha, cried out : “[She is our] sister.” but Brahmā saw nothing but the sight of her face.”



So a face appeared on his right side, with pale cheeks. And another sprang up in the back, its lip quivering in wonder...

And then a fourth one too, on his left side, wounded by love's arrows.<sup>17</sup>

And when she flew up, a fifth face sprang up atop Brahmā's head so as to gaze at her lovely form (3:39-40).<sup>18</sup> Her elevation, however, was a vain attempt to escape the attentions of her father. Brahmā's passion, however, had consequences, the *Matsya Purāṇa* narrator interjects (3:39cd-40ab):

*sṛṣṭyartham yat kṛtam tena tapaḥ paramadāruṇam //*  
*tat sarvaṃ nāśam agamat svasutopagamecchayā /*

The tremendous *tapas* which Brahmā had practised for the purpose of creation was entirely annihilated through his desire to unite with his own daughter.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Translation by Dimmitt and van Buitenen in 1978, p.35.

3:38cd reads: *tato 'nyad abhavat tasya kāmāturatayā tathā //* Dimmitt and van Buitenen insert 3:38cd before 3:38ab as "Then another face appeared owing to his love-sickness..." Although 3:38cd clearly indicates yet another face, which would make it a fifth, for Brahmā had one to begin with, to which three (one on the right, one in the back, and one on the left) were already added, 3:40cd speaks of yet another face identified as a "fifth," rather than a sixth (*tenordhvaṃ vaktram abhavat pañcamam...*). It would appear, therefore, that 3:38cd is simply another wording of 3:38ab, confirmed by their mutual connection with the pain of love (3:38b *kāmaśarāturam*; 3:38d *kāmāturatayā*).

Cf. 13:52b where Sarasvatī is said to be enshrined in the faces of Brahmā: *brahmāsyeṣu sarasvatī //*

<sup>18</sup> It is noteworthy that Prajāpati is referred to as *pañcamukha* in the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* (2:9).

<sup>19</sup> Translation by Dimmitt and van Buitenen in 1978, p.35. The whole of 3:39-40 reads: *utpatantyās tadākārālokanakutūhalāt // sṛṣṭyartham yat kṛtam tena tapaḥ paramadāruṇam // tat sarvaṃ nāśam agamat svasutopagamecchayā // tenordhvaṃ vaktram abhavat pañcamam tasya dhimataḥ // āvirbhavaj jaṭābhiś ca tad vaktram cāvṛṇot prabhuh //* (I have changed *tadākārālokanakutūhalāt* to *tadākārālokanakutūhalāt*, which, although it makes sense, removes a metrically-needed syllable.) There seems to have been some confusion in the order of the verses here, for 3:39cd-40ab would logically fit in after 3:40d. Although no comment is provided, this is obviously why Dimmitt and van Buitenen translated 3:39cd-40ab following 3:40cd.

Sending off his sons to create (3:41),<sup>20</sup> he married Śatarūpā, and made love to her inside a pavilion within a lotus for as long as a hundred years (3:43a-44b):

*upayeme sa viśvātmā śatarūpām aninditām /  
sambabhūva tayā sārddham atikāmāturo vibhuḥ /  
sa lajjāc cakame devaḥ kamalodaramandire //*

*yāvad abdaśatam divyaṃ yathānyah prākṛto janah /*

The universal soul married blameless Śatarūpā. The lord, overcome with intense passion, united with her. Out of shame, the god, like an ordinary man, made love (to her) in a pavilion inside a lotus for as long as a hundred celestial years.

She bore him a son, Svayambhū Manu, the primal person (3:44cd).<sup>21</sup>

As in the Brāhmanas, the incestuous nature of the relationship is indeed a problematic issue. In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Brahmā's mind-born sons protest (3:34), and the creator experiences shame before them, so much so that he manifests four additional faces "to conceal" his passion for the lovely Sāvitrī (3:39-40). His desire to unite with his own daughter leads to the loss of all his intense *tapas* practised for the purpose of creation (3:39cd-40ab). Thus he is impaired in his function as creator. Whereas in the Vedic accounts the father was punished by a celestial archer *for* his sin, here he is punished *by* the sin itself, both in his shame and in his loss of *tapas*. Creation, the very task for which he produced Sāvitrī, is assigned to his sons, so that Brahmā may remain alone with her, freed of the shame he feels before them. The *Matsya Purāṇa* also includes a moralistic supplement

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<sup>20</sup> *tatas tān abravīt brahmā putrān ātmasamudbhavān : prajāḥ sṛjadhvam abhitāḥ sadevāsurasamānuṣiḥ //* "So Brahmā spoke to those sons who had sprung from him, saying, "From now on you must produce all the creatures, as well as the gods, demons and human beings." (Dimmitt and van Buitenen in 1978, p.35.)

<sup>21</sup> *tataḥ kālena mahatā tasyāḥ putro 'bhavan manuḥ //* (Manu as *svayambhuva* and as the *adhipuruṣa* is mentioned in 3:45, the following stanza.)

to deal with this issue. When asked how Brahmā could have committed such a transgression (4:1), Matsya the Fish incarnation explains that gods are not subject to the same duties and prohibitions as humans, and thus their deeds are not to be judged (4:6). And yet Brahmā in his act was compared to an ordinary man in 3:44b ( *yathānyah prākṛto janah* )!

Brahmā and Gāyatrī, Matsya continues, are as inseparable as light and shadow, and therefore there is no sin in their union (4:9-10). Nevertheless, the sense of sinfulness of the act continues to pursue even the creator, for, the Purāṇa tells us, Brahmā was ashamed of himself and cursed Kāma (4:11) . Hence, in the end, the union of the father with the daughter remains a sin both in human and in celestial eyes.

## **b. Names of Sarasvatī**

### **i. Rivers**

One of the ways in which Sarasvatī acquires different names is through her identification with different rivers. It will be remembered that in the *Mahābhārata* (9:37:3-4), in direct connection with the *R̥g Veda* passage where Sarasvatī is called *saptāsvasṛ* (6:61:10b), we find seven Sarasvatī rivers, each given a different name and location, and yet understood to be seven forms of the one Sarasvatī. In this superimposition of the Sarasvatī on other rivers, the names of these rivers become her other names. She is thus Suprabhā, Kāñcanākṣī, Viśālā, Mānasahṛdā, Aughavatī, Suveṇu, and Vimalodakā.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See p.113 above.

## ii. Śatarūpā, Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, and Brahmāṇī

Far better known, on the other hand, are some of the different names of Sarasvatī which bear no particular connection with her riverine aspect. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (4:31), as we have seen, she is called Śatarūpā, Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, and Brahmāṇī. As the spouse of Brahmā, she is Brahmāṇī. Her connection with Śatarūpā, on the other hand, is unclear.<sup>23</sup> As for Gāyatrī, it is one of the metres in which Vedic hymns were composed, and therefore a form of speech. It is, furthermore, the name of an invocation to the Sun (Savitṛ) in the *Rg Veda* (3:62:10), and hence also known as the Sāvitrī. As an integral part of the Upanayana ceremony, a prerequisite for the study of the Vedas, the Gāyatrī mantra is whispered into the boy's ear. The *Manu Smṛti* explains that "... the birth marked by the tying of the belt of rushes is his Vedic birth, and in it the verse to the sun-god is said to be his mother and the teacher his father" (2:170 *tatra yad brahmajanmāsya mauñjībandhanacihnitam // tatrāsya mātā sāvitrī pitā tvācārya ucyate //*).<sup>24</sup> The mantra is then to be repeated every single day of a twice-born's life. The Gāyatrī mantra is believed to embody the essence of the Vedas, for, according to the *Manu Smṛti*, Prajāpati produced it by milking out one foot from each of the three Vedas (2:77). As an encapsulated form of the Vedas, she is Vāc itself, both as speech and the knowledge it conveys, and therefore also Sarasvatī.

There is another Sāvitrī, daughter of king Aśvapati and wife of Satyavat, who is, however, closely connected with the above Sāvitrī/Gāyatrī, seemingly her very incarnation. As the *Mahābhārata* (3:277-283) recounts, following eighteen years of austerities and

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<sup>23</sup> Anand Swarup Gupta (1952, p.73) connects Śatarūpā with the *viśvarūpā* epithet of Sarasvatī.

<sup>24</sup> Translation by Doniger and Smith in 1991, pp.34-35.

recitation of the Sāvitrī, the goddess appeared to childless king Aśvapati (3:277:10).<sup>25</sup> Although he asked for the boon of many sons (3:277:14cd).<sup>26</sup> Sāvitrī replied that she had already spoken of his desire to the Grandfather (Brahmā), and announced, on behalf of Brahmā, the imminent birth of a girl (3:277:16-17).<sup>27</sup> When the child was born, she was given the name Sāvitrī. “for she had been given by Sāvitrī when she [the goddess Sāvitrī] was pleased with the oblations he [the king] had offered with the *sāvitrī* [mantra]” (3:277:24).<sup>28</sup> She grew into an extraordinarily beautiful woman, likened in splendour to the embodiment of Śrī (3:277:25ab).<sup>29</sup> Such was her beauty that no man dared choose the celestial maiden (*devakanyā*) for his bride (3:277:26cd-27).<sup>30</sup> Overcome with concern, the king sent Sāvitrī out to find a husband (3:277:36ab).<sup>31</sup> Accompanied by elderly counsellors, she set out on a pilgrimage to all the *tirthas* and hermitages (3:277:41).<sup>32</sup> Upon her return, she told her father about the blind king Dyumatsena, whose realm had fallen into enemy hands and who lived with his wife and son Satyavat in the vast wilderness of the forest performing austerities. It was Satyavat, she declared, whom she had chosen for husband. Sage Nārada,

<sup>25</sup> *pūrṇe tv aṣṭādaśe varṣe sāvitrī tuṣṭim abhyagāt svarūpiṇī tadā rajan darśayāmāsa taṃ nṛpam* //

<sup>26</sup> *putrā me bahavo devi bhavyeṣu kulabhāvanāḥ* //

<sup>27</sup> *pūrvam eva mayā rājann abhiprāyam imaṃ tava jñātvā putrārtham ukto vai tava hetoḥ pitāmahaḥ ... prasādāc caiva tasmāt te svayambhuvihitād bhuvi kanyā tejasvini saumya kṣipram eva bhaviṣyati* //

<sup>28</sup> *sāvitrīyā prītayā dattā sāvitrīyā hutayā hy api sāvitrīyā eva nāmāsyāś cakrur viprās tathā pitā* //

Translation by van Buitenen in 1975, p.762. Square-bracketed portions are mine.

<sup>29</sup> *sā vīgrahavatīva śrīr vyavardhata nṛpātmaḥ* //

Cf. 3:277:29d *devī śrīr iva rūpiṇī* //

<sup>30</sup> *prāpteyaṃ devakanyeti dṛṣṭvā sammenire janāḥ tāṃ tu padmapalāsākṣim jvalantim iva tejasā na kaścīd varayāmāsa tejasā prativāritaḥ* //

<sup>31</sup> *idaṃ me vacanam śrutvā bhartur anveṣaṇe tvara* //

<sup>32</sup> *evaṃ sarveṣu tirtheṣu dhanotsargaṃ nṛpātmaḥ kurvati dvijamukhyānāṃ taṃ taṃ deśam jagāma ha* //

who happened to be present, exclaimed in dismay that Sāvitrī's choice was a great wrong, for the virtuous Satyavat blessed with all qualities would die in one year to the day (3:278:11-22).<sup>33</sup> Urged to find another man, she adamantly refused (3:278:23-26),<sup>34</sup> and was wed to the prince Satyavat (3:279:15-17).<sup>35</sup> For one year she lived with him and his parents in the forest, remembering always Nārada's words (3:279:23).<sup>36</sup> When the appointed time arrived, she greeted Yama with folded palms and through wise speech arising from virtuousness and determination, she who was possessed of the power of her austerities secured four boons from him: King Aśvapati would regain his sight and kingdom, and one hundred sons would be born not only to him, but also to Sāvitrī by Satyavat (3:281:10-45). The following exchange then ensued (3:281:50-51, 53):

*yama uvāca*

*yathā yathā bhāṣasi dharmasamhitam  
mano 'nukūlam supadam mahārthavat /  
tathā tathā me tvayi bhaktir uttamā  
varam vṛṇiṣvāpratimam yatavrate //*

*sāvitrī uvāca*

*na te 'pavargah sukṛtād vinākṛtas  
tathā yathānyeṣu vareṣu mānada /  
varam vṛṇe jīvatu satyavān ayam  
yathā mṛtā hy evam aham vinā patim //...*

<sup>33</sup> *aho bata mahatpāpam sāvitrīyā nṛpate kṛtam / ajānantiyā yad anyā guṇavān satyavān vṛtaḥ //* (3:278:11)  
*eko doṣo 'sya nānyo 'sti so 'dya prabhṛti satyavān / samvatsareṇa kṣīṇayur dehanyāsam kariṣyati //* (3:278:22)

<sup>34</sup> *ehi sāvitrī gaccha tvam anyam varaya śobhane* (3:278:23ab) *dirghāyur atha vālmāyuh saḡuṇo nirguṇo  
'pi vā . sakṛd vṛto mayā bhartā na dvitīyam vṛṇomy aham //* (3:278:26)

<sup>35</sup> *yathāvidhi samudvāham kārayāmāsatur nṛpau //* (3:279:15cd)

<sup>36</sup> *sāvitrīyās tu śayānāyās tiṣṭantiyās ca divāniṣam / nāradena yad uktaṃ tad vākyaṃ manasi vartate //*

*varātisargah śataputratā mama  
tvayaiva datto hriyate ca me patih /  
varam vṛṇe jivatu satyavān ayam  
tavaiva satyam vacanam bhaviṣyati //*

Yama said:

Since every time you speak so well,  
So pleasing, so meaningful of the Law,  
My love for you is incomparable—  
Choose you a compareless boon, strict woman!

Sāvitri said:

You make no exception to your favor,  
Pride-giver, as in the other boons!  
I choose the boon that Satyavat live,  
For I am as dead without my lord...

You have given the boon that a hundred sons  
Will be born to me, yet you take my man.  
I choose the boon that Satyavat live!  
Your very own word shall now come true!<sup>37</sup>

And so it came to pass that Sāvitri saved them all, including her husband's entire lineage (3:283:14).<sup>38</sup>

This "human" Sāvitri had not only the beauty of a goddess and the virtues of austerity and right conduct, but far more significantly for us here, the gift of speech. It was through her eloquence rooted in knowledge that she acquired boons, that she saved others, and that she outwitted death itself in the form of Yama. She enchanted him through the power of her speech—one might even say seduced him with her wise words—so that his repeatedly

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<sup>37</sup> Translation by van Buitenen in 1975, p.772.

<sup>38</sup> *evam ātmā pitā mātā śvaśrūḥ śvaśura eva ca / bhartuḥ kulam ca sāvitryā sarvam kṛcchrāt samuddhṛtam .*

stated resolve not to return Satyavat's life (3:281:25c, 30c, 36c, 43c *vināsyā jīvitam*) was ultimately abandoned in face of her persistent eloquence. No matter how many times Yama urged Sāvitrī to turn back (3:281:19a, 25a, 27d, 32d, 38d, 43d, 45d *nivarta*), she continued to speak (3:281:39cd):

*tathā vrajann eva giram samudyatām  
mayocyamānām śrṇu bhūya eva ca //*

As thou goest thy course do thou listen again  
to the ready words I shall speak to thee.<sup>39</sup>

Cleverly she chose her boons, tricking Yama on the fourth one, for, as she herself triumphantly declared (3:281:53), the fulfillment of her wish for a hundred sons by Satyavat required the life of her husband. Her discourses, as she well knew, did not fall on deaf ears. They filled Dharmarāja with devoted love for her, until he could no longer resist offering her a compareless, exception-free boon. She whom they called Sāvitrī, for she was given by the goddess Sāvitrī when the latter was pleased with the oblations offered to her with the Sāvitrī/Gāyatrī mantra, embodied Sarasvatī-Vāc as speech and knowledge. Therefore sage Gautama exclaimed (3:282:34cd-35ab):

*tvām hi jānāmi sāvitrī sāvitrīm iva tejasā //*

*tvam atra hetum jāniṣe...*

I know you, Sāvitrī, you are like Sāvitrī herself in splendid power.

You know the reason behind it all...<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Van Buitenen 1975, p.771.

<sup>40</sup> Van Buitenen 1975, p.777.



“Human” though she might have been, this Sāvitrī was endowed with divine beauty and the learning and eloquence appropriate to the goddess who presides over them.

### iii. Epithets

There are also other names assigned to Sarasvatī, as in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (66:9), in which her eightfold form is invoked:

*lakṣmī medhā dharā puṣṭiḥ gaurī tuṣṭiḥ prabhā matiḥ /  
etābhiḥ pāhi cāṣṭābhis tanūbhir māṃ sarasvatī //*

Protect me Sarasvatī with your eightfold forms, Lakṣmī,  
Medhā, Dharā, Puṣṭi, Gaurī, Tuṣṭi, Prabhā, and Mati.

This eightfold form refers largely to deified qualities: Lakṣmī (fortune), intelligence, forbearance, prosperity, Gaurī (whiteness or brilliance), satisfaction, brilliance, and mental resolve. Lakṣmī and Gaurī alone are goddesses in their own right, which only by interpretation, so as to suit the context, can be taken as representatives of certain qualities. Therefore at least six of these forms do not belong to the same category as Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, and the others. This stanza is comparable to a passage in the *Mahābhārata*, where Sarasvatī is praised, also in eightfold form, as prosperity, splendour, glory, success, growth, speech, the invocation word *svāhā*, and also as Umā: *puṣṭiḥ dyutis tathā kīrtiḥ siddhir vṛddhir umā tathā / tvam eva vāṇī svāhā tvam* (9:41:31a-c).

#### iv. Sarasvatī's Name Applied to Other Goddesses

There are also instances in which Sarasvatī's name is assigned to another goddess, such as Durgā. In the *Devī Māhātmya*, for instance, the Devī (Durgā) is called Sarasvatī (11:22). In the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (9:75-93), Sarasvatī is included amidst particularly lengthy lists of names assigned to Umā and in the context of an interesting creation myth, which uses and reassigns some of the elements we saw in the Brahmā-Sarasvatī myth. As the *Vāyu Purāṇa* recounts, when Brahmā's mind-born sons were so unattached to the world that they did not create, Brahmā grew angry. From out of his anger, a person was born (9:71-75). He asked the person, who was half male and half female (9:75c *ardhanārīnaravapuḥ*), to divide himself (9:76). The male half subdivided further, and the Rudras were produced (9:77-80). The female half of Śaṅkara's body, now said to have been born of Brahmā's mouth, also consisted of two halves: the right was white, while the left was black (9:82c-83d). Upon Brahmā's request, she separated her white and black parts (9:84). Her many names were Svāhā, Svadhā, Mahāvidyā, Medhā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Aparṇā, Ekaparṇā, Pāṭalā, Umā, Haimavatī, Ṣaṣṭhī, Kalyāṇī, Khyāti, Prajñā, Mahābhāgā, and Gaurī (9:85-87b). She also had names for her universal forms and names appropriate to the end of the Dvāpara age (9:87c-93).

#### c. Worship of Sarasvatī

Sarasvatī is worshipped above all for speech, knowledge, and music. Amongst the

early Purāṇas, the *Mārkaṇḍeya* and the *Matsya* include rites centering on the goddess.

### i. For Speech and Other Ends

In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* a sacrifice to Sarasvatī as goddess of speech is performed to cure dumbness brought on by a curse (72:22-25).<sup>41</sup> The rite is not described, and only the recitation of hymns addressed to the goddess are mentioned (72:26 *iṣṭim sārāsvatīm cakre tadartham sa dvijottamaḥ / sārāsvatāni sūktāni jajāpa ca samāhitaḥ //* ). A woman wishes this sacrifice to be performed for her cursed friend, and a *brāhmaṇa* carries it out on her behalf.

An extensive ritual description appears in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, where Sarasvatī is invoked for a whole series of desired ends beginning with sweet speech (*madhurā bhārati*). When Manu asks how sweet speech, worldly prosperity, resolve (*matī*), skill in all sciences, inseparable conjugal union, friendship, and long life are to be attained (66:1-2).<sup>42</sup> Matsya the Fish incarnation describes the practice (*vrata*) centering on Sarasvatī (66:3).<sup>43</sup> The appropriate day is selected, sages are worshipped and fed, and white clothes together with ornaments are given away (66:4a-6b).<sup>44</sup> Then Gāyatrī is worshipped with garlands of white

<sup>41</sup> *madartham tena nāgena sutā śaptā sakhi mama / mukā bhaviṣyasity āha sā ca mukatvam āgatā tasyāḥ pratikriyāṃ prityā mama śaknoti ced bhavān vāgvibhāgaprasāntyarthaṃ tataḥ kiṃ na kṛtaṃ mama // mārkaṇḍeya uvāca / tataḥ sa rājā taṃ vipram āhāsmīn kidrīṣi kriyā / tanmukatāpanodāya sa ca taṃ prāha pārthivam // brāhmaṇa uvāca / bhūpa sārāsvatīm iṣṭim karomi vacanāt tava / putrau taveyam ānṛṇyaṃ yātu tadvak pravartanāt //*

<sup>42</sup> *madhurā bhārati kena vratena madhusūdana tathaiva janasaubhāgyam matim vidyāsukauśalam // abhedaś cāpi dāpatyos tathā bandhujanena ca / āyuś ca vipulam pumsām tan me kathaya mādharma //*

<sup>43</sup> *samyak pṛṣṭam tvayā rājāṇ chrṇu sārāsvatam vratam / yasya samkīrtanād eva tasyatiha sārāsvatī //*

<sup>44</sup> *yo yad bhaktaḥ pumān kuryād etad vratam anuttamam / tad vāsarādau sampūjya viprān etān samācāret // athavādityavāreṇa grahatārābalena ca / pāyasam bhojayed viprān kṛtvā brāhmaṇavācanam // śuklavastrāṇi //*

flowers and ointments (66:6d),<sup>45</sup> and invoked as follows (66:7-8):

*yathā na devi bhagavān brahmaloke pitāmahāḥ /  
tvām parityajya samtiṣṭhet tathā bhava varapradā //*

*vedāḥ śāstrāṇi sarvāṇi gītanṛtyādikaṃ ca yat /  
na vihīnaṃ tvayā devi tathā me santu siddhayaḥ //*

As, O Goddess, the lord, the grandsire does not remain in the realm of Brahmā separated from you, so be a boon-giver.

The Vedas, all the Śāstras, the songs, the dances, etc. are not separate from you, O Goddess, so may I have successes.<sup>46</sup>

There follows an iconographic description of the four-armed goddess carrying *vinā*, rosary, water pot, and book, amidst further instructions for worship with white flowers and unhusked barley (66:10a-d):

*evam sampūjya gāyatrīm viṇākṣamaṇidhāriṇīm /  
śuklapuspākṣatair bhaktyā sakamaṇḍalupustakām //*

The devotee is to maintain a vow of silence while consuming his meal(s) (66:10ef *maunavratenā bhūñjīta sāvyaṃ prātaḥ tu dharmavit //*), and to worship Brahmavāsini on the fifth day of both fortnights, offering her a measure of rice together with a vessel filled with clarified butter, and also milk and gold, invoking her with the words: “Gāyatrī, be pleased” (66:11).<sup>47</sup> Vows of silence during *sandhyā* and fasts are to continue for thirteen

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*dattvā ca sahiranyāni śaktitāḥ*

<sup>45</sup> 66:6cd *gāyatrīm pūjayed bhaktyā śuklamālyānulepanaiḥ //*

In 66:10c she is worshipped with white flowers and unhusked barley (*śuklapuspākṣatair bhaktyā*).

<sup>46</sup> 66:9 describes the eightfold form of the goddess. See p.141 above.

<sup>47</sup> *pañcamyāṃ pratipakṣam ca pūjayed brahmavāsiniṃ / tathaiḥ taṇḍulaprasthāṃ gṛhapātreṇa samyutam kṣīraṃ dadyād dhiranyam ca gāyatrī priyatām iti //*

months (66:12),<sup>48</sup> bringing the *vrata* to a close. Then the devotee should feed and offer gifts to a sage, give away various objects, and worship his teacher (66:13-15).<sup>49</sup> The *phalaśruti* concludes that one who thus worships Sarasvatī becomes learned and wealthy, acquires a melodious voice, and attains the realm of Brahmā. Even women can benefit from this *vrata* (66:16-17).<sup>50</sup>

So the purpose of the *Matsya Purāṇa* Sarasvatī *vrata* is first and foremost sweet speech (66:1ab *madhurā bhārati kena vratena madhusūdana /*), to which are then added prosperity, resolve, skill in the sciences, conjugal union, friendship, and longevity, thus covering all aspects of life. Three of the desired ends are, therefore, clearly within the realm of the goddess of speech and learning, for, apart from *madhurā bhārati*, *mati* can also be intelligence (connected with the acquisition of knowledge), and *vidyāsukauśala* is knowledge itself. The final stanzas following the description of the observance list the results acquired through it (66:16-17): one becomes learned, wealthy, and sweet-voiced, and attains the realm of Brahmā. Thus not all of the desired ends are achieved (i.e. conjugal

<sup>48</sup> *sandhyāyām ca tathā maunam etat kurvan samācaret / nāntarā bhōjanam kuryād yāvan māsās trayodaśa //*

<sup>49</sup> *samāpte tu vrata kuryād bhōjanam śuklatandulāḥ / pūrvam savastrayugmam ca dadyād viprāya bhōjanam // devyā vitānam ghaṇṭām ca sitanetre payasvinim candanam vastrayugmam ca dadyāc ca śikharam punaḥ // tathopadeṣṭāram api bhaktyā sampūjayed gurum / vittaśāṭhyena rahito vastramālyānulepanāḥ //*

<sup>50</sup> *anena vidhinā yas tu kuryāt sārāsvatam vratam / vidyāvān arthasamyukto raktakaṇṭhas ca jāyate // sārāsvatyāḥ prasādēna brahmaloke mahiyate // nāri vā kurute yā tu sāpi tatphalagāmini // brahmaloke vased rājan yāvat kalpāyutatrayam //*

A final stanza promises three *kalpas* in the city of the *vidyādharas* to one who hears or recites this *vrata* (66:18 *sārāsvatam vratam yas tu śrṇuyād api yaḥ paṭhet / vidyādharapure so 'pi vaset kalpāyutatrayam //*).

A simpler Sarasvatī *vrata* is also mentioned, amidst a list of *vratas* to other gods, in 101:17-18: *sandhyāmaunam tataḥ kṛtvā samānte ghaṇṭakumbhakam / vastrayugmam tilān ghaṇṭām brāhmaṇāya nivedayet // sārāsvatam padam yāti punar āvṛttidurlabham // etat sārāsvatam nāma rūpavidyāpradāyakam //* “The devotee who maintains the vow of silence during *sandhyā* for a year and at the end of it gives a jar of clarified butter, a pair of clothes, sesame seeds, and a bell to a *brāhmaṇa*, goes to the domain of Sarasvatī which is difficult to attain again if one is in the cycle of rebirth. This is known as Sārāsvata [*vrata*]—which gives beauty and learning.” This may refer back to the one in MP 66.

union and friendship). However, in addition to acquiring that which is within the goddess's domain (learning and sweet speech), as well as wealth, the practitioner goes to Brahmaloaka, Sarasvatī's spouse's abode. As a *vrata* dedicated to a goddess, it is indeed appropriate that women should also be able to benefit from its performance.

## ii. For Music

In another passage of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (23) Sarasvatī is worshipped as the supreme *Brahman* and asked to grant knowledge in music. In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, it will be remembered, songs and dances were said not to be separate from her (66:8bc).<sup>51</sup> The *nāga* King Aśvatara who has lost his brother sets out for Plakṣāvatarāṇa (Plakṣaprasavaṇa) where the Sarasvatī river originates, and there he engages in arduous austerities and praise of the goddess (MkP 23:28-29).<sup>52</sup> He invokes her as the imperishable in whom all things and beings, even the syllable Om, reside (23:32-34).<sup>53</sup> "Undefinable, composed of half a measure, supreme, unchanging, imperishable, celestial, devoid of alteration is this thy other supreme form which I cannot express. And even the mouth does not declare it, nor the tongue, the copper-coloured lip, or other [organs]. Even Indra, the Vasus, Brahmā, the Moon and the Sun, the Light [cannot declare thy form], whose dwelling is the universe, which has the form of the universe; which is the ruler of the universe, the Supreme

<sup>51</sup> See p.144 above.

<sup>52</sup> *evam uktvā sa nāgendrah plakṣāvatarāṇam gireḥ tirtham himavato gatvā tapas tepe suduścaram / tuṣṭāva girbhīś ca tatas tatra devīm sarasvatīm tanmanā niyatāhāro bhūtvā trisavanāplutaḥ* :

<sup>53</sup> 23:32, 34 *tvam akṣaram param devi yatra sarvaṃ pratiṣṭhitam / akṣaram paramam devi samsthitam paramaṇuvat / ... tathā tvayi sthitam brahma jagac cedam aśeṣataḥ / omkāraḥ sarasamsthānam yat tu devi sthirāsthiram* :

Ruler...” (23:39c-42b).<sup>54</sup> Sarasvatī then appears<sup>55</sup> and offers the king a boon, and he chooses two: his brother Kambala and knowledge of all sounds for them both (23:49-50).<sup>56</sup> “The seven musical notes, the seven modes in the musical scale, O most noble Nāga! the seven songs also, and the same number of modulations, so also the forty-nine musical times, and the three octaves—all these thou and also Kambala shalt sing, O sinless one!... I have not given this to any other on earth or in Pātāla, O Nāga: and ye shall be the teachers of all this in Pātāla and in heaven and on earth also, ye two Nāgas!” (23:51-52, 56).<sup>57</sup> Sarasvatī, the tongue of all, then disappears and the boons are fulfilled, as the king and his brother play the *viṇā*, the goddess’s instrument par excellence. It is not, however, Sarasvatī whom they invoke with music and song, but Śiva (23:57-59).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *anird[d]eśyaṃ tathā cānyad ar[d]dhamātrānvitam param / avikār[y]yakṣayaṃ divyaṃ pariṇāmavivarjitam tavaitat paramaṃ rūpaṃ yan na śakyaṃ mayoditum / na cāsyena ca taj jihvā tāsroṣṭādibhir ucyate / indro 'pi vasavo brahmā candrārkaḥ jyotir eva ca // viśvāvāsaṃ viśvarūpaṃ viśveśaṃ parameśvaram /* Translation by Pargiter in 1904, p.129. Square brackets are mine.

<sup>55</sup> Although the text does not specifically state that Saravati appears, it does say that she later disappears from the *nāga*'s view (23:57).

<sup>56</sup> *varam te kambalabhrātaḥ prayacchāmy uragādhipa / tad ucyatām pradāsyāmi yat te manasi varttate / aśvatara uvāca / sahāyaṃ dehi devi tvaṃ pūrvam kambalam eva me // samastavarasambandhum ubhayoḥ samprayaccha ca //*

<sup>57</sup> *sapta svarā grāmarāgāḥ sapta pannagasattama / gitakāni ca saptaiva tāvatīś cāpi mūrechanāḥ // tālās caikonapañcāśat tathā grāmatrayan ca yat / etat sarvaṃ bhavān gātā kambalaś ca tathānagha // ... tathā nānyasya bhūrloke pātāle cāpi pannaga / pranetarau bhavantau ca sarvasyāsya bhaviṣyataḥ // pātāle devaloke ca bhūrloke caiva pannagau //* Translation by Pargiter in 1904, pp.130-32.

<sup>58</sup> *ity uktvā sā tadā devi sarvajihvā sarasvatī / jagāmādarśanaṃ sadyo nāgasya kamalekṣaṇā // tayoś ca tad yathā vṛttam bhrātroh sarvam ajāyata // vijñānam ubhayor agryam padatālasvarādikam // tataḥ kailāsaśailendraśikharasthitam īśvaram / gitakāiḥ saptabhir nāgau tantrīlayasamanvitau //*

## d. Iconography of Sarasvatī

### i. Four-armed Sarasvatī

The *Matsya Purāṇa vrata*, as we have seen, provides an iconographic description of Sarasvatī (66:10bd): she carries the *viṇā*, rosary, water pot, and book.<sup>59</sup> It is therefore a four-armed form. Likewise Brahmāṇi is to be made four-armed, but is described as holding only the rosary and the water pot (261:24cd-25ab): *brahmāṇi brahmasaḍṛṣī caturvaktrā caturbhujā // haṃsādhirūḍhā kartavyā sākṣasūtrakamaṇḍaluḥ /* The same list of objects as appears in MP 66:10bd is also found in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (3:64:2), but with the added specification of which is to be held in which hand (3:64:1-2):

*devi sarasvatī kāryā sarvābharanabhūṣitā /  
caturbhujā sā kartavyā tathaiva ca samutthitā //*

*pustakam cākṣamālām ca tasyā dakṣiṇahastayoḥ /  
vāṃayoś ca tathā kāryā vaiṇavi ca kamaṇḍaluḥ //*

The goddess Sarasvatī is to be made adorned with all ornaments. She is to be made four-armed and standing.

In her right hands, she is made [to hold] the book and the rosary, and in the left, the *vaiṇavi*<sup>60</sup> and the water pot.

The *vaiṇavi*, Priyabala Shah explains,<sup>61</sup> is not the flute, but the wooden staff of the *viṇā*. In *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (3:73:25) on the other hand, the *vaiṇavi* is replaced with the

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<sup>59</sup> Nag publishers' edition of the *Matsya Purāṇa* (1983) has *vāṇim kṣayanivāriṇim* (Vāṇi/Speech warding off decay/loss), which would make her two-armed, holding water pot and book.

<sup>60</sup> Following Priyabala Shah's edition of *khaṇḍa* 3 of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, 1958, p.154.

<sup>61</sup> In her edition of *khaṇḍa* 3 of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, 1958, p.154.



trident, a traditionally Śaivaite implement: *caturbhujā ca kartavyā tathā devī sarasvatī / akṣamālā triśūlaṃ ca pustakaṃ ca kamaṇḍalu //* This iconographic prescription is not followed in the representations of Sarasvatī.

## Book

The *pustaka* clearly belongs to the goddess of knowledge and is found in the earliest known image of Sarasvatī from about the third century C.E., as we shall see.<sup>62</sup> The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* says it represents the Vedas (3:64:3cd): *vedās tasya bhujā jñeyāḥ sarvaśāstrāṇi pustakaṃ //*

## Rosary

The rosary is somewhat more difficult to explain. *Akṣa* is the seed from which a rosary is made, while *mālā* is a garland. Whereas in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* it is referred as *akṣamālā* (3:64), in the *Matsya Purāṇa* it is *akṣamaṇi* (66:10b), jewels or pearls [on a string], which Anand Swarup Gupta glosses as *akṣamālā*.<sup>63</sup> *Sūtra* “thread, string” is also sometimes used instead of *mālā*, as in MP 261:25b (*sākṣasūtrakamaṇḍaluh*), where Brahmāṇī carries an *akṣasūtra*. The string of pearls fits in with her connection with the colour white: white flower garlands and white flowers are offered to her during the *Matsya Purāṇa vrata* (66:6d, 10c), for instance. She is associated

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<sup>62</sup> See pp.166-71 below.

<sup>63</sup> Gupta 1962, p.81.

with purity, and hence with what is white.

According to the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, the rosary in Sarasvatī's hand represents time (3:64:4cd): *akṣamālā kare tasyāḥ kāle bhavati pārthiva //*

### *Vīṇā*

The *vīṇā* as Sarasvatī's dominant iconographic feature represented consistently to this day is of overwhelming importance. We have already seen the instrument in connection with Vāc in the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>64</sup> There it was the gods who played it to win Speech back from the *gandharvas*. In later times, however, it is the *gandharvas* as celestial musicians who play the *vīṇā* and sing.<sup>65</sup> Amongst the earlier Purāṇas, Sarasvatī's association with the *vīṇā* appears also in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, where she presents no less than a "great-sounding great *vīṇā*" to Skanda: *baśya dattā sarasvatyā mahāvīṇā mahāsvanā / (72:46cd)*.

According to the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, the *vīṇā* is to be known as symbol of accomplishment: *siddhir mūrtimatī jñeyā vaiṇavi nātra saṁśayah / (3:64:5ab)*.

### Water Pot

As river goddess, the water pot is a symbol appropriate to her. According to Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, it represents abundance or immortality.<sup>66</sup> The *Viṣṇudharmottara*

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<sup>64</sup> See p.93 above.

<sup>65</sup> Hopkins 1915, p.154.

<sup>66</sup> 1963, p.191.

*Purāṇa* says the water pot is to be known as the immortal nectar of all scriptures (3:64:4ab):  
*sarvaśāstrāmṛtaraso devyā jñeyah kamandaluh /*

## ii. *Haṃsa* Mount

Although nothing is said of Sarasvatī's mount in MP 66, in 260:40c Brahmā's mount is identified as the *haṃsa* or goose (*haṃsārūḍhaḥ kvacit kāryah*),<sup>67</sup> and therefore it is also assigned to his consort Brahmānī (261:24c-25b *brahmānī brahmasadrśī caturvaktrā caturbhujā // haṃsādhirūḍhā kartavyā* ). Amongst the extant images of Sarasvatī, we find her with a *haṃsa* from about the tenth century onwards (fig.23).<sup>68</sup> Although she later appears also with a ram and with a peacock,<sup>69</sup> the *haṃsa* is her most common mount.

The word *haṃsa* is often erroneously translated as “swan.” for the goose generally tends to be perceived as devoid of all elegance and intelligence, the very model of silliness and stupidity. As Jean Philippe Vogel explains,<sup>70</sup> the ordinary greyish brown and white goose found in India (*Anser indicus*) is a bird of passage which “lives in India from October to April and breeds on the lakes of Tibet and Central Asia.” The Latin word *anser*, it should be noted, is clearly related to the Sanskrit *haṃsa*. The white goose is called *rājahaṃsa* “royal goose,” and it is this white goose which is Sarasvatī's mount. Not only

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<sup>67</sup> In the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* Brahmā's chariot is drawn by seven geese: *jaṭādharaṃ caturbāhuṃ saptahaṃsa rathe sthitam /* (3:44:6b). In the Lecture Hall of Tōji 東寺 in Kyoto, there is an early ninth century image Brahmā on four geese (see Kyoto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 1995, fig.3).

<sup>68</sup> See p.185 below.

<sup>69</sup> See K. Bhattacharyya 1983, figs. VIII (ram) and XX (peacock), for instance.

<sup>70</sup> 1962, p.2.

is its gait described as graceful,<sup>71</sup> but its voice is also said to be charming.<sup>72</sup>

The *haṃsa* is best known for its ability to separate milk from water. The original connection, however, may have been with soma rather than with milk.<sup>73</sup> In the Upaniṣads, the *haṃsa* is the *ātman* (*Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 4:3:11-12):

*svapnena śārīram abhiprahatyāsuptaḥ suptān abhicākaśīti /  
śukram ādāya punar eti sthānaṃ hiraṇmayah puruṣa  
ekahaṃsaḥ //*

*prāṇena rakṣann avaraṃ kulāyaṃ bahiṣkulāyād amṛtaś caritvā /  
sa iyate 'mṛto yatra kāmam hiraṇmayah puruṣa ekahaṃsaḥ //*

Subduing by sleep the bodily realm, remaining awake, he contemplates the sleeping senses. Taking the light, he returns to his place—the golden person, the single goose!

Guarding by breath the lower nest, the immortal roams outside the nest; the immortal goes wherever he wants—the golden person, the single goose!<sup>74</sup>

In the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, the migrating *haṃsa* is in one passage (1:6) the transmigrating individual soul (*jīvātman*),<sup>75</sup> and in another the *ātman* (6:15).<sup>76</sup> One might say, therefore,

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<sup>71</sup> *Manu Smṛti* 3:10 *avyaṅgāṅgiṃ saumyanāmnim haṃsavāraṇagāminim* / “He [a man] should marry a woman who does not lack any part of her body and who has a pleasant name, who walks like a goose or an elephant...” (Doniger and Smith translation in 1991, p.44.)

<sup>72</sup> Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* says that Rāma speaks with the voice of an enamoured *haṃsa* (2:112:15).

<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, RV 4:45:4; 5:78:1-3; 8:35:8; VS 19:74.

<sup>74</sup> Translation by Patrick Olivelle in 1996, p.59; 1998, p.113.

<sup>75</sup> *sarvājīve sarvasamsthe bṛhante asmin haṃso bhrāmyate brahmacakre / pṛthag ātmānaṃ preritāraṃ ca matvā juṣṭas tatas tenāmṛtatvam eti //* “Within this vast wheel of *brahman*, on which all subsist and which abides in all, a goose keeps moving around. When he perceives himself (*ātman*) as distinct from the impeller, delighted by that knowledge he goes from there to immortality.” (Olivelle 1996, p.253; 1998, p.415.)

<sup>76</sup> *eko haṃso bhuvanasyāsya madhye sa evāgniḥ salile sanniviṣṭaḥ / tam eva viditvātīrṃtyum eti nānyah panthā vidyate 'yanāya //* “He is the one goose in the middle of this universe. He himself resides as fire within the ocean. Only when man knows him does he pass beyond death; there is no other path for getting there.” (Olivelle 1996, p.264; 1998, p.433.)

that the sage who knows his Self is thus a *haṃsa*<sup>77</sup> endowed with the faculty of discrimination likened to the separation of milk from water by the goose.

In connection with Sarasvatī, the *haṃsa* is indeed an appropriate mount, not only because it is her spouse's mount, but also because she is goddess of knowledge, which requires discrimination (like separation of milk from water). In her river goddess aspect, she is linked with the *haṃsa* in connection with water, for the goose dwells in lakes and pools. In terms of colour, as Sarasvatī is associated with white, her royal goose is also white.

### iii. With Brahmā

When texts prescribe that Brahmā is to have Sarasvatī and Sāvitrī by his side, Sarasvatī is on his right and Sāvitrī on his left: *vāmapārśve 'sya sāvitrīṃ dakṣiṇe ca sarasvatīm //* (MP 260:44cd).

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<sup>77</sup> The word *paramahaṃsa* is appended in the form of a title to the names of certain religious figures, such as Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

## Vedic, Epic, and Puranic Sarasvatī in Retrospective

Before proceeding to the early images of Sarasvatī, let us look back to the textual sources examined so far, and summarize the conceptual development of Sarasvatī perceptible from the *R̥g Veda* to the early Purāṇas.<sup>78</sup>

In the *R̥g Veda*, Sarasvatī appears as a powerful river and a mighty goddess, invoked to grant all things and to destroy enemies. She is called on in hymns that were recited during sacrifices performed on her banks, and is associated with the sacrificial goddesses Ṛ̥ṣā and Bhāratī. She is closely connected with inspired thought (*dhī́*), which, in turn, is inseparably tied in with speech (*vác*).

In the *Atharva Veda*, Sarasvatī is invoked for her assistance in matters of this world, such as marriage ceremonies and the granting of progeny. She continues to be connected with the Ṛ̥ṣā and Bhāratī, who, together with Sarasvatī, are here called the *tīsrāḥ s̥arasvatīḥ*. One step beyond her association with inspired thought in the *R̥g Veda*, she is connected, in the *Atharva Veda*, with speech and even identified with it.

In the *Yajur Veda*, Sarasvatī plays a significant part in the Sautrāmaṇī ritual, where she functions as healer and life-giver of Indra through speech. As in the *Atharva Veda*, she is both associated and identified with speech. She acquires a particular connection with the ewe, which is offered to her during the Sautrāmaṇī sacrifice.

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<sup>78</sup> See also Table on pp. 157-58 (to be read facing one another) below.

In the Brāhmaṇas, the river goddess Sarasvatī makes a comeback. Sacrificial sessions are performed along the river, against its course, producing a Sarasvatī river pilgrimage. The goddess is repeatedly and definitively identified with speech, the embodiment of knowledge. Speech becomes daughter and consort to the creator Prajāpati, and Prajāpati-Vāc myths then form the basis for the later Brahmā-Sarasvatī relationship. Vāc is also connected, for the first time, with music and with the *viṇā*.

In the *Mahābhārata*, the pilgrimage along the river Sarasvatī is vastly expanded and elaborate myths are woven around the *tirthas* on her banks. In contrast with the *Rg Veda* description of a powerful flooding river, the epic depicts a calmer-flowing Sarasvatī. Her banks are populated by huge numbers of sages performing rituals. As goddess, she governs over knowledge, now quite independently of speech, whose identity had long ago become her own. In relationship to other gods and humans, she becomes the daughter of Brahmā, the wife of Manu and of sage Matinara, and the mother of Tamsu and Sarasvat.

In the *Mārkaṇḍeya* and *Matsya Purāṇas*, sacrifices dedicated to Sarasvatī are performed to obtain, above all, speech, but also knowledge and other things. Vāc's Brāhmaṇa connection with music and the *viṇā* bears fruit in the Purāṇas: in the *Mārkaṇḍeya*, Sarasvatī is worshipped to obtain full knowledge of music, and in the *Vāyu*, provides Skanda with a *viṇā*. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* the Brahma-Sarasvatī myth, based on Brāhmaṇa accounts of Prajāpati-Vāc, is fully elaborated. She also acquires, in the *Matsya Purāṇa* story of Brahmā and Sarasvatī, different names, including Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, and Brahmāṇī. In later portions of the *Matsya Purāṇa* (ca. 550-650), and then repeated in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, she is described as four-armed, carrying

*viṇā*, rosary, water pot, and book. Her usual mount, the *haṃsa*, is attributed both to her spouse Brahmā and to Brahmāṇī.

We may distinguish, then, three aspects of Sarasvatī: the original river aspect, followed in the Brāhmaṇas and the *Mahābhārata* by the knowledge aspect, and then the early Puranic music aspect. To these must also be added her Puranic daughter-consort aspect in relation to Brahmā. Hence her aspects are physical (river), functional (knowledge and music), and relational (daughter-consort of Brahmā). In iconographic descriptions, her functional aspects of knowledge and music are combined, as the four-armed goddess carries both the manuscript and the *viṇā*.



## FROM THE VEDAS TO THE EARLY PURĀNAS

	RIVER	GODDESS	SACRIFICE	SPEECH
<b>RG VEDA</b> After 1750 B.C.E.	powerful river	powerful goddess	sacrifices on river banks	presides over <i>dhi</i>
<b>ATHARVA VEDA</b> Ca. 12 <sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E.		assists in worldly matters	The Three Sarasvatis	associated and identified with speech
<b>YAJUR VEDA</b> Ca. 12 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E.			Sautrāmaṇi ritual, ewe offering	associated and identified with speech
<b>BRĀHMAṆAS</b> Ca. 900 – 500 B.C.E.	river		sacrificial sessions along river	identified with speech
<b>MAHĀBHĀRATA</b> Ca. 400 B.C.E. – 400 C.E.	calmer river, pilgrimage along river, mythology of the <i>tirthas</i>		sacrifices on river banks	
<b>MĀRKAṆḌEYA PURĀNA</b> Ca. 3 <sup>rd</sup> c. C.E. 3 <sup>rd</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> c.			sacrifice for speech worship for music	
<b>MATSYA PURĀNA</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> c. 550 - 650			sacrifice for speech, knowledge, etc.	
<b>VĀYU PURĀNA</b> 4 <sup>th</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup> c.				
<b>VIṢṆU-DHARMOTTARA PURĀNA</b> Ca. 400 – 1000				

## FROM THE VEDAS TO THE EARLY PURĀNAS

KNOWLEDGE	MUSIC	NAMES	ICONOGRAPHY	RELATIONS
				mother and consort of Indra
speech = Vedas = knowledge	Speech connected with music, and with <i>viṇā</i>			Speech as daughter and consort of Prajāpati
goddess of knowledge		another Sāvitrī		daughter of Brahmā, wife, mother
goddess of knowledge	teaches music			
goddess of knowledge		Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, Brahmāṇī Lakṣmī, Gaurī, epithets	4-armed: <i>viṇā</i> , rosary, water pot, book; mount: goose	daughter and consort of Brahmā
	gives <i>viṇā</i> to Skanda			
goddess of knowledge			4-armed: <i>viṇā</i> , rosary, water pot, book; symbolism	

### III. INDIAN IMAGES OF SARASVATĪ

#### Introduction

Surviving early images of Sarasvatī are not limited to the Hindu fold. With the advent of Buddhism and Jainism in the sixth century B.C.E. and their subsequent growth and development, Sarasvatī's sphere of influence extended into new realms. In an environment where, irrespective of religious or philosophical affiliation, knowledge was highly valued, she, as an embodiment of it, had widespread, universal appeal. We therefore have early Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist images of Sarasvatī.

In terms of textual background, as we have seen, there is a great deal of Vedic, epic, and Puranic literature on the goddess. The principal Jain sources on Sarasvatī, on the other hand, date from a later period, and hence cannot provide us with a background for the earliest Jain images of the goddess. As the composition of these Jain sources extends beyond the time frame of the Indian side of this study (pre-eighth century), they will not be discussed here.<sup>1</sup> As for the Buddhist textual background, it does not apply to the one probably Buddhist image (e.g. Sārnāth) discussed below. Early Buddhist sources, on the other hand, function as the background for Chinese and Japanese representations, as we shall see. They cannot, furthermore, be discussed separately from their Chinese translations.

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<sup>1</sup> For a textual discussion of the Jain Sarasvatī, see Shah 1941. I would like to thank Paul Dundas of the University of Edinburgh and Nagasaki Hōjun 長崎法潤, professor emeritus at Otani University 大谷大学 in Kyoto, for their assistance in matters of dating Jain sources.

Hence Buddhist textual material will be taken up in the following section (IV. Buddhist Sarasvatī).

As in the Purāṇas, then, I will focus here on surviving pre-eighth century material, in the form of Sarasvatī images. I will also discuss the images of this time period which are erroneously labelled as Sarasvatī, as well as those erroneously dated as pre-eighth century.

## 1. Early Indian Images of Sarasvatī

### a. Bhārhut: *Vīṇā*-player on a Stupa Pillar (fig. 1)

An image which has been called an early prototype of Sarasvatī and even Sarasvatī herself appears in the second century B.C.E. Buddhist site of Bhārhut in eastern Madhya Pradesh.<sup>2</sup> The figure is carved on the southeastern pillar of the earliest surviving stupa railing in India, now housed in the Indian Museum in Calcutta. She stands atop a full-blown lotus growing from a lake<sup>3</sup> with her left hip thrust out and her right knee bent. As in the case of some of the other Bhārhut images of *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*,<sup>4</sup> only the toes of her right foot, now largely missing, appear to have touched the ground. She carries a seven-stringed harp in her two hands. She wears a sash around her waist, a covering over her head, and ornaments adorn her body. Her face is youthful. The image is, unfortunately, quite damaged, and there is no descriptive label as is usually found on Bhārhut reliefs. It is, therefore, impossible to identify the figure with certainty.

The belief that this may be Sarasvatī or an early prototype of the goddess stems exclusively from the presence of the stringed instrument, which is indeed a *vīṇā* in its earliest form. In her study of musical instruments in ancient India, Claudie Marcel-Dubois

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<sup>2</sup> Barua (1934-37, vol.3, p.35), who is followed by Banerjea (1956, p.377), advances the early prototype argument. Coomaraswamy (1956, p.63) cautiously suggests the identification of the image with Sarasvatī on the basis of later iconography. Yasodadevi (1963, p.690) and K. Bhattacharyya (1983, p.77) go even further, calling her an actual "representation" of Sarasvatī.

<sup>3</sup> Barua 1934-37, vol.2, p.75.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Barua 1934-37; Harle 1987, fig. 12.

discusses the different types of harps, zithers, and lutes, all of which may be referred to as *viṇā*.<sup>5</sup> As Coomaraswamy and Marcel-Dubois explain, the word *viṇā* was probably first applied to the bow-shaped harp (“harpe arquée”), which is the earliest type to appear in artistic representations.<sup>6</sup> The earliest extant depictions of this bow-shaped harp, furthermore, are to be found at Bhārhut, as in our image. This instrument, however, is not exclusive to our female figure: the *gandharva* Pañcaśikha is renowned as a harp-player and appears as Indra’s envoy when the king of the gods wishes to meet the Buddha. This scene is illustrated at a number of early Buddhist sites, including Bhārhut (fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> As the two sides of the Bhārhut medallion are broken, a part of the figure of Pañcaśikha holding the bow-shaped harp remains on the left side. One might also point to two female musicians, one playing a bow-shaped harp and the other a flute, appearing on one of the scenes incised on a first century B.C.E. bronze vase from Gondla, Himachal Pradesh, now in the British Museum (fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> Our image, therefore, cannot be identified as Sarasvatī on the basis of the musical instrument she carries.<sup>9</sup> The earliest extant depictions of what is decidedly Sarasvatī playing upon a *viṇā* date from about the sixth century (figs. 14-15)—no less than eight hundred years after this Bhārhut sculpture. Likewise, the earliest iconographic description of Sarasvatī carrying the *viṇā* is found in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (66:10b), which according to Hazra may

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<sup>5</sup> Marcel-Dubois 1941, pp.90-91, 113. The different types of harps, zithers, and lutes are described in detail on pp.72-93. See also Sadie 1984, vol.3, pp.728-735. The arched-harp is attested from the second century B.C.E., the lute from the early centuries C.E., and the stick-zither from the sixth century C.E.

<sup>6</sup> Coomaraswamy 1930, p.244; Marcel-Dubois 1941, pp.90-91. See also Sivaramamurti 1942, p.144, pl.13, fig.3.

<sup>7</sup> The illustrations of this scene are discussed in Coomaraswamy 1928.

<sup>8</sup> Errington, Cribb, and Claringbull 1992, pl.163, pp.162-164. According to Maurizio Taddei (1993, p.347), the vase should be assigned to the second century B.C.E.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive list of deities who carry the *viṇā*, see Marcel-Dubois 1941, pp.113-114.

be assigned to 550-650 C.E.<sup>10</sup> The type of *viṇā* which we see in these sixth century images, it should be noted, is no longer the bow-shaped harp, but the later zither.<sup>11</sup>

#### **b. Ghantashala: Four-armed Sarasvatī on a Marble Slab (fig. 4)**

Another image which is claimed to be a second century B.C.E. example of Sarasvatī is from the Buddhist site of Ghantashala in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately none of the individuals who has made this claim has taken the trouble to read carefully Alexander Rea's report of the excavation at the stupa at the beginning of 1892.<sup>13</sup> As Rea explains, the stupa probably dates to a few years following the later works of Amarāvati, which would place it in about the second or third century C.E. A few of the many marble slabs which would have adorned the building, including piers, capitals, an umbrella, a carved railing, stupa slabs, and other slabs now carved with modern sculptures, have been preserved in the village of Ghantashala and adjoining villages. Our Sarasvatī appears on one of these remaining slabs which have been defaced and resculptured with Hindu deities, and which are now worshipped in a Śiva temple. It is not, therefore, anything near a second century B.C.E. Sarasvatī image, nor is it a Buddhist Sarasvatī, but rather a comparatively modern,

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<sup>10</sup> See p.130 above.

<sup>11</sup> One exception to the almost ever-present zither of the Indian Sarasvatī is the bow-shaped harp in a ninth century bronze image of the goddess from Nālandā (Marcel-Dubois 1941, pl.XLVI:1).

<sup>12</sup> K. Bhattacharyya 1983, pp.78,131-32; Sahai 1975, pp.152-53; Yasodadevi 1963, p.689. Support for this dating is even claimed on the basis of stylistic features: K. Bhattacharyya (p.78) points to the "strict frontality" of the image, which is supposed to indicate that it is contemporary with the Bhārhut image, while Yasodadevi, who claims it belongs to the third century B.C.E., sees resemblances with Mohenjodaro art!?!

<sup>13</sup> Rea 1894, pp.32-34, 38; pl. XXXI.

crudely-carved four-armed Hindu Sarasvatī. Her hair is rolled and layered on her head like a coiled snake, and her disproportionately large and protruding ears are adorned with earrings. She stands naked and flat-footed, holding a lotus in her top right hand, a manuscript in her top left,<sup>14</sup> and petting her mount the *haṃsa* with her bottom right. Her bottom left hand simply hangs down. Her two top arms are so disproportionately large and masculine-looking that they appear not to belong to her body. Her bottom arms, emerging from her excessively broad shoulders, are also a little larger than they should be, and in the case of the left, far too angular at the wrist, with a disproportionately large hand placed on the head of the *haṃsa*. The bottom hands, furthermore, are carved in abbreviated form so that instead of five fingers, we see something resembling the head of a fish or a snake. The iconography of this Sarasvatī image is an indication in itself, as we shall see, of a date clearly much later than the second century B.C.E. Although the manuscript shows up in a ca. third century C.E. image (fig. 8), the *haṃsa* is first mentioned as Brahmāṇi's mount in the *Matsya Purāna* (161:25a) of ca. 550-650 C.E. and does not appear amongst the surviving images of what is decidedly Sarasvatī until about the tenth century.

### c. Gandhāra: *Vīṇā*-player on a Lion (fig. 5)

The sculpture of a goddess seated on a lion, and playing a lute appears amidst the Gandhāra art of the Lahore Museum. The head of the female figure is missing, as are parts

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<sup>14</sup> In one instance K. Bhattacharyya claims this is a manuscript (1983, p.78), and in another, that it is a noose (1983, p.131). It is a mystery to me why he and Sahai (1975, p.145) have interpreted this object as a noose.



of the leaping lion. Albert Grünwedel identified her as belonging to the Sarasvatī type on the basis of later images of the goddess.<sup>15</sup> The lute she plays is another type of *viṇā*, which first appears in Gandhāra art.<sup>16</sup> Alfred Foucher, on the other hand, suggested that although the image represents a musician deity of some repute, at this time she would not yet have succeeded in distinguishing herself from the anonymous crowd of such figures.<sup>17</sup> There are plenty of other Gandhāra examples of male and female figures playing the same type of lute, and they are usually identified simply as musicians (figs. 6-7). The same identification could just as well be applied to this figure on the lion, as Harald Ingholt has done, labelling her as a “gandharvī.”<sup>18</sup> Sarasvatī, it should be noted, does not have the lion as her mount.

Foucher’s suggestion that the *viṇā*-playing Sarasvatī arises from amidst the host of *gandharvi* figures is certainly inaccurate. As we have seen, there are numerous factors which contributed to the development of Sarasvatī into a goddess of music: the sound of the river’s flowing waters, her identification with Speech, the recitation of the Vedas, Vāc’s choice to remain with the *viṇā*-playing gods in the myth of the barter for Soma, and the expansion of her territory to all fields of knowledge, to name but the most relevant factors.

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<sup>15</sup> 1920, pp.100-101. Grünwedel only has a line drawing of the image. For a photographic illustration, see, for instance, Foucher 1918 (vol.2), p.71, fig.340 and Ingholt 1957, pl.363.

<sup>16</sup> For the *viṇā* as a lute see Marcel-Dubois 1941, pp.87-91. It is the lute, known in China as the *pipa* and in Japan as the *biwa* (琵琶), which we see in the hands of most Japanese two-armed Sarasvatī images.

<sup>17</sup> 1918 (vol.2), p.67.

<sup>18</sup> 1957, p.151, pl.363.

#### d. Kaṅkāli Tīlā: Sarasvatī with a Manuscript (fig. 8)

The earliest surviving artistic representation which decidedly depicts Sarasvatī was found by A. Führer on January 18, 1889 at the Jain site of Kaṅkāli Tīlā near Mathura. There used to be two magnificent temples on the site, which belonged to the Śvetāmbaras.<sup>19</sup> The image, now kept at the State Museum in Lucknow, is made of mottled red sandstone and measures 57 cm in height. It is quite damaged, with the head, shoulders, right hand, and left breast missing altogether. Most fortunately, however, it bears an inscription on the two-tiered pedestal identifying it as Sarasvatī and specifying the date of its installation. The inscription consists of seven lines written in Brāhmi script:

1. *(sid)dham sava 50 4 hemaṃtamāse catu(r)tth(e) 4 divas(e) 10 a-*
2. *sya purvvāyāṃ koḷeyāto gaṇāto sthāniyāto kulāto*
3. *vairāto śākhāto śrīgrh(ā)to sambhogāto vācakasyāryya*
4. *(gha)sta(or u)hastisya śiṣyo gaṇisya aryya māghahastisya śraddhacaro vācakasya a-*
5. *ryya devasya nirvvarittana govasya sīhaputrasya lohikakarakasya dānaṃ*
6. *sarvvasatv(ā)n(ā)ṃ hitasukhā ekasarasvatī pratiṣṭhāvitā stavatale (na)dānavato*
7. *dha(r)m(e?)*

Success! In the year 54,<sup>20</sup> in the fourth month of winter, 4, on the

<sup>19</sup> Bühler 1889, p.233; Burgess 1892-94, vol.1, p.378.

<sup>20</sup> Bühler had some difficulties deciphering the first numeral of the year: in his article in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* in 1889 (p.239) he hesitantly proposed the year 84, which he then, in *Epigraphia Indica* in 1892 (Burgess 1892-94, vol.1, p.391), revised—still hesitantly—to 54 on the basis of another inscription which includes both words and figures (p.391, note 66). According to Smith (1901, p.56, note 1; p.57), the plate in *Epigraphia Indica* (no.21) clearly reads 44. Lüders (1904, p.105, nos.16-17), however, argued for the year 54: while the first figure of the date does not resemble the numeral sign for 40, he could not, on the other hand, recognize any difference between that figure and the signs for 50 occurring in Mathurā inscriptions. Furthermore, Lüders added, the appearance of some of the same names in what he read as slightly different forms as well as of some of the same facts (the venerable Deva as the teacher of a

10th day,<sup>21</sup> on this occasion as specified, a Sarasvatī, the gift of the smith<sup>22</sup> Gova, son of Siha, (was) erected at the request of the preacher the venerable Deva, the *śraddhacaro* [companion] of the *gaṇin* [head of a school] the venerable Māghahasti, the pupil of the preacher the venerable (Gha)sta(or u?)hasti, of the Koḷeya *gaṇa*, the Sṭhāniya *kula*, the Vairā *śākhā*, the Śrīgrha *sambhoga*.<sup>23</sup> for the welfare of all beings.<sup>24</sup>

Ghastahasti and his disciple Māghahasti appear as Māghuhasti and Ghastuhasti in another inscription with the reading of the year as 52.<sup>25</sup> The year 54 refers to Kaṇiṣka's chronological system. There continues to be wide disagreement amongst scholars, however, on the date when the era began.<sup>26</sup> If we follow those who support the year 78 C.E., it places our image in 132 C.E. Many, on the other hand, believe the era began about half a century later, in 110-115 or in 128, for instance. That would put our image in the latter part of the second century. Others still, insist on the third century, notably the leading numismatist

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member of the caste of smiths) in an inscription for another Jain image of Mathurā from two years earlier confirm the reading for the year of our inscription as 54. Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1949, p.286-87), whose translation this is, likewise reads the numerals for the year as 54.

<sup>21</sup> According to Smith (1901, p.56, note 2), the plate in *Epigraphia Indica* reads 11 or 12, rather than 10, for the day, and in this, Lüders (1904, p.105, nos.16-17, note 49) believes Smith may be right. Obviously Lohuizen-de Leeuw agreed with Bühler on this one.

<sup>22</sup> Although Jains cannot take up the profession of smiths, as it involves the destruction of animal life, Bühler (1889, p.239, note 9) suggests that Gova may either have been a smith or have belonged to the caste of smiths, but would have left the profession on converting to Jainism.

<sup>23</sup> It would seem that the *kula* represented the spiritual lineage of the master, that the *śākhā* was a branch issued from this line, and the *sambhoga* a regional subdivision (Bühler 1890, pp.315-16). The division into *gaṇa* and *kula* is peculiar to the Jains (Bühler 1888, p.142).

<sup>24</sup> Lohuizen-de Leeuw's reading of the inscription and translation of it (1949, p.287). Her reading resolves the enigmatic last line that had remained unclear to Bühler (1889, p.239 and in Burgess 1892-94, vol.1, pp.391-92), Smith (1901, p.56), and Lüders (1904, p.104). Square bracketed portions and italics are mine.

<sup>25</sup> When Lüders noted this point in 1904 (p.104, nos.16-17), his reading of "Ghastahasti" in our inscription, in accordance with Bühler's before him (1889, p.239 and in Burgess 1892-94, vol. pp.391-92), was as "Hastahasti." Guérinot (1908, pp.40-41) provides a convenient chart of the Koliya (Kotika) *gaṇa*, its subdivisions, and its lineage of teachers on the basis of surviving inscriptions.

<sup>26</sup> For a recent summary of the numerous dates proposed, see Zwalf 1996, vol.1, Appendix 1, pp.357-58, which includes extensive bibliographic references.

Robert Göbl, who argues for 225-32. If we follow Göbl, our image would then have been produced in 286. Furthermore, Johanna Engelberta van Lohuizen-de Leeuw's masterly study on the Scythian period shows that between the years 100 and 157 of the Kaṇiṣka era (and possibly even after that), people continued to count steadily on, but omitted the figure 100 when inscribing a date.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, unless an inscription from this period gives the name of the reigning monarch, all dates between 1 and 57 can pertain either to the first half of the first century of Kaṇiṣka's era or to the first half of the second century—as in our image. This dilemma can then be resolved by comparison with sculptures with fixed dates and by analysis of the character forms in the inscription. If we consider the arrangement of our Sarasvatī sculpture, it is characteristic of post-Kuṣāṇa art, as Lohuizen-de Leeuw points out. The goddess appears on an inscribed two-tiered rectangular pedestal, with an adorant on each side of her, standing on the first tier. This same arrangement (with top tier not always inscribed) is found in post-Kuṣāṇa Jina images of Mathura.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Lohuizen-de Leeuw's meticulous analysis of the style and character forms of the inscription shows a number of points in common with Gupta inscriptions. Thus, she argues, the date must be one hundred years later: year 154. As Lohuizen-de Leeuw accepts the year 78 as the beginning of Kaṇiṣka's era, the year 154 of this era would then correspond to 232 C.E.<sup>29</sup> Given the wide range and complexity of suggestions for the starting date of the Kaṇiṣka era, I will cautiously settle for a date of ca. third century for our Kaṅkālī Tīlā Sarasvatī image.

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<sup>27</sup> 1949, pp.232-301.

<sup>28</sup> 1949, pp.286, 241 (textfig.22), 246 (textfig.23).

<sup>29</sup> 1949, pp.287-88.

Atop the two-tiered, rectangular pedestal bearing this long inscription, a now headless Sarasvatī sits squatting. It is also, as Umakant P. Shah points out,<sup>30</sup> the posture in which Mahāvīra attained the highest knowledge. It is, therefore, an appropriate posture for the goddess of knowledge. The lower half of Sarasvatī's body is draped in a sari, the end of which is drawn over her left arm and would have extended over her no longer existent left shoulder. As Sadashiv Gorakshakar notes,<sup>31</sup> her squatting posture with her knees spread wide apart emphasizes the crescent folds of her sari. She wears a bracelet on each wrist, and holds a palm-leaf manuscript wrapped in cloth in her left hand. There have been various suggestions as to what her missing right hand might have held: a lotus,<sup>32</sup> a *mudrā*,<sup>33</sup> a pen,<sup>34</sup> or a rosary.<sup>35</sup> In 1941 Shah began by quoting Jain iconographic descriptions, mostly of a much later date than our Kaṅkāli Tīlā sculpture, such as Bappabhaṭṭi Sūri's (ca.743-838) *Caturvaṃśathā*,<sup>36</sup> and then, presumably on that basis, suggested that Sarasvatī probably held a lotus in her right hand.<sup>37</sup> By 1946, however, Bajpai had taken a closer look

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<sup>30</sup> 1987, p.324.

<sup>31</sup> Pal 1994, pl. 55.

<sup>32</sup> Sadashiv Gorakshakar in Pal 1994, pl. 55; Shah 1941, p.199.

<sup>33</sup> According to Bhattasali 1929, p.187, the *vyākhyāna* (teaching); according to Bajpai 1946, p.1, and Jain 1964, p.100, the *abhaya* (fear-not); or according to Jain 1964, p.100 and 1971, p.31, the *varada* (boon-giving).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Bajpai 1946, p.1; Debala Mitra in A. Ghosh 1974-75, vol.1, p.67; Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949, p.286; Shah 1987, p.324; Srinivasan 1989, p.356.

<sup>36</sup> Stanza 76: *vāgdevī varadābhūtapustikāpadmalakṣitau / āpo 'vyād bibhrati hastau pustikāpadmalakṣitau* / (as quoted in Shah 1941, p.198, note 19). Although Shah (1941, p.198, note 21) quotes a few stanzas at the end of the *Bhagavati Sūtra*, a text which dates, in parts, from a very early period (third or second century B.C.E., gradually expanded), Sarasvatī's name does not appear here: a *śrutādevatā* has a full-blown lotus in her hand. According to Paul Dundas (private communication), however, this *śrutādevatā* is surely not Sarasvatī, "but rather a kind of all purpose category." Nagasaki Hōjun, on the other hand, believes it is Sarasvatī (private communication). For *śrutādevī* as Sarasvatī in later times, see pp.182-83 below.

<sup>37</sup> 1941, pp.198-199.

at the image and noticed a part of the rosary—four beads to be exact—preserved near the wrist.<sup>38</sup> As he suggested, Sarasvatī’s right hand was probably also raised in a *mudrā*, as one sees in later images.<sup>39</sup> The fact that the arm is raised is an indication in itself that it could not have been held in the downward-pointing *varada mudrā*. From the point of view of the position of the arm and wrist, and in accordance with the inscription which states that the image was made “for the welfare of all beings,” the *abhaya mudrā*, which Bajpai suggests, and the *vyākhyāna* are both possibilities. However, since the image was made at the request of a preacher and a manuscript was placed in the goddess’s left hand—hence emphasizing her function as goddess of knowledge—the teaching gesture would seem to be more fitting here.

Sarasvatī is flanked by two male diminutive figures. The one on her right wears a dhoti and carries a water pot, while the one on her left is draped in monk’s robes and holds his palms together in veneration. As Sadashiv Gorakshakar suggests, the former probably represents the smith Gova, and the latter the preacher Aryadeva, who inspired him to donate the image.<sup>40</sup>

For Jyoti Prasad Jain, this Sarasvatī sculpture is the symbol of a period of Jain literary activity (zenith ca. 50 B.C.E. - 50 C.E.) which he calls “the Sarasvatī movement.”<sup>41</sup> What he refers to, therefore, is not a “movement” centering on Sarasvatī, but rather on

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<sup>38</sup> 1946, p.1. It is unfortunate that this plainly visible fact has for most, with the exception of Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1949, p.286) and Shah (1987, p.324), remained an object of speculation—particularly in the case of Sadashiv Gorakshakar in Pal 1994, pl.55.

<sup>39</sup> See K. Bhattacharyya 1983, pl.19, for instance.

<sup>40</sup> Pal 1994, plate 55.

<sup>41</sup> 1964, pp.100-119; 1971, pp.30-33.

learning as such, which she as pan-Indian goddess of knowledge represents. Nevertheless, to label a period of literary activity as “the Sarasvatī movement” seems to me misleading because it suggests large-scale, organized worship of the goddess, for which there is no evidence. Although, as Jain suggests, other Jain images of Sarasvatī may well have been made prior to this one,<sup>42</sup> if there had been so many, would it not be reasonable to presume that more than one would have survived?

### **e. Samudragupta and Samācāradeva Coins: Female Figure on the Obverse**

(figs. 9-13)

#### **i. Samudragupta Coin (figs. 9-10)**

The Allahabad pillar inscription glorifies Samudragupta’s (r. ca. 350-375) skill in music.<sup>43</sup> On his lyrist type coins,<sup>44</sup> the king is shown playing a bow-shaped harp on the obverse (fig. 9), while a female figure appears on the reverse (fig. 10). She is seated on a wicker stool, wearing a loose robe and a close-fitting cap, and is adorned with jewelry. She holds a fillet in her right hand and a horn of plenty in her left. Because Samudragupta appears on the front of the coin playing the *vinā*, this figure on the back, according to

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<sup>42</sup> 1971, p.32.

<sup>43</sup> The entire inscription together with the translation is found in Fleet 1887, no.1, pl.1, pp.6-17. The glorification of Samudragupta’s skill in music is found on line 27.

<sup>44</sup> Allan lists nine coins (1914, pp.18-20), providing plates for all (pl.5, figs.1-8) but the one in the Indian Museum in Calcutta. There are others, such as the two in the National Museum in New Delhi published in Chhabra 1986, pl.1, figs.10-11 and Khandalaval 1991, pl.3, and the one from the Lingen collection in the Netherlands published in Raven 1994a, pl.6.

Radha Kumud Mookerji,<sup>45</sup> can be identified as Sarasvatī, the goddess of music closely associated with this instrument. Although the connection he makes may appear plausible,<sup>46</sup> if we compare this female figure with the ones found on the reverse side of other Samudragupta or other Gupta rulers' coins, Mookerji's identification of her as Sarasvatī becomes untenable.

There are numerous extant examples of female figures holding a fillet, usually, as in the case of our coin, in the right hand.<sup>47</sup> There are also a number of examples of a seated female figure holding a fillet in her right hand and a horn of plenty in her left—just as in our coin—such as on the reverse side of the sceptre and battle-axe (fig. 11) types of Samudragupta coins and on the sceptre type of Candragupta II (r. ca. 375-413) coins.<sup>48</sup> This female figure is generally accepted to be Śrī (Lakṣmī), the embodiment of prosperity, an essential royal virtue. Like an invisible other wife, she attends to the king. Skandagupta (r. ca. 455-467), who is described in the Junagadh inscription as embraced by Śrī and carefully selected by Lakṣmī from among all other kings, even issued coins on the front of which he appears together with Lakṣmī, his divine consort, beneath the imperial banner.<sup>49</sup> The goddess of fortune appears on the back of most coin series of the Gupta rule, a device originally borrowed from late Kuṣāṇa coin imagery, as Ellen Raven explains.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 1969, pp.35, 137.

<sup>46</sup> Leaving aside questions which come to mind, such as why, if Sarasvatī is intended to be depicted here specifically as goddess of music, she is not portrayed playing her characteristic instrument, and why Mookerji does not mention Kumāragupta lyrist-type coins with a female figure on the reverse (by his reasoning, this female figure should likewise be Sarasvatī).

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Allan 1914 and Raven 1994a.

<sup>48</sup> For the Samudragupta sceptre type coin, see Raven 1994a, pl. 1, and for the Candragupta II sceptre type coin, Raven 1994a, pl.4.

<sup>49</sup> Raven 1994a, pp.42-43, pl.2. For the Junagadh rock inscription, see Fleet 1887, pp.56-65 (passages referred to appear in lines 2 and 5 on p.59).

<sup>50</sup> 1994a, p.44. The image of Lakṣmī carrying fillet and horn of plenty is modelled on Ardoxsho, a goddess



The most plausible identification of the female figure on the reverse of the Samudragupta lyrist type coin is likewise Lakṣmī, as John Allan, Ellen Raven, and others have posited,<sup>51</sup> and not Sarasvatī. The diadem fillet which she carries represents sovereignty, while the horn of plenty symbolizes prosperity. Both implements are therefore related to the ruler.<sup>52</sup>

## ii. Samācāradeva Coin (figs. 12-13)

Another coin which is believed to have Sarasvatī on the back is the *rājalilā* type coin of king Samācāradeva (ca. 550-575) of the independent kingdom of Vaṅga that arose in Bengal (eastern and southern) at the fall of the Gupta empire.<sup>53</sup> The king is represented on the front side (fig. 12) seated on a couch in *rājalilā* (royal ease) posture with a female attendant on each side. The syllables *samā*, *cā*, and possibly *ra* appear to be written out in the available spaces.<sup>54</sup> On the reverse (fig. 13) stands a female figure on a lotus in *tribhaṅga* (“three bends”) posture. With her right hand she draws up a lotus bud with a long stalk, as if to smell it, while her left hand rests on a lotus with a bent stalk. Yet another lotus appears of Avestan or local eastern Iranian origin who governs over good fortune in political, dynastic, and national matters, and who is depicted on Kuṣāṇa coins. See Rosenfield 1967, pp.74-75.

<sup>51</sup> Allan 1914, pp.lxxv, 18; Raven 1994a, p.45, explanation to pl.6; Altekar 1957, p.76; Chhabra 1986, pp.5-6, pl.1 figs.10-11; Khandalaval 1991, p.110, explanation to fig.3 by R. Vanaja; etc.

<sup>52</sup> One could take the symbolism of this coin a step further (see Raven 1994a, p.49), connecting the obverse and the reverse through the musical instrument played by Samudragupta. The *viṇā* in the Aśvamedha sacrifice (ŚB 13:1:5:1) represents *śrī*. She leaves the king during the performance of this sacrifice, and is again conferred upon him when the *viṇā* is played for him. Although it is true that Samudragupta is the one playing the *viṇā* on the coin, while *brāhmaṇas* rather than the king himself play the *viṇā* during the Aśvamedha, the association of the *viṇā* with *śrī* in the royal sacrifice might conceivably have endowed it with symbolism related to the figure of Śrī on the reverse side of the coin. At the same time, we do not know that this symbolism was read into the *viṇā* played by Samudragupta on this coin at the time of its production, and we would do well to refrain from excessive association and over-interpretation.

<sup>53</sup> On Samācāradeva see Majumdar 1943, pp.51-54.

<sup>54</sup> Altekar 1954, p.313; 1957, p.328.

below her right hand, and a *hamsa* at her feet tries to snatch a lotus leaf in front of its open beak. It is the presence of the *hamsa*, Sarasvatī's traditional mount, which suggests the identification of the female figure as Sarasvatī.<sup>55</sup> But if, in imitation of the Guptas, Samācāradeva had Lakṣmī represented on the reverse side of his archer type of coin,<sup>56</sup> would it not be reasonable to consider that it is likewise Lakṣmī that we see on the back of this *rājalilā* type coin? As Raven explains, while the diadem fillet and the horn of plenty are the emblems of the goddess in the earliest Gupta coin series, her iconography was changed to match Lakṣmī's well-known association with lotuses.<sup>57</sup> Already in the Candragupta II (r. ca. 375-413) lion-slayer type of coin, we see her carrying fillet and lotus, and in his *cakravikrama* type of coin, an unidentified female deity with a lotus stands on a lotus.<sup>58</sup> On the Kumāragupta I (ca. 415-450) tiger-slayer and horseman type coins, Lakṣmī appears with a lotus, feeding fruit to a peacock, a prized pet in the royal household and the mount of Kārttikeya/Kumāra, war-leader of the gods.<sup>59</sup> Likewise the female figure on the reverse of the Samācāradeva coin is surrounded by lotuses, appropriate to Lakṣmī, and a bird particularly fond of lotuses<sup>60</sup> appears below. Although the *hamsa* was not as closely associated with royalty as the peacock, it held a prominent place

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<sup>55</sup> Altekar 1957, p.328; Bhattasali 1923, p.56. Vincent Smith (1972 repr., p.122) mistook the *hamsa* for a peacock, and identified the female figure simply as a goddess. Allan (1914, p.150), on the other hand, thought it was Lakṣmī.

<sup>56</sup> Allan 1914, p.149, pl.XLIX.6; Altekar 1957, p.327, pl.XXIV.4. Bhattasali (1923, p.55) and Smith (1972 repr., p.121) do not identify the goddess. This is the only other Samācāradeva coin that is known.

<sup>57</sup> 1994a, p.44; 1994b, vol.1, p.32.

<sup>58</sup> The lion-slayer type of coin is published in Raven 1994a, p.52, pl.14, and the *cakravikrama* type on p.44, pl.5.

<sup>59</sup> The tiger-slayer type of coin is published in Raven 1994a, p.51, pl.13, and the horseman type on p.54, pl.15.

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion of the close association of the *hamsa* with the lotus, see Vogel 1962, pp.5-8.

amongst the animals kept at the court of Indian kings.<sup>61</sup> Poets honored it with the name *rājahaṃsa* “royal goose” and considered it king or master of feathered birds.<sup>62</sup> The association with the *haṃsa* is certainly not exclusive to Sarasvatī, as we have already seen in the Purāṇas.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, it does not appear in surviving images of Sarasvatī until about the tenth century. Hence to identify the figure on the reverse of Samācāradeva’s *rājāḷilā* coin as Sarasvatī is highly questionable, to say the least. I would suggest, rather, that Allan’s identification of her in 1914<sup>64</sup> as Lakṣmī is far more probable.

#### **f. Uttar Pradesh Sculpture: Sarasvatī Playing the *Vīṇā* (fig. 14)**

Also from about the sixth century is the slightly polished, buff sandstone Sarasvatī holding a stick-zither from a temple in Uttar Pradesh. This image from the Pan-Asian Collection is at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It measures 83.8 cm in height. The lower half of Sarasvatī’s body is draped with a sari, and she wears a scarf around her shoulders. Her hair is rolled up into a wide bun and adorned with an elaborate jewelled fillet. Particularly large earrings weigh down her ears. She wears a necklace, armlets, bracelets, a waist band, and anklets. She is seated in *lalitāsana* on a lotus, playing the stick-zither, also referred to as a *vīṇā*, attested from the sixth century onwards.<sup>65</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup> Vogel 1962, p.11.

<sup>62</sup> Vogel 1962, pp.10,12,22.

<sup>63</sup> See p.151 above.

<sup>64</sup> See p.150.

<sup>65</sup> It has been suggested that the stick-zither may have been an indigenous folk instrument long before its representation in art. See Sadie 1984, vol.3, pp.728-729.

middle part of her instrument is missing. Accompanying her are two animal-headed musicians representing *gandharvas*. The ape-headed one on her lower right plays a drum, while the horse-headed one on her lower left plays a flute. Above the *gandharvas*, are two *apsarases*. The one on Sarasvatī's right dances, while the one on her left plays the cymbals. Amidst her lively entourage, Sarasvatī appears as goddess of music, playing her *viṇā*.

**g. Sārnāth: Sarasvatī Playing the *Viṇā* (fig. 15)**

The Sārnāth Museum of Archaeology has a small figure (ht. 35.5 cm) of Sarasvatī on a slab of reddish Chunar sandstone discovered in 1904-05. Stylistically it is dated to the sixth century. Although much more roughly and simply made, it has many points in common with the exquisite Los Angeles County Museum image (fig. 14), also of about the sixth century and likewise from Uttar Pradesh. This Sarasvatī is likewise seated in *lalitāsana*, playing a stick-zither. She wears the same hairstyle, clothing, and ornaments as the previous one. She is not, however, surrounded by celestial musicians and dancers. Above her head is foliage from a tree, and to her lower right is an upside down jar. The water pot is an appropriate symbol for a river goddess. As we have seen, the *Matsya* and *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇas* prescribe the *viṇā*, water pot, book, and rosary in Sarasvatī's four hands.<sup>66</sup> This image, however, like the previous one, is only two-armed, and there is no sign of either the book or the rosary.

As it was found at the Buddhist site of Sārnāth, furthermore, it is probably a Buddhist

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<sup>66</sup> See p.148 above.

Sarasvatī, but not necessarily. Although Daya Ram Sahni in his catalogue of the museum <sup>67</sup> lists this image under “Images of goddesses and other female images” amidst Buddhist goddesses, it could just as well have been included in his section on “Brahmanical sculptures.” It is not inconceivable that it was produced as a Hindu image, which found its way into a Buddhist environment. The Los Angeles County Museum image, at any rate, of which it appears as a pale shadow, is assumed to be a Hindu image, as it shows no indication of being a Buddhist one.

**h. Ākoṭā and Vasantgarh Bronzes: Sarasvatī with Lotus and Manuscript** (figs. 16-19)

Amongst the large number of Jain metal images dating from the seventh to the tenth century dug out before June 1951 from the site of Ākoṭā, the ancient town of Āṅkoṭṭaka not far from Vadodara (formerly Baroda) in Gujarat discovered in 1949, were three images which Umakant P. Shah identified as Sarasvatī.<sup>68</sup>

**i. Bronze from ca. 600-620 (fig. 16)**

The earliest one is from ca. 600-620, and was offered by a nun called Isiyā (fig. 16). We know this from the entirely preserved inscription starting from the left side of what

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<sup>67</sup> 1914.

<sup>68</sup> On the Ākoṭā bronzes, see U.P. Shah's 1959 study.

remains of the pedestal and running along the back of it. The inscription reads:

*om devadharmoyam nivuya kulikasya /  
isiyā (?) gaṇiṇyo (?) (nī?) /*

Om. This is the pious gift of the *gaṇiṇi* (nun ) Isiyā .<sup>69</sup>

The image itself has been well preserved. The goddess stands on the flat pedestal with her hip thrust slightly to her right. As in the case of other Ākoṭā images of Sarasvatī, she has a large head and a slender body with full breasts. She wears a lower garment with a triangle pattern formed by slanting lines and enclosed in broad horizontal lines. Her scarf, worn over her shoulders and falling onto the pedestal, has a bead design with the two ends showing a geometrical motif. Her hair is worn in a large bun on top of her head and adorned with a crown. A plain, slightly oblong halo encircled with beads appears behind her head. She wears earrings, a necklace with a pendant, bracelets, and a waist band. Her left, disproportionately large hand hangs down holding a manuscript, while in her right hand she carries a lotus with a long stalk extending down to the pedestal.

In U.P. Shah's explanation of the Sarasvatī images found in Ākoṭā,<sup>70</sup> he curiously omits to mention the object held in her left hand (i.e. the manuscript). In a 1941 article, however, he identifies the same object, which in this case is held in the hand of a Sarasvatī from Vasantgarh (fig. 19) dated ca. 650-675 and stylistically akin to the Ākoṭā images, as a book (i.e. a manuscript).<sup>71</sup> Now if the Vasantgarh image holds a manuscript, then the Ākoṭā bronzes undoubtedly do also. For the goddess of knowledge, it is obviously a fitting

<sup>69</sup> Translation by U.P. Shah (1959, p.34, plates 75a-b).

<sup>70</sup> U.P. Shah 1959, pp.33-34, 43,46.

<sup>71</sup> U.P. Shah 1941, p.199 referring to fig.2.

emblem, which we have already seen in the Sarasvatī image from Kaṅkālī Ṭilā (fig. 8), also a Jain site. Shah, however, must have doubted the object held by the Ākoṭā images was a manuscript, since, despite his extensive description of each image (1959), he did not even mention its presence. Why this would be an issue for doubt, especially since he compares the Ākoṭā images of Sarasvatī with the one from Vasantgarh, where he seems not to have been in doubt regarding her manuscript, is unclear. And if he did not believe it was a manuscript, it is unclear on what basis he identified any of the Ākoṭā images as Sarasvatī.

Out of three Ākoṭā bronzes depicting her, all of which carry the same emblems, only one (fig. 16 discussed above) has an inscription, which, however, does not provide any information on the identity of the goddess. As the lotus is not exclusive to Sarasvatī, the manuscript is her distinguishing feature. In other words, if the manuscript in the Ākoṭā bronzes is not identified, then there is no basis on which to identify these images as Sarasvatī. Comparison of the Vasantgarh Sarasvatī (fig. 19) with the Ākoṭā images (figs. 16-18), on the other hand, leaves no doubt that they all hold the same object in the left hand, and that it is indeed a manuscript. If we look at the surviving Jain images of Sarasvatī, furthermore, both the lotus and the manuscript appear very commonly.<sup>72</sup>

## ii. Late Seventh Century Bronze (fig. 17)

In the late seventh century Ākoṭā image of Sarasvatī (fig. 17), both the pedestal and the image are damaged with parts missing. If there used to be an inscription on the

<sup>72</sup> See U.P. Shah's charts in 1941, pp.215-18.

pedestal, it is entirely lost. Sarasvatī's left shoulder is missing, and the image is cracked at the level of the breasts and below the knees. The goddess stands in *tribhāṅga* posture on a lotus atop the pedestal, holding the long-stemmed lotus in her right hand and the manuscript in her left. She is dressed and adorned in much the same manner as the earlier Ākoṭā image (fig. 16). Her halo is more ornate, consisting of a lotus design in the center, surrounded by a circle of beads. Her eyes are inlaid with silver.

iii. Bronze from ca. 700 (fig. 18)

The third Sarasvatī from Ākoṭā (fig. 18) dates from ca. 700, and is even more damaged. The pedestal is lost, the image is in two pieces, broken at the level of the hips, and only a fragment of the halo survives. As in the other bronzes, she carries a long lotus stalk, most of which is missing, and a manuscript. Her crown is made of five, rather than three, projections. She stands in *tribhāṅga* posture.

iv. Vasantgarh Bronze of ca. 650-675 (fig. 19)

Stylistically akin to these Ākoṭā images is the above-mentioned Sarasvatī from Vasantgarh (known today as Vantaparagadh in southern Rajasthan, near Gujarat) dating from ca. 650-675 (fig. 19).<sup>73</sup> The image is now in the Mahāvīrasvāmī temple in Pindawara and has been erroneously worshipped as Cakreśvarī.<sup>74</sup> She stands on a lotus between two

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<sup>73</sup> U.P. Shah 1959, p.43.

<sup>74</sup> U.P. Shah 1941, p.199.



jars atop a pedestal, holding the long-stemmed lotus in her right hand and the manuscript in her left. She is dressed and adorned in the same manner as the Ākoṭā bronzes. Her crown is particularly elaborate, topped with a representation of the sun with a *makara* on each side. As in the case of other images of Vasantgarh, local worshippers have thickened the lines of her eyebrows.<sup>75</sup>

The elaborate crown of the Vasantgarh Sarasvatī may or may not be simply decorative. Although the presence of the sun is unclear, the aquatic *makara* is associated with rivers. It is a marine monster derived from the fish, the elephant, and the crocodile.<sup>76</sup> Its aquatic character naturally makes it the mount of marine and river divinities. Thus it is associated with Varuṇa,<sup>77</sup> Gaṅgā (fig. 21), and Yamunā.<sup>78</sup> It might be noted that the *makara* appears as Sarasvatī's mount in a few South Indian wood images of the Musée Guimet, which, however, are unrelated to the Vasantgarh image.<sup>79</sup>

#### v. Sarasvatī and the *Vidyādevīs*

In all the Jain images we have seen, Sarasvatī appears as goddess of knowledge with manuscript in hand. According to B.C. Bhattacharya in his study of Jain iconography, Sarasvatī is *śrutādevī*, head of a group of sixteen goddesses called *vidyādevīs*, who began

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<sup>75</sup> U.P. Shah 1955-56, p.61.

<sup>76</sup> The different types of *makara* are discussed in Viennot 1954. The ones found on Sarasvatī's crown belong, according to Viennot's categorization, to the northern type derived from the elephant (p.190).

<sup>77</sup> Banerjea 1956, pp.526-27.

<sup>78</sup> Mallmann 1963, p.233. The *makara*, it should be noted, is not exclusively associated with marine and river divinities. It also appears as the ensign of Kāma (Hopkins 1915, p.167).

<sup>79</sup> Mallmann 1963, p.190n.

to appear in Jain literature in ca. 500 C.E.<sup>80</sup> This is a complete misconception, which has, unfortunately, been repeated by others.<sup>81</sup> The *vidyādevīs* are not goddesses of learning, as U. P. Shah explains in his detailed study on this group: they are goddesses with magical powers who propagate Jain faith and worship the Tīrthāṅkaras.<sup>82</sup> Sarasvatī, however, is indeed *śrutādevī* (e.g. Hemacandra's *Abhidhāna Cintāmaṇi* of the twelfth or thirteenth century),<sup>83</sup> and as such presides over the preaching of the *tīrthāṅkaras*. Jain texts are described as her limbs and ornaments.<sup>84</sup> Thus the function of the *vidyādevīs* belongs to the devotional aspect of Jainism, while that of Sarasvatī is in the realm of textual knowledge. In terms of Jaina cosmology, as John Cort explains,<sup>85</sup> the various goddesses reside in three different realms: Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī dwell in the upper realm (*ūrdhvaloka*), the *vidyādevīs* in the middle realm (*tiryagloka*), and the *yakṣī* attendants of the 24 *tīrthāṅkaras* in the lower realm (*adholoka*). Neither Sarasvatī nor other goddesses referred to as *śrutādevatās*<sup>86</sup> are the head of the *vidyādevīs*. The connections we find between Sarasvatī and the *vidyādevīs* are the iconographic features she shares with certain forms of Mahāmānasī, the sixteenth *vidyādevī*, in two twelfth-century sculptures,<sup>87</sup> and the appearance of Sarasvatī's name in a

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<sup>80</sup> 1939 (rev. ed. 1974, p.163). For literature on the Vidyādevīs (centuries later than 500 C.E.), see U.P. Shah 1947.

<sup>81</sup> E.g. Yasodadevi 1963, p.686.

<sup>82</sup> 1947. See especially p.170.

<sup>83</sup> U.P. Shah 1941, p.196.

<sup>84</sup> U.P. Shah 1941, p.196. Shah refers to the *Pratiṣṭhātīlaka* (pp.761-762) and the *Pratiṣṭhāsāroddhira* (6:27-32) of the tenth or the eleventh century.

<sup>85</sup> Cort 1987, p.236.

<sup>86</sup> U.P. Shah 1947, p.169.

<sup>87</sup> U.P. Shah 1947, p.166.

very small number of later lists of the *viḍyādevīs*, such as in a thirteenth-century manuscript which also includes miniatures of the goddesses.<sup>88</sup>

### i. *Mātrkā* Brahmanī Sculptures (fig. 20)

Brahmanī, as we have seen, is Brahmā's consort, a form of Sarasvatī. In images she is distinguished from Sarasvatī by her four heads (MP 261; 24d *caturvaktrā*), three of which can be seen. Brahmanī is also one of the *mātrkās* (mothers), a group of goddesses whose number and names become standardized after the Gupta period, although surviving images are recognizable from about the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>89</sup> In this form, Brahmanī is never referred to as Sarasvatī. By about the seventh century, representations of the group of *mātrkās* become individually distinguishable. The Museum of Baroda has a set of *mātrkās* from this period, including an image of Brahmanī (fig. 20). The goddess is seated, carrying what seem to be a water pot in her left hand and a rosary in her right—just as the *Matsya Purāṇa* prescribes (261:25b *sākṣasūtrakamaṇḍaluh /* ). Also in agreement with the *Matsya Purāṇa* (261:25a *hamsādhirūdhā kartavyā* ), a *hamsa* appears below her. Although she is four-faced (three faces visible), she is not, as the Purāṇa stipulates, four-armed (MP 261:24cd *brahmanī brahmasadrśī caturvaktrā caturbhujā //* ). A small figure, a child according to U.P. Shah,<sup>90</sup> appears to her right below. The presence of a child would be appropriate to a *mātrkā*. Shah mentions another a *mātrkā* Brahmanī of about the seventh

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<sup>88</sup> U.P. Shah 1941, p.203, fig.10; 1947, p.121. This is a palm-leaf manuscript of the *Īpadesāmalāvṛtti*.

<sup>89</sup> Coburn 1984, pp.313-330; J.N. Tiwari 1985, pp.95-181.

<sup>90</sup> In Mankad 1962, p.30.

century in the Rajputana Museum of Ajmer.<sup>91</sup> Most other examples, however, are later.<sup>92</sup>

#### **j. Ellora Onwards (figs. 21-23)**

At Ellora, Sarasvatī appears in various forms in caves dating from the eighth to the tenth century. Sarasvatī's most well-known representation here is in the shrine of the river goddesses in cave 16 (fig. 21): Gaṅgā stands on a *makara* in the center, with Sarasvatī on a lotus to her right (fig. 22), and Yamunā on a tortoise to her left.<sup>93</sup> Likewise in cave 16, there is an image of Brahmā flanked by Sarasvatī on his right and Sāvitrī on his left (MP 260:44cd *vāmapārśve 'sya sāvitrīm dakṣiṇe ca sarasvatīm //* ).<sup>94</sup> Brahmāni amidst sets of *mātrkāś* is found in caves 16 and 22.<sup>95</sup> In the Jain cave 32, which may be as late as the tenth century, Sarasvatī appears seated and four-armed, holding lotuses in her upper hands and a manuscript in her lower left (her lower right is damaged).<sup>96</sup>

Sarasvatī images dating from the ninth century onwards are numerous. The most

<sup>91</sup> 1955-56, p.55.

<sup>92</sup> Shanti Lal Nagar (1992) provides illustrations of two other examples which he claims to be early, perhaps a little too early: one from Sabarkantha in Gujarat (pl.73), which he assigns to the Gupta period, and another in the Allahabad Museum (pl.74), which he identifies as early medieval. Later examples of Brahmāni as a Mātrkā are found in Nagar 1992, pls.75-79 and Pal 1997, pls.231-234, for instance.

<sup>93</sup> At Elephanta (sixth century) a three-headed female figure in a cup or a shell rises from the crown of the main image of Śiva Mahādeva. Fergusson and Burgess (p.470) have suggested that this figure represents the three rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī.

<sup>94</sup> Gupte and Mahajan 1962, p.191.

<sup>95</sup> Gupte and Mahajan 1962, pp.128, 203. There is a drawing of the Mātrkāś in cave 16 in Fergusson and Burgess, pl.LXXII.

<sup>96</sup> N. Ghosh 1984, pl.37:2; Parimoo, Kannal, and Panikkar 1988, pl.110; Shah 1941, p.207, pl.18. A detailed study of all of the Sarasvatī images at Ellorā extends beyond the scope of this dissertation, but should indeed be taken up at some point. Errors in identification, it must be noted, have occurred, as in the case of the Mahāmāyūrī image of cave 6, which Fergusson and Burgess (p.375) considered to be Sarasvatī.

common iconography, seen even in modern representations, does not follow the *Matsya* and *Viṣṇudharmottara Purānas* (book, rosary, *viṇā*, and water pot), but agrees with one of the descriptions of the *Agni Purāna*, which omits the water pot (50:16ab *pustākṣamālikāhastā viṇāhastā sarasvatī /*).<sup>97</sup> This type of four-armed image, holding book, rosary, and *viṇā*, can be seen, for instance, in the tenth-century sandstone sculpture from Mathurā now at the British Museum (fig. 23). Typically, her mount the *haṃsa* appears below. The lotus and *mudrā* (usually *varada*) are also common features. Variations in the implements she is depicted with are even more numerous than the many iconographic descriptions found in the *Purānas*. By the eleventh century, six- and eight-armed forms begin to appear.<sup>98</sup> In South India, the multi-armed Sarasvatī is also shown dancing.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The same set of objects appears in the *Skanda Purāna* (6:46:17-19). For the dates of the *Agni* and *Skanda Purānas*, see Rocher 1986, pp.136-137 (*Agni*), 236-237 (*Skanda*).

<sup>98</sup> Examples can be found in Khajuraho for instance (Agrawal 1964, pp.59-60).

<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, K. Bhattacharyya 1983, p.99, pls.32-33. There are four-, six-, and eight-armed dancing images.

## Conclusion

What we see then amongst the images discussed above are a number of representations erroneously identified as Sarasvatī (Bhārhut, Gandhāra, Samudragupta and Samācāradeva coins) and one mistakenly dated sculpture (Ghantashala). This brings the number of extant pre-eighth century images of Sarasvatī to seven, to which may be added the Brahmāṇī sculpture of the Museum of Baroda. Of these seven, there are no less than five Jain images, one of which (Kaṅkāli Ṭīlā) happens to be the earliest extant representation of Sarasvatī from 232 C.E. Of the remaining two (sculptures from Uttar Pradesh, one of which is from Sārnāth), the one from Sārnāth could possibly be a Buddhist image.

The Jains clearly worshipped Sarasvatī as a goddess of knowledge, as indicated by the manuscript held in her hand in all the early surviving Jain images: first in the sandstone sculpture from Kaṅkāli Ṭīlā (near Mathura) from about the third century C.E., and then, some four centuries or so later, in the three small bronze images from Ākoṭā (Gujarat) dating from 600-700 and the related small bronze from Vasantgarh (southern Rajasthan, near Gujarat) from 650-675. It is interesting that, in contrast, the presumed Hindu image of about the sixth century from Uttar Pradesh, as well as the similar sixth-century one from Sārnāth (also in Uttar Pradesh), depict her playing the *viṇā*, like a goddess of music. This is particularly evident in the first Uttar Pradesh image (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), where Sarasvatī is surrounded by a lively entourage of musicians and dancers.

We have here, then, two of the four aspects (river, knowledge, music, daughter-consort of Brahmā) of Sarasvatī found in the textual sources from the Vedas to the early Purāṇas.

Sarasvatī's connection with knowledge, as we have seen, is the earlier of the two: it surfaces in the Brāhmaṇas (900-500 B.C.E.) through her identification with speech, the embodiment of knowledge, most notably of the Vedas, and is established as particular to Sarasvatī from the *Mahābhārata* (400 B.C.E. - 400 C.E.) onwards. Her music aspect, on the other hand, does not arise until about the third to the sixth century C.E. (later *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*), although Vāc, as a woman, finds some connection with music already in the Brāhmaṇas. The Jain images, therefore, reflect an earlier aspect of Sarasvatī, necessarily applied, in a Jain context, to Jain texts. It is in this aspect that Sarasvatī continued to be worshipped amongst the Jains, even when the *viṇā* was later also placed in her hands.<sup>100</sup> The musical aspect of roughly the Gupta period, on the other hand, is represented in the two sixth-century Uttar Pradesh images.

Although the two aspects are clearly distinguishable in pre-eighth century images of Sarasvatī, their symbols in the form of the manuscript and the *viṇā* are combined in later images, whether Hindu (see fig. 23) or Jain, as they were in the iconographic descriptions of the *Matsya* and *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇas* (*viṇā*, rosary, water pot, and book). Such multi-armed images, therefore, represent both aspects of Sarasvatī, although she as goddess of knowledge predominates in all traditions.

As for Sarasvatī's other aspects, she is rarely depicted purely as a river goddess, as in Ellora (figs. 21-22), but representations of her together with Brahmā (e.g. Ellora, noted above) are more numerous. There is also a significant number of *māṭṛkā* Brahmāṇī images (fig.20).

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<sup>100</sup> See Shah 1941.

## IV. BUDDHIST SARASVATĪ FROM INDIA TO CHINA TO JAPAN THROUGH THE *SUTRA OF GOLDEN LIGHT*

### Introduction

Sarasvatī's name is mentioned in some of the Buddhist sutras and commentaries. She appears most prominently in the *Sutra of Golden Light* (*Suvarṇabhāsa* or *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra*),<sup>1</sup> which includes an entire chapter (*parivarta*) dedicated to her. It is through this text that Sarasvatī was introduced into China and thence into Japan. This text and its Chinese translations, therefore, are fundamental to our study. Already in this chapter we are carried into China, for the earliest Chinese translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light* is based on an older version of the Sanskrit original than the extant one, and thus must be given priority.

A study of Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*, furthermore—even in the reading of the extant Sanskrit version—very quickly leads to Japan, where the sutra was held in tremendous importance for the protection of the state, and where its prescriptions were carefully followed. The sutra describes an eight-armed (weapon-bearing according to Yijing's Chinese translation) form of Sarasvatī, of which there are no examples in India and exceedingly rare, not to mention comparatively late (tenth century), surviving representations in China. In Japan, on the other hand, not only are there records of the production of Sarasvatī

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<sup>1</sup> *Rāja* is sometimes appended to the title (*Suvarṇabhāsottamarāja Sūtra*), as in the corresponding Chinese title of Yijing's early eighth-century translation. There was also a change of title to *Suvarṇa-prabhāsottama*, which appears in its Tibetan correspondent already in the first Tibetan translation of the eighth century. For a discussion of the title, see the introduction (pp. XI-XII) to Nobel's 1937 edition of the Sanskrit text.



images already in the eighth century, but there is a surviving eight-armed example from the period. Hence, not only do we have a Chinese translation corresponding to a more original version of the Sanskrit than the extant text, but we also have an early Japanese representation of the goddess based very likely on the sutra, unmatched in India and preceding what we know of in China. This study of the sutra, therefore, carries not only into China, but also into Japan. Furthermore, because what we find in China (Dharmakṣema's translation of the sutra) precedes what survives in India (the extant Sanskrit text of the sutra), and because what is preserved in Japan (eighth-century sculpture) predates what is known in China (tenth-century painting), my study cannot be geographically chronological in an eastward direction.

The earliest period of life (fifth to eighth century) of the Buddhist Sarasvatī in China and Japan is most clearly and conveniently understood through iconography. There are two principal forms of the goddess, each one based on a specific textual source:

1. the above-mentioned eight-armed form based on Yijing's translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light* of 703;
2. the later, two-armed lute-playing form based on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, translated into Chinese in 725, twenty-two years later than the *Sutra of Golden Light*, and depicted in the Womb World Mandala (*garbhadhātu maṇḍala*) brought to Japan at the beginning of the ninth century.

As the subject of my study is Sarasvatī's trajectory from India to Japan, I will focus here far more on her first known introduction into China and Japan, i.e. in her eight-armed form based on the *Sutra of Golden Light*. Apart from chronological considerations, there is far more material on Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light* than in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, and hence there is much more to be discussed. Further, although the two-armed lute-playing form evidently corresponds to the *viṇā*-playing Sarasvatī, the eight-armed goddess, with no

Indian correspondent as Sarasvatī, has a far more complicated history to unravel.

The “first known introduction” of Sarasvatī in China necessarily raises the issue of possible previous introductions of the goddess. Could Sarasvatī, it may and should be asked, have made her way into China prior to the time of the first Chinese translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light* by Dharmakṣema in the early fifth century? Trade relations between India and China existed from early on: an overland route had been established as early as the second century B.C.E., and by the first century C.E. merchants from the Indian subcontinent had begun travelling by sea to China.<sup>2</sup> So it is conceivable that Sarasvatī could have been introduced to China before the early fifth century, and yet I have found no evidence whatsoever for this so far. Alexander Soper’s *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (1959) never mentions Sarasvatī. It is also remarkable that the *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Records about the Famous Painters through the Ages), the most important Tang work on painting from the earliest period to the time when it was written in 847 by Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, does not mention a single image of Sarasvatī. This does not necessarily mean, however, that no representations of the goddess were made in China during this time. Not only did Zhang Yanyuan make a selection of what he saw, but he was also unable to describe the huge quantity of art objects destroyed during the persecution of Buddhism of the years 842-845. No Sarasvatī is mentioned, furthermore, either in the *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄 (Record of Famous Painters of the Tang Dynasty) completed in 840 by Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄, or in the *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 (Records of Famous Painters of Sichuan) written in the second half of the tenth century by

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<sup>2</sup> Shaffer 1996, p.18.

Huang Xiufu 黄休復 (?-after 1006), or in Guo Ruoxu's 郭若虛 (ca. 1020-after 1075) eleventh-century history of Chinese painters from the second half of the Tang dynasty entitled *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞志 (Record of Experiences in Painting).<sup>3</sup>

And hence our study of the Chinese Sarasvatī begins with the *Sutra of Golden Light* .

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<sup>3</sup> I searched the online (<http://210.69.170.100/s25/index.hmt>) *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Complete Poems of the Tang Dynasty), a huge Tang-period anthology of poems, for Biancai 辯才 (Eloquence Talent, as Sarasvatī is called), Biantian 辯天 (Eloquence Deity, as she is also called), *tiannū* 天女 (goddess), and Miaoyin 妙音 (Wonderful Sound[s], another name for Sarasvatī), but none of the references is to Sarasvatī. Biantian and Miaoyin do not appear at all, Biancai seems to be a name, and the references to *tiannū* are not to Sarasvatī.

## 1. The *Sutra of Golden Light* in Context

### a. The Sutra

#### i. Growth of the Text

The *Sutra of Golden Light* is a text with a highly complicated history, which would have existed in some form already in the first century C.E. Johannes Nobel (1887-1960), who spent much of his life unravelling the intricacies of its passages in its numerous translations and renditions, demonstrated that the text grew up around the chapter on confession (chapter 3).<sup>4</sup> In Nobel's edition of the Sanskrit text which has come down to us, we read:

*atha khalu ruciraketur bodhisattvaḥ suptaḥ / svapnāntaragataḥ  
suvarṇāṃ suvarṇamayikāṃ bherim adrākṣit /  
samantāvabhāsamānām / tadyathāpi nāma sūryamaṇḍalam ...  
tatra ca brāhmaṇarūpeṇa puruṣam adrākṣit / tāṃ bherim  
parāhanantaṃ tatra bherīśabdād imā evaṃrūpā deśanāgāthā  
niścaramāṇā aśrauṣit // atha khalu ruciraketur bodhisattvaḥ  
prativibuddhaḥ samānas tā dharmadeśanāgāthā amusmarati  
sma /*

Then indeed the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu slept. In the middle of his sleep he saw a golden drum, made of gold, shining everywhere just like the orb of the sun... And there he saw a man with the form of a brahmin, beating that drum. There from the sound of the drum he heard these (and) similar confessional verses coming forth. (21) Then indeed the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu, as soon as he

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<sup>4</sup> See Nobel's introduction to his edition of the extant Sanskrit version of the sutra (1937), pp.XXX, XXXIV, XL, XLVII.

awoke, recollected these verses of confession of the Law.<sup>5</sup>

The practice of confession of sins in Buddhism can be traced back to the earliest period, within the lifetime of the Buddha. During the *poṣadha* (Pali *uposatha*), held every fortnight, monks would recite the *vinaya* rules (the *prātimokṣa*) and confess their transgressions.<sup>6</sup> Confessions were also made throughout the rainy season (*varṣa*), but especially on the final day of this three-month retreat period. As we shall see, rites of confession gradually developed into much more than acknowledgment of transgression of monastic rules.<sup>7</sup> Even the above passage refers to something more, as expressed in what follows it: the verses coming forth from the golden drum are first and foremost a wishful prayer for the removal of suffering of all sentient beings, and only afterwards do they turn into a confession.<sup>8</sup> This confession is then identified as the “splendid, excellent Golden Light” (*svaṇabhāsottamā śubhā*).<sup>9</sup>

To this confession, Nobel explains,<sup>10</sup> chapter 6 was then added, where the Four Great Kings (*caturmahārāja*) prophesy the continued reign and prosperity of the ruler who upholds the sutra.<sup>11</sup> The great importance acquired by our text in Japan for the protection of the

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<sup>5</sup> Translation by Emmerick in 1996, pp.8-9. The numerical reference is to the page in Nobel’s 1937 edition of the Sanskrit. All references to the extant Sanskrit text herein are to Nobel’s edition.

<sup>6</sup> Gombrich 1988, pp.180-110; Warder 1970, p.58.

<sup>7</sup> See pp.202-203 below.

<sup>8</sup> Sanskrit, pp.22ff. (Emmerick 1996, pp.9ff.).

<sup>9</sup> Sanskrit, p.29 (Emmerick 1996, p.12).

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the growth of the text, see Nobel’s introduction to his 1937 edition of the Sanskrit, pp.XLIIff.

<sup>11</sup> Sanskrit, pp.64ff. (Emmerick 1996, pp.24ff.).

state derives from this prophecy.<sup>12</sup> Then came chapters 7-11, where various deities, including our Sarasvatī (chapter 7), promise, following the Four Great Kings in chapter 6, to uphold the sutra, its preachers and their audiences, listing the numerous benefits that will accrue to them. Chapter 13 about King Susambhava's visit to a monk to hear an exposition of the sutra and to have his wishes fulfilled was later still. Chapter 14 is a conclusion to chapters 1-13, advising people to listen to the preaching of the text and listing the merits thereof. In its older version, the *Sutra of Golden Light* would have ended here. Another five, rather differently composed, chapters (15-19) were gradually added to form the text as it has come down to us. This surviving Sanskrit text, according to Nobel, cannot be dated earlier than the middle of the fifth century.

## ii. Extant Text and Translations

The extant Sanskrit text of the *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra* was edited by Johannes Nobel in 1937 and translated into English by Ronald E. Emmerick in 1970, who then revised and corrected his translation in 1990, 1992, and 1996.<sup>13</sup> A new edition of the Sanskrit is being prepared by P. O. Skjærvø, for which he uses a Nepalese manuscript that was not available to Nobel.

Numerous translations of the *Sutra of Golden Light* reveal the importance of this text and the existence of earlier and different versions of it. In addition to Chinese and Tibetan renderings, there are Uighur, Mongol, Sogdian, Khotanese, and Xi Xia (Tangut) translations

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<sup>12</sup> See pp.212ff. below.

<sup>13</sup> All references to Emmerick herein are to the third (revised) edition of 1996.

surviving either in whole or in part.

The Taishō edition of the Buddhist Canon includes three Chinese translations of the sutra:

- a. Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchen 曇無讖; 385-433 or 436) translation: *Jinguangming jing* 金光明經 in 4 fascs. (T. vol.16, no.663), appeared in 417.<sup>14</sup> This translation, if Nobel is correct, is based on an earlier Sanskrit version of the sutra than the extant version he edited in 1937. The chapter on Sarasvatī is entitled “Da Biantianshen pin” 大辯天神品 (pp.344c20-345a3).
- b. Baogui 寶貴 edition: *Hebu Jinguangming jing* 合部金光明經 in 8 fascs. (T. vol.16, no.664), edited by Baogui in 597.<sup>15</sup> and including the translations of Dharmakṣema from 417, of Paramārtha (Boluomotuo 波羅末陀; 500-569) from 552,<sup>16</sup> and of Yaśogupta (Yeshejueduo 耶舍崛多; d.u.) and Jñānagupta (Shenajueduo 闍那崛多; 523-600) from 561-578.<sup>17</sup> The chapter dedicated to Sarasvatī is entitled “Da Biantian pin” 大辯天品 (pp.386b22 - 388a7). Dharmakṣema’s translation is reproduced, with a small number of minor differences, in the first 11 lines of the chapter (p.386b24-c5), and then followed (pp.386c6-388a7) by the translation of Yaśogupta and Jñānagupta. The chapter as it stands in Baogui’s edition corresponds more closely to the extant Sanskrit than Yijing’s considerably more elaborate version.
- c. Yijing 義淨 (635-713) translation: *Jinguangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王

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<sup>14</sup> *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, T. vol.55, no.2145, p.11b17. The date 417 is based on note 12 of p.11, where we read that the Song, Yuan, and Ming editions of the Buddhist Canon specify that Dharmakṣema’s translation appeared in the fifth month of the sixth year Xuanshi 玄始, that is between June 1-29, 417. Chen Jinhua, however, in an article provisionally entitled “Dharmakṣema (385-433): A Fifth Century Indian Buddhist Missionary in China,” (forthcoming) discusses the issue of Dharmakṣema’s arrival in the Northern Liang (r. 397-439) capital of Guzang 姑臧 (present-day Wuwei 武威, Gansu), and in this connection calls into question the date of 417 for Dharmakṣema’s translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

<sup>15</sup> *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, T. vol.55, no.2154, p.548b26-27.

<sup>16</sup> *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記, T. vol.49, no.2034, p.98c22-23.

<sup>17</sup> Fei Zhangfang 費長房, in 597, says the translation was made in the reign of Wudi (561-578) of the [Northern] Zhou (557-581) (*Lidai sanbao ji*, T. vol.49, no.2034, p.100b24-25, c3-5; see also *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T. vol.55, no.2154, p.545a18-19, 25). The preface of the *Hebu Jinguangming jing* only states that the translation was done during the [Northern] Zhou (p.359b21). Although a note on p.386c6 indicates that what follows is Jñānagupta’s translation (此下闍那崛多續譯補之), we know that Jñānagupta worked on this together with Yaśogupta.

經 in 10 fascs. (T. vol.16, no.665), completed in 703.<sup>18</sup> The chapter dedicated to Sarasvatī is called “Da Biancai tiannü pin” 大辯才天女品 (pp.434b25 - 438c23). Johannes Nobel translated Yijing’s entire version into German in 1958 (under 1958a in Bibliography B.).

Yijing’s translation was in turn translated into Tibetan, Sogdian, Xi Xia, and Uighur.<sup>19</sup> Besides the Tibetan translation of Yijing in the ninth century (Tib. III), there are two others done from the Sanskrit in the eighth (Tib. I) and ninth (Tib. II) centuries.<sup>20</sup> Khotanese versions survive in numerous fragments which indicate that several different Khotanese translations were made, probably between the fifth and tenth centuries.<sup>21</sup> There is a forthcoming transcription, edition, and translation of these numerous Khotanese fragments, together with extensive introduction and notes, by Oktor Skjærvø.

For our purposes here, the extant Sanskrit in Nobel’s edition of 1937 and the Chinese translations found in the Taishō edition of the Buddhist Canon (T. vol.16, nos.663-665) are used. Before addressing the contents of the Sarasvatī chapter in these versions, however, it is important to understand the political significance of the sutra, for it undoubtedly influenced the growing contents of the text.

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<sup>18</sup> See the colophon of the sutra discovered in Dunhuang reproduced in Forte 1976, pl.XXXIII and partially translated on p.87.

<sup>19</sup> Nobel, in the introduction to his 1937 edition of the Sanskrit (p.XXVI), thought the Uighur version was based rather on the Tibetan translation of Yijing.

<sup>20</sup> Nobel has also worked on the Tibetan translations: see Nobel 1944 and 1958b.

<sup>21</sup> Private communication from Natalie Gummer of Harvard University, working on the *Sutra of Golden Light*.



## b. Political Significance of the Sutra in China

As noted above, the Four Great Kings (*caturmahārāja*) prophesy the continued reign and prosperity of the ruler who upholds the *Sutra of Golden Light*. Its importance as one of the principal Buddhist texts for the protection of the state, therefore, is easily understood.<sup>22</sup>

It is well known that in Japan, the *Sutra of Golden Light* was upheld as a text for the protection of the state. We know less about the sutra in China, but as China was the model followed in Japan at the time, we can presume that the sutra certainly had some political significance in China as well. As for the Indian situation, we know nothing at all of the use of the sutra by rulers. The only mention of the preaching of the sutra, as we shall see, appears in the biography of a semi-legendary monk. Obviously the section of the Four Deva Kings protecting the country where the sutra is upheld was written with the support of rulers in mind, and to address the issue of security in a perhaps vulnerable kingdom subject to numerous attacks, as we shall see.

### i. The Sutra and Repentance

Monks played a role in Chinese politics, often a considerable one.<sup>23</sup> Yijing, for instance, after spending over twenty years in India and Southeast Asia, studying at Nālandā and travelling about, returned to Luoyang in 695, where he was assigned to the Great Fuxian

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<sup>22</sup> For the sutras dealing with protection of the state see "Chingokokka" by Jacques May in *Hōbōgirin* 1967 (fasc.IV), pp.322-327. For the *Sutra of the Benevolent Kings*, see Orzech 1998.

<sup>23</sup> See Forte 1976.

Monastery 大福先寺, the most powerful dynastic monastery at the time. As Antonino Forte notes, his assignment, amongst other factors, reveals his political involvement with Empress Wu.<sup>24</sup> Yijing worked with seventeen collaborators, including Faming 法明, Degan 德感, and Fazang 法藏, on the translation of our sutra.<sup>25</sup> Faming and Degan were amongst the ten monks of the imperial chapel (*nei daochang* 内道場) who presented the *Dayun jing Shenhuang shouji yishu* 大雲經神皇授記義疏, *Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Shenhuang in the Great Cloud Sutra (Mahāmegha Sūtra)*, to the throne in 690, which as Forte (1976) has shown, was a political document that influenced, intentionally or not, a dynastic change. The monks hoped to create an ideal Buddhist state with the Empress Wu as the *cakravartin* and reigning bodhisattva prophesied in the *Mahāmegha Sūtra*. This sutra, which had been translated by Dharmakṣema in the early fifth century (T. vol.12, no.387), was recited, by imperial order of 629, once a month by all monks of Chang'an.<sup>26</sup> The above commentary was distributed to the monasteries by an edict of August 17, 690.<sup>27</sup> A few months later, on December 5, another edict was issued ordering the institution of the Great Cloud monasteries (Dayunsi 大雲寺).<sup>28</sup> These were the most important state monasteries in Chinese history, established also in Central Asia.<sup>29</sup> As we

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<sup>24</sup> See Forte (forthcoming). The subject of Yijing's political involvement is also touched on in Barrett 1998.

<sup>25</sup> See Forte 1976, pl.XXXIII (Dunhuang manuscript).

<sup>26</sup> Forte 1976, pp.39, 41.

<sup>27</sup> The date August 16 appears in Forte 1976, p.53, but is emended to August 17 in Forte 1988, p.117, note 52.

<sup>28</sup> Forte 1992, p.220.

<sup>29</sup> During the Tang period, state monasteries were instituted on four occasions: under Gaozong in 666, Empress Wu in 690, Zhongzong in 705, and Xuanzong in 738. See Forte 1992.

shall see, the Japanese *kokubunji* 國分寺 connected with the *Sutra of Golden Light* in Yijing's version were modelled on the Great Cloud monasteries connected with the *Great Cloud Sutra*.

The preaching of our sutra is mentioned in Huijiao's 慧皎 (497-554) *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳) completed in ca. 530. It appears in the first of the biographies, that of She Moteng 攝摩騰 (Kāśyapa Mātāṅga?) of the first century from Central India. Kāśyapa Mātāṅga, we are told, preached the *Sutra of Golden Light* in a small kingdom of India:

昔經住天竺附庸小國講金光明經會敵國侵境。騰惟曰。經云。能說此經法。為地神所護。使所居安樂。今鋒鏑方始。會是為益乎。乃誓以忘身。躬住和勸。遂二國交歡。由是顯達。

Autrefois, alors qu'il s'était rendu dans un petit royaume satellite de l'Inde pour y prêcher le *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra* 金光明經, il advint qu'un royaume ennemi attaqua le territoire (où il se rendait). Kāśyapa Mātāṅga dit seulement: "Le Sūtra déclare: 'Quiconque peut exposer la Loi de ce Sūtra est protégé par la divinité de la Terre qui assure sécurité et bonheur à sa résidence'. Maintenant que la guerre vient de commencer, est-il encore utile (de m'y rendre)?" Alors il résolut de s'oublier lui-même et alla en personne conseiller la paix. Les deux royaumes se réconcilièrent. C'est ainsi qu'il se distingua.<sup>30</sup>

Fei Zhangfang's *Lidai sanbao ji*, completed in 597, also mentions the *Sutra of Golden Light* (T. vol.49, no.2034, p.49c19) in the entry on Kāśyapa Mātāṅga's Chinese translation of the *Sutra of the Forty-two Articles* (pp.49c9-50a4). A small country in northwest India.

<sup>30</sup> T. vol.50, no.2059, p.322c13-17. Translation by Robert Shih in 1968, p.1. I have corrected his "Suvarṇaprabhāsa" to "Suvarṇaprabhāsa." There is also a short note about Kāśyapa Mātāṅga's translation of the *Sutra of the Forty-two Articles* (*Sishierzhang jing* 四十二章經) in Sengyou's 僧祐 (445-518) *Chusanzang jiji* (T. vol. 55, no.2145, p.81c5ff.) completed in 515 and revised by the author before his death, and hence roughly contemporary with the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*. There is no mention here of his preaching of the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

where the people honoured the *Sutra of the Forty-two Articles*, was constantly threatened with attack from a neighbouring country. Yet, whenever the neighbouring country was about to attack, an obstacle presented itself, preventing them from doing so. It was therefore believed that the small country had some special techniques. To find out about this, a spy was sent. Upon his return, the spy reported:

彼國君臣講習大乘金光明等經。經言。說此法地神王護之。

The sovereign and the officials of this country preach and study Mahāyāna sutras, such as the *Sutra of Golden Light*. The sutra says: “By preaching this Dharma, the Earth Deity King will protect it [i.e. the country].” (p.49c18-20)

The neighbouring country then called a truce and turned to the promulgation of Mahāyāna. From there, we are told, [Mahāyāna] spread to southern India and gradually to China.

According to these sources, then, the *Sutra of Golden Light* was preached somewhere in the northwestern part of India already during the first century. She Moteng, however, is a legendary figure whose historicity has not been proved. All that concerns him, therefore, must be taken very cautiously.

The *Biographies of Eminent Monks* tells us that Dharmakṣema, who was renowned for his learning, eloquence, and skill in the use of *dhāraṇīs*, was invited by the Northern Liang ruler Juqu Mengsun 沮渠蒙遜 (r. 401-433) to Liangzhou 涼州, where the king sponsored his translation of sutras, including the *Sutra of Golden Light* (p.336a19-b1). Dharmakṣema was much sought after by the Emperor Taiwu 太武 (423-452) of the Northern Wei dynasty, but Juqu Mengsun did not wish the monk, endowed with magical powers, to leave his country. So when Dharmakṣema left, in search of the last part of the *Nirvāṇa*

*Sūtra*, the king had him assassinated as he was making his way to India (p.336b20-c17).

The *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (p.397c4-398a7) also tells us that Xuangao 玄高 (402-444), the chief disciple of the Kashmiri monk Buddhahadra (Chi. Fotuobatuoluo 佛陀跋陀羅, 359-429), once performed a repentance ceremony on the basis of the *Sutra of Golden Light* to intervene in a court strife. While Xuangao was serving as mentor to the crown prince, the emperor once became suspicious of his son. When the prince came to Xuangao for help, the monk performed a repentance ceremony (*chanfa* 懺法) on the basis of the sutra. The ceremony apparently resulted in the appearance, in the emperor's dream, of his ancestors, who scolded him for wronging the crown prince. Alarmed, the emperor then entrusted his power to the prince. When Xuangao's behind-the-scenes intervention came to light, however, he was executed.<sup>31</sup>

Repentance, as we have seen, is an important aspect of this sutra, and repentance rites on the basis of it were not uncommon. In fact, as we shall see, texts were later written on this ritual. But what, one may ask, do repentance rites have to do with court strife? Confession, as noted above, extended beyond the monastic practice of acknowledging one's transgressions of the *vinaya* rules. Illness seemed a natural consequence of sin, and hence the theme of "illness-confession" appears in Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist contexts, amidst both the aristocrats and the populace, as Kuo Liying explains.<sup>32</sup> Through the act of confession, the individual hoped to cure his own or someone else's illness, to prolong his life, and to reach a paradise. Chinese rulers, furthermore, practised confession to avert

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<sup>31</sup> I am grateful to Chen Jinhua for bringing this passage to my attention.

<sup>32</sup> See Kuo 1994, pp.8-9, who discusses confession in Chinese Buddhism from the fifth to the eighth century.

misfortunes, such as famines, droughts, and floods. Confession could also involve meditation and visualization, and the realization of the emptiness of sin on the more philosophical plane. As Kuo Liying explains, the practice of confessing one's transgressions eventually evolved into the invocation of the names of the Buddha.<sup>33</sup>

During the sixth century, the *Sutra of Golden Light* was translated by Paramārtha, Yaśogupta, and Jñānagupta, and edited by Baogui. It would seem, however, that Dharmakṣema's text continued to be employed, for references to the use of the sutra call it the *Jinguangming jing*. At this time the sutra received more attention from emperors. The *Chen shu* 陳書 (2:38) compiled in 636 by Yao Silian 姚思廉 (557-637) tells us Emperor Chen Wudi 陳武帝 (r. 557-559) devoted particular study to sutra in 558 (Yongding 永定 2). His successor Wendi 文帝 (r. 559-566), according to Zhipan's 志磐 (worked from 1258-1269) *Fozu tong ji* 佛祖統記 (T. vol.49, no.2035, p.352c3-5), had a repentance ceremony on the basis of our sutra, known as the *Jinguangming jing chan* 金光明經懺, performed in the Taiji Hall 太極殿 in 563 (Tianjia 天嘉 4). The votive article which goes under the name of Wendi (*Jinguangming chanwen* 金光明懺文) and which he would have read at this ceremony is found in a much earlier source than the *Fozu tong ji*, Daoxuan's 道宣 (596-667) *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (T. vol.52, no.2103, p.333b14-c6).

At this time the sutra, in Dharmakṣema's translation, also became an important Tiantai text. Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597), the founder of Tiantai, wrote two commentaries on it: *Jinguangming jing xuanyi* 金光明經玄義 (T. vol.39, no.1783) and *Jinguangming jing wenju* 金光明經文句 (T. vol.39, no.1785), and on which subcommentaries were in turn

<sup>33</sup> Kuo 1994, p.16.

written by Zhili 智禮 (960-1028) during the Northern Song dynasty (T. vol.39, nos.1784, 1786). Zhiyi, it would seem, used the *Jinguangming jing* for the propagation of Tiantai. According to his disciple Guanding's 灌頂 (561-632) *Sui Tiantai Zhi-zhe Dashi biezhuan* 隋天台智者大師別傳 composed around 605 (T. vol. 50, no.2050, pp.193c-194a), to stop fishermen from fishing, Zhiyi resorted to the story of the ten thousand fish living in a great pool with insufficient water, told in the sutra (Sanskrit, ch. 17; Dharmakṣema, ch. 16; Baogui, ch. 21; Yijing, ch. 25). In a previous life, the sutra tells us, the Buddha in the form of Jālavāhana filled the pool with abundant water, gave the fish food from his father's house, and preached the Law to them. The fish were then reborn amongst the Thirty-three Gods (*Trāyatrimśā devāḥ*; *Sanshisantian* 三十三天). Zhiyi also established a pond where fish which had been caught and were still alive could be released (*fangshengchi* 放生池, ponds for released beings). On the occasion of their release, he conducted a ceremony (懺), obviously related to the sutra. As Chen Jinhua has noted,<sup>34</sup> there is a stele, the inscription of which was written after Chen Xuandi's 陳宣帝 (r. 569-82) death in 582, commemorating Zhiyi's efforts to establish *fangshengchi* in the Tiantai area.<sup>35</sup> Zhiyi created fifty-five of these ponds.<sup>36</sup>

## ii. The *Jinguangming jing chanfa*

There is a very brief description of the performance of a repentance ceremony (*chanfa*)

<sup>34</sup> 1999, p.7, note 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Guoqing bailu* 國清百錄 compiled by Guanding ca. 607, T. vol. 46, no. 1934, no. 21, pp.801c10-802c9.

<sup>36</sup> Chen 1999, p.90.

懺法) on the basis of the *Jinguangming jing* in the *Guoqing bailu* 國清百錄 compiled by Guanding around 607 (T. vol. 46, no. 1934, p.796a4-b21). According to Chen Jinhua,<sup>37</sup> primarily on the basis of contents and style, the first seven documents of this text, the fifth of which is this *Jinguangming jing chanfa*, would have been written by Zhiyi himself. In terms of the *chanfa*, Chen's conclusion is confirmed by one of the catalogues of the works brought back to Japan by Saichō 最澄 (767-822, travelled to China 804-805), which mentions the *Jinguangming jing chanfa* of four sheets produced by Zhiyi.<sup>38</sup> As Kuo Liying points out,<sup>39</sup> however, a manual for the performance of this repentance ceremony existed before Zhiyi's time (538-597), for Sengyou (445-518) in his *Chu sanzang ji ji* mentions a work of almost exactly the same title: *Jinguangming jing chanhuifa* 金光明懺悔法 (see T. vol. 55, no.2145, p.91b4).

Let us turn then to the description of the ceremony in the *Guoqing bailu*. The ritual space (*bodhimāṇḍa*) is adorned, a seat for sutra-chanting is set up, and banners, flowers, etc. are arranged. A seat for Śrī (Lakṣmī) (Gongdetian 功德天) is placed to the left of the Buddha's seat, and if space permits, the seats for Sarasvatī (the great Bian[tian] 大辯) and for the Four Deva Kings (Sitianwang 四天王)<sup>40</sup> are placed to his right: 安功德天座在佛座左。道場若寬曳安大辯座。四天王座在右。For each of the seats, incense is burnt and flowers are scattered. A plate of fruits and vegetables is prepared, and another one with

<sup>37</sup> Private communication.

<sup>38</sup> *Dengyō Daishi shōrai Taishū roku* 傳教大師將來台州錄 in T. vol.55, no.2159, p.1056a2.

<sup>39</sup> 1994, p.116, note 20. There is a misprint in the reference: it is p.91b4, and not p.55b4.

<sup>40</sup> Although the Sanskrit *caturmahārāja* means "Four Great (*mahā*) Kings," the characters read "Four Deva (四天王) Kings."



mixed fruits and vegetables, which are sprinkled in all the directions. Every day one must bathe and put on new, purified clothes. The sutra says that for seven days and seven nights [the rules followed during] the six fasts are to be maintained.<sup>41</sup> On the day when the ceremony is to begin, at noon, everyone should hold an incense burner and one person should recite three times a series of invocations to buddhas, bodhisattvas, disciples of the Buddha, gods and goddesses, including Sarasvatī (the great Bian[tian]) and Śrī (Gongde[tian]), as well as to local, i.e. Chinese, gods and demons. Then one (presumably meaning each of the individuals taking part in the ritual) should state one's aim in the repentance ceremony, explaining to the best of one's knowledge. Three names are to be uttered three times: that of the Lord of the Treasure-flower Lapis Lazuli World, that of the sutra, and that of Śrī (Gongdetian). Having paid homage to the Three Jewels, one turns three times, and takes the Triple Refuge. Then one sits down for a meal. This is the pre-noon method (ritual). The remainder of the time, as usual, one recites only the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

The first of the three names to be repeated three times, that of the Lord of the Treasure-flower Lapis Lazuli World, is the name of a buddha to whom Śrī attributes her power and hence whom she urges people to worship, as stated in the chapter dedicated to this goddess in the *Sutra of Golden Light* (Sanskrit, p.113, lines 14 ff.; Dharmakṣema, p.345a14ff.; Yijing, p.439a10ff.).<sup>42</sup> In the sutra, she derives her name (Śrī, Gongdetian

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<sup>41</sup> The six monthly fast days are the 8th, 14th, 15th, 23rd, 29th, and 30th. On these days, when the demons are occupied, the Four Deva Kings take note of human conduct. For this reason, one should be cautious and eat nothing after noon. For further details, see Oda 1917, pp.1822c-1823b.

<sup>42</sup> The Sanskrit (1937, p.113, line 15 - p.114, line 1; Emmerick transl., 1996, p.50) only says that Śrī planted a merit-root in the Tathāgata.

功德天, Jixiangtian 吉祥天) from his: in the extant Sanskrit this Buddha is called Ratnakusumaguṇasāgaravaiḍūryakanakagirisuvarṇakāñcanaprabhāśrī (Jewel-flower Ocean-of-qualities Lapis-lazuli-gold-mountain Shining-golden-light Śrī); in Dharmakṣema's translation, his name is rendered as Baohua gongdehai liuli jinshan zhaoming rulai 寶花功德海琉璃金山照明如來 (Treasure-flower ocean-of-merit lapis-lazuli-gold-mountain Tathāgata); and in Yijing's translation, as Liuli jinshan baohua guang zhao jixiang gongdehai rulai 琉璃金山寶花光照吉祥功德海如來 (Lapis-lazuli-gold-mountain Treasure-flower Shining-light Ocean-of-auspicious-merit Tathāgata). Hence, the uttering of the name of this Buddha, of the sutra, and of Śrī indicates a close association in sixth-century China of the repentance ceremony of our sutra with Śrī. In eighth-century Japan, as we shall see, the association asserts itself even more strongly, for the ceremony comes to be called also the Kichijō keka 吉祥悔過 (Śrī repentance).

Originally our sutra's repentance ceremony was probably not specifically connected with the goddess Śrī. One of the probable sources for the origin of the association appears in the first chapter of the sutra, where, in the extant Sanskrit, the Buddha calls the confession he will preach "thoroughly adorned with every splendour" (*sarvaśrīsamalakṛta*).<sup>43</sup> In Dharmakṣema's version we read of "merit (*gongde* 功德) derived from the repentance and other ceremonies" 懺悔等法 所生功德 (Dharmakṣema, p.335b12; Baogui, p.359c21) and that the confession is "adorned with infinite merit (*gongde* 功德)" 無量功德

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<sup>43</sup> Sanskrit, p.2, line 9. Translation by Emmerick, 1996, p.1. *Śrī* has various meanings, including good fortune, wealth, beauty, virtue, etc.

之所莊嚴 (Dharmakṣema, p.335b14; Baogui, p.359c23-24).<sup>44</sup> In Yijing's version of 703, it says "the excellent among fortune[-bringing] (*jixiang* 吉祥) repentances" 吉祥懺中勝 (p.404a14). There is a possibility, however, that in later times, in Japan at least, a different interpretation may perhaps have been given to Yijing's passage by assuming an abbreviation: "the Śrī (Jixiang) [repentance] (吉祥[懺]), excelling amongst repentances (懺中勝)." Such a reading, if it existed, could conceivably have been the source for the Japanese name of the repentance ritual, *Kichijō keka* 吉祥悔過. Marinus de Visser, furthermore, suggests yet another reading: "... the entire superiority of the *Kichijō-sen* (吉祥懺)..."<sup>45</sup> Regarding the origin of the *Kichijō keka*, he points to this and to two other passages in Yijing's version of the sutra: the goddess's promise "to bestow all kinds of wealth and felicity upon the faithful readers of the sutra" (Śrī chapter, e.g. p.439a14-16) and the fact that "she is mentioned at the head of the devas who... promised to devote their whole heart to the protection of this King of sutras and to those who received and kept it" (p.446c21-447a1).<sup>46</sup> Although he identifies these passages as "the origin of the *Kichijō-kekwa*," they are at best, rather, the origin of the name of the rite.

In the context of this repentance ritual, then, images of our Sarasvatī (Biancaitiān) would have been made in China, at least by Zhiyi's time. Furthermore, if the *Jingguangming jing chanfa* in the *Guoqing bailu* happens to reflect or reproduce the contents, in terms of images produced for the ritual, of the *Jingguangming jing chanhuifa* mentioned in the *Chu*

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<sup>44</sup> The corresponding Sanskrit passage of 懺悔等法 所生功德 is *māṅgalyadeśana*... (Sanskrit, p.2, line 6); 無量功德 之所莊嚴 corresponds to *sarvasrīsamalaṅkṛta* of p.2, line 9.

<sup>45</sup> De Visser 1935, vol.1, p.309.

<sup>46</sup> De Visser 1935, vol.1, p.309.

*san-zang ji ji* of the early sixth century—it is not impossible, it should be noted, that this could be one and the same text—Biancaitian images could have been made as early as in the fifth century. No Chinese images of the goddess from either the fifth or the sixth century, however, are known. In fact, the earliest surviving images are paintings from Dunhuang dating from the tenth century.<sup>47</sup> One of the examples in the Musée Guimet (fig.25A), for instance, is clearly related to the *Sutra of Golden Light*, as we shall see, and almost certainly also with a ritual connected with it. There are, however, on the Japanese side, both records and earlier surviving representations of deities which might well have been used for the celebration of the Kichijō *keka*, as we shall see.<sup>48</sup> And the Japanese images would have been made on the basis of a practice already established in China.

A description of the repentance rite connected with our sutra also appears in a Song period text on the subject: the *Jingguangming chanfa buzhu yi* 金光明懺法補助儀 (T. vol.46, no.1945, pp.957b1-961c17) compiled by Zunshi 遵式 (946-1032). In terms of the altar arrangement (p.959a), the text tells us that in front of a Śākyamuni image, the *Jingguangming jing* is placed. A seat for Śrī (Gongdetian) is put to the left of the Buddha. However, the text adds, “according to the new sutra, you should draw the image of Śrī (Jixiangtian)” 準新經。應畫吉祥天像。 (p.959a9). If it (the ritual space) is large, seats for Sarasvatī (Da Bian[caitian]) and the Four Deva Kings are placed to the right of the Buddha. In conformity with the way of the Vaiśravaṇa (Pishamentian 毘沙門天, one of the Four Deva Kings) *dhāraṇī*, one is to draw the image of Śrī (Jixiangtian) to the left of the

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<sup>47</sup> See pp.246-48 below.

<sup>48</sup> See pp.217ff. below.

Buddha, and one is to make the image of Vaiśravaṇa (Duowentian 多聞天 = Pishamentian) to the right of the Buddha.

What we see in Zunshi's text, then, is a departure from what may have been the sculptural representation of Śrī, and instead, following "the new sutra," a painting of the goddess is to be made. "The new sutra" refers to Yijing's translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, as specified by Zunshi himself at the beginning of his text: 準淨師新經 "following the new sutra by Master [Yi]jing" (p.957b12). The passage in Yijing's translation referred to by Zunshi appears in the chapter entitled "The Protection of the Country by the Four Deva Kings" 四天王護國品, in the course of Vaiśravaṇa's explanation of a ritual to obtain the vision of him (T. vol.16, no.665, p.431b14-17):

於白疊上畫佛形像。當用木膠雜彩。莊飾其畫像人為受八戒。於佛左邊。作吉祥天女像。於佛右邊作我多聞天像。并畫男女眷屬之類

... on a white cotton cloth,<sup>49</sup> he should draw the form of the Buddha. He should use tree glue and various colours to adorn it magnificently. The person who paints this image should receive the Eight Precepts. On the Buddha's left side, he should make an image of the goddess Śrī (Jixiangtian). On the Buddha's right side, he should make my, (i.e.) Vaiśravaṇa's (Duowentian's) image. He should also draw (my) various retinues of men and women.

It is noteworthy here that in a text earlier than Yijing's translation of our sutra in 703, we find specific instructions for the painting of the image of Śrī in a ritual in honour of her:

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<sup>49</sup> I follow Nobel's translation (1958, pp.212-213 "Baumwollstoff") of 疊, which in turn is based on the variant (疊 with the radical for hair/wool 毛) used in the Yuan and Ming canons (T. vol.16, no.665, p.431, note 16).

the ritual is known as the *Gongdetian xiang fa* 功德天像法 ([Ritual] method for the Gongdetian image) and is described in the *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 attributed to Adiquduo 阿地瞿多 (Skt. Atikūṭa, Atigupta?) from Central Asia, who arrived in Chang'an in 651 and worked there from 653-654. Here, however, Śrī (Gongdetian) appears in the centre, while paintings of Brahmā (Fanmotian 梵摩天) and Indra (Dishitian 帝釋天) appear on her left and right, respectively (T. vol.18, no.901, p.876a18-22): 其功德天像。身端正赤白色二臂。畫作種種纓絡環釧耳璫天衣寶冠。天女左手持如意珠。右手施呪無畏。宣臺上坐。左邊畫梵摩天。。。右邊畫帝釋天。 Could the *Sutra of Golden Light* in the stage of development represented by Yijing's translation have been influenced by the *Tuoluoni ji jing*? Was Zunshi familiar with the *Tuoluoni ji jing*? Fascinating as these questions may be, an attempt to address them is beyond the scope of this dissertation. What is clear here is that Zunshi incorporated the painting instruction of Yijing's translation of the Protection of the Country by the Four Deva Kings chapter into the *Jingguangming jing chanfa* prescriptions of the *Guoqing bailu*, which he repeatedly refers to in his text (e.g. p.957b6-7), in order to produce his own version of the *chanfa* explanation. Although there is no mention in Zunshi's text of the painting of Biancaitian's image, we know from Yijing's version of the *Sutra of Golden Light* that there was a ritual wherein her image was drawn (p.436c17 如法應畫辯才天 ) to obtain a vision of her and have one's wishes fulfilled.

According to Daoxuan's 道宣 (596-667) *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gao seng zhuan* 續高僧傳) completed in 645, Zhiyi performed a seven-day repentance ceremony (懺) on the basis of the *Jingguangming jing* to cure the illness of consort Xiao

蕭妃 in the early 590s.<sup>50</sup> She was the great great granddaughter of Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (r. 502-549), the Chinese Aśoka, and consort of the prince of Jin 晉王, the future Emperor Sui Yangdi 隋煬帝 (r. 604-614).

If we now turn to Yijing's version of the sutra, it is interesting to discover that all but one of the commentaries found in the Taishō edition are by Japanese monks (T. vol.56, nos.2196-2199).<sup>51</sup> The lone Chinese commentary (T. vol.39, no.1788) is by Huizhao 慧沼 (650-715) of the Faxiang school on the basis of Yogācāra. Clearly Dharmakṣema's version of the sutra was more important in China than Yijing's, to say nothing of those of Paramārtha and Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta.<sup>52</sup> Would this perhaps explain why we find so few Chinese images of Sarasvatī, whose form and implements are not described in Dharmakṣema's version? In Yijing, on the other hand, she is described as eight-armed carrying weapons. As Yijing's version quickly overshadowed Dharmakṣema's shortly after it had entered Japan, becoming the standard translation of the sutra, images of this form of the goddess were made from early on, as we shall see, and are still popularly produced in Japan today.

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<sup>50</sup> T. vol.50, no.2060, p.567a 10ff.

<sup>51</sup> The commentaries are by Gangyō 願曉 (835-871) of the Sanron school (no.2196); Myōichi 明一 (728-798), who resided at Tōdaji (no.2197); Hyōbi 平備 (d.u.) of the Hossō school (no.2198); and Kūkai 空海 (774-835), founder of the Shingon school (no.2199a-b).

<sup>52</sup> Nanjio's catalogue (1883, p.42, no.127) also states that Dharmakṣema's version was the most popular in China.

### c. Political Significance of the Sutra in Japan

#### i. The Sutra and the *Kokubunji* System

In Japan, sutras for the protection of the state were among the earliest introduced and held an importance from the start. The Shitennōji 四天王寺 (Four Deva Kings Monastery) in Osaka, obviously connected with our sutra, was according to tradition founded by Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (574-622), but was more likely established as a memorial to him.<sup>53</sup>

The *Sutra of Golden Light* is mentioned for the first time in Japan in 677 (Hakuhō 白鳳 5), when, according to the *Nihongi* 日本紀, Emperor Temmu 天武 (r. 673-686) sent out messengers to the four directions to expound the *Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明經 (the title of Dharmakṣema's translation in Japanese pronunciation, but which could refer in abbreviated form to Baogui's edition pronounced *Gobu Konkōmyōkyō* 合部金光明經), and the *Sutra of the Benevolent Kings* (*Ninnōkyō* 仁王經 in Japanese pronunciation) in the version attributed to Kumārajīva.<sup>54</sup> Out of the twelve sutras mentioned in the *Nihongi*, the *Konkōmyōkyō* appears the largest number of times by far.<sup>55</sup> Several passages from the

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<sup>53</sup> Tamura 1971, p.88.

<sup>54</sup> *Nihongi* 29. Hakuhō 5, 11/20 (11th month, 20th day); transl. Aston 1896 (repr. 1956, part 2, p.335). There is either a misprint or an error in de Visser's work (1935, vol.2, p.436), where the year is given as 676, rather than 677. A note in the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* series on this record says the version of our sutra referred to may be either Dharmakṣema's or Baogui's. The full title of the *Sutra of Benevolent Kings* attributed to Kumārajīva is, in Chinese reading, *Renwang bore boluomi jing* 仁王般若波羅蜜經 (T. vol.8, no.245).

References to our sutra in Japan are listed in de Visser 1935, vol.2, pp.436ff.

<sup>55</sup> While the other sutras are mentioned once or twice at most, the *Konkōmyōkyō* appears six times. See Tamura 1971, p.10, Table C.



*Nihongi*, furthermore, seem to be based on the *Sutra of Golden Light*'s cult of the Four Deva Kings, as Tamura Encho explains.<sup>56</sup>

In 680, the sutra began to be expounded in the palace and in various Buddhist monasteries,<sup>57</sup> and in 686 one hundred priests came to the palace to read the sutra.<sup>58</sup> As a result of great floods, Empress Jitō 持統 (r. 686-697) ordered in 692 the expounding of the sutra in the capital and in four home provinces.<sup>59</sup> In 694 she sent one hundred copies of the sutra to the various provinces to be read during the first quarter of the moon of the first month.<sup>60</sup> Another order was issued for the sutra to be read in 696.<sup>61</sup> It was expounded in the four home provinces when Emperor Mommu 文武 (r. 697-707) was ill in 702.<sup>62</sup> The following year the sutra was read in the four great monasteries of Nara, Daianji 大安寺, Yakushiji 薬師寺, Gangōji 元興寺, and Gūfukuji 弘福寺.<sup>63</sup> In 705, there was another reading of the sutra in the five great monasteries of Nara (probably adding Hōryūji 法隆寺 to the previous list ) to relieve the suffering of people owing to drought.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tamura 1971, pp.11-13, 28-32.

<sup>57</sup> *Nihongi* 29, Hakuho 8, 5/1; transl. Aston 1896 (repr. 1956, part 2, p.346 under 9th year of Hakuho).

<sup>58</sup> *Nihongi* 29, Shuchō 朱鳥 1, 7/8; transl. Aston 1896 (repr. 1956, part 2, p.378).

<sup>59</sup> *Nihongi* 30, 6th year of Jitō's reign, intercalary 5th month, 3rd day; transl. Aston 1896 (repr. 1956, part 2, p.408).

<sup>60</sup> *Nihongi*, 8th year of Jitō's reign, 5/11; transl. Aston 1896 (repr. 1956, part 2, p.416).

<sup>61</sup> *Nihongi*, 10th year of Jitō's reign, 12/1; transl. Aston 1896 (repr. 1956, part 2, p.421).

<sup>62</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 2, Taihō 大宝 2, 12/13.

<sup>63</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 3, Taihō 3, 7/13. On the great monasteries (*daiji* 大寺) in Japan see "Daiji (Japan)" by Hubert Durt in *Hōbōgirin* 1983 (fasc.6), pp.704-711. de Visser (1935, vol.2, pp.437) erroneously gives the list of four here as including Kōfukuji 興福寺 instead of Gūfukuji, but as Durt explains (p.709), Kōfukuji replaces Gūfukuji in the list of four great monasteries only from 735 onwards. The correct list, as cited in the *Shoku Nihongi*, Taihō 3, 3/1, is listed by Durt on p.708.

<sup>64</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 3, Keiun 慶雲 2, 4/3.

Yijing's translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light* (*Konkōmyōsaishōōkyō* 金光明最勝王經 in Japanese pronunciation, referred to as the *Saishōōkyō*) is first mentioned in Japan in the *Shoku Nihongi* 續日本紀 in 725 (Jinki 神龜 2, 7/17) as an alternative text to the *Konkōmyōkyō*: Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (r. 724-749) ordered that monks and nuns read the *Konkōmyōkyō*, but if they do not have (a copy of) this sutra, they should “turn” the *Saishōōkyō* instead, for peace in the country (仍令僧尼讀金光明經。若無此經者。便轉最勝王經令國家平安也). In 728, chapters of the sutra, here called *Konkōmyōkyō*, were distributed in the provinces for reading so as to have the peace in the country.<sup>65</sup> Given the differentiation of the *Konkōmyōkyō* from Yijing's *Saishōōkyō* in the 725 edict, the reference here to the *Konkōmyōkyō* is almost certainly not to Yijing's translation,<sup>66</sup> which within a few years (i.e. by 734) became the standard version in Japan. In 734 (Tenpyō 天平 6, 11/21), it was stipulated that those who wish to enter the religious order must also memorize the *Saishōōkyō*.<sup>67</sup> Clearly, by this time, Yijing's version was the one used in Japan. As in the *Nihongi*, the sutra continued to be held in importance in the *Shoku Nihongi*, where the *Konkōmyōkyō* is mentioned seven times and the *Saishōōkyō* eighteen times. The *Heart Sutra*, however, was also widely used, for it appears twenty times in the *Shoku Nihongi*.<sup>68</sup>

In 737 Shōmu ordered that monks and nuns of all the provinces should purify themselves through ritual baths and read the *Saishōōkyō* two or three times a month.<sup>69</sup> Later the same

<sup>65</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 10, Jinki 5, 12/28.

<sup>66</sup> According to Nedachi 1992, p.25, however, the text in question is indeed Yijing's version.

<sup>67</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 11, Tenpyō 6, 11/21.

<sup>68</sup> See Tamura 1971, p.17, Table F.

<sup>69</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 12, Tenpyō 9, 8/2.

year, seven hundred monks were invited to the palace to read the *Daihannyakyō* 大般若經 (*Mahāprajñā[pāramitā] Sūtra*)<sup>70</sup> and the *Saishōōkyō* for peace in the state.<sup>71</sup> In 738, Shōmu issued a proclamation that the *Saishōōkyō* should be read throughout the country to promote peace.<sup>72</sup> Then he established the system of state monasteries and nunneries, plans for which were summarized in edicts of 741, although their institution began in the late 730s.<sup>73</sup> His model was the Great Cloud monasteries system established in 690 by Empress Wu.<sup>74</sup> Shōmu ordered that in every province there should be a monastery called Konkōmyō Shitennō Gokoku no tera 金光明四天王護國之寺, “Monastery for the Protection of the Country by the Four Deva Kings of the *Konkōmyō[saishōō]kyō*,” more usually known as *kokubunji* 國分寺 (provincial monasteries),<sup>75</sup> on the grounds of which should be built a seven-storey pagoda. The emperor himself intended to write out the *Saishōōkyō* in gold characters, one copy for each of the pagodas. The state nunneries, called Hokke metsuzai no tera 法華滅罪之寺 “Monastery for the extinction of sin [by means of] the *Lotus Sutra*,” more usually known as *kokubunni* 國分尼寺 (provincial nunneries), were connected with the *Lotus Sutra*. During the Tenpyō Shōhō 天平勝宝 era (749-757), Tōdaiji became the institution “governing the provincial monasteries” (*sōkokubunji* 總國分寺) and Hokkeji

<sup>70</sup> Seems to be Xuanzang’s 玄奘 (d. 664) translation, *Da bore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經, made between 660 and 663 (T. vols.5-7, no.220), which consists of translations from a number of different sutras (see Conze 1960, p.28).

<sup>71</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 12, Tenpyō 9, 8/15.

<sup>72</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 13, Tenpyō 10, 4/17.

<sup>73</sup> See Piggott 1987, pp.101-104. The edicts summarizing plans for the establishment of the state monasteries and nunneries network appear in *Shoku Nihongi* 14, Tenpyō 13, 1/15 and 3/24.

<sup>74</sup> See p.198 above.

<sup>75</sup> The term *kokubunji* appears for the first time in 741 (Tenpyō 13, 1/15) in *Shoku Nihongi* 14, p.163, line 6.

法華寺, also in Nara, the institution “governing provincial nunneries” (*sōkokubunji* 總國分尼寺).<sup>76</sup>

Hence, while the Great Cloud monasteries established under Empress Wu were named after the *Great Cloud Sutra*, the *kokubunji* derived their full name from the *Sutra of Golden Light*. The *sōkokubunji* Tōdaiji in the capital of Nara had as its prototype the main Dayun monastery, called Zhong Dayun si, Central Great Cloud Monastery, in the capital of Luoyang.<sup>77</sup>

## ii. The Kichijō *keka*

In 743, monks went to Tōdaiji, referred to as Konkōmyōji, to read the *Saishōōkyō* for seven times seven days to promote the happiness of the Imperial House, the purity of the country, the happiness of the people.<sup>78</sup> In 745, following an earthquake, Emperor Shōmu ordered the reading of the *Saishōōkyō* for seven days in all the monasteries of the capital.<sup>79</sup> In 749, during the first seven days of the year, repentance rites (*keka* 悔過) were performed and the *Saishōōkyō* was read in all the monasteries of the country.<sup>80</sup> In 764, a Shōsōin 正倉院 document tells us, a repentance ritual was performed in the Kichijō kekasho 吉祥悔過所 (Place for the Kichijō repentance [ceremony]) at Tōdaiji for twenty-two days (3/17

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<sup>76</sup> De Visser 1935, vol.2, p.449.

<sup>77</sup> For the Central Great Cloud Monastery, see Forte 1992, pp.222-223.

<sup>78</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 15, Tenpyō 15, 1/13.

<sup>79</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 16, Tenpyō 17, 5/2.

<sup>80</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 17, Tenpyō Shōhō 1, 1/1.

- 4/10).<sup>81</sup> One can only assume that if it was called the “Place for the Kichijō repentance.” the elaborate repentance 悔過 ritual in question in this Shōsōin document was indeed the Kichijō *keka* 吉祥悔過 (Śrī repentance). Ritual expenses are listed, and petitions for the required items, including also the offerings for fourteen or eighteen Buddhist images,<sup>82</sup> and for the services of hundreds of monks are recorded in the document. In 767, during the first seven days of the year, the *Shoku Nihongi* records that high priests of all the great monasteries were invited to expound the *Saishōōkyō*, and that the “Kichijōten *keka*” 吉祥天悔過 (Repentance of the deity Kichijō) took place in every *kokubunji*.<sup>83</sup> As we have seen, the Japanese name for the repentance ritual of the *Sutra of Golden Light* appears as an auspicious characteristic (*kichijō* 吉祥) of the repentance in Yijing’s translation of the sutra itself, and could have been interpreted as the name of the goddess Kichijō[ten] 吉祥[天] rather than simply an auspicious characteristic.<sup>84</sup> Its performance over a period of seven days is described in *Guoqing bailu*.<sup>85</sup> The expected merit to be derived from this performance, states the 767 edict, was peace in the realm, wind and rain in due season, ripening of the five grains, happiness of the people, and good fortune extending also to all sentient beings. It is perhaps not without significance that Śrī in the sutra promises also abundant harvest to those who uphold the sutra.<sup>86</sup> This ceremony, according to de Visser, was performed in

<sup>81</sup> The related entries begin on p.486 of vol.16 of the *Dai Nihon komonjo*. The days of the *keka* are specified on p.496 in connection with the food required for the monks and others.

<sup>82</sup> It is not specified which Buddhist images would have been made, but only their number is given (p.496).

<sup>83</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 29, Jingo Keiun I, 1/8.

<sup>84</sup> See pp.206-207 above.

<sup>85</sup> See p.205 above.

<sup>86</sup> Sanskrit, p.117 *tasya ca mahādhānyarāśim vivardhayiṣyati* . “she will make increase the great heap of

Japan from 739, when Emperor Shōmu ordered a seven-day and seven-night repentance ceremony to be celebrated in all the monasteries of the country for good crops,<sup>87</sup> until about 1068.<sup>88</sup>

#### d. Sutra-related and Ritual Images of Benzaiten

The earliest recorded image(s) of Benzaiten (the Japanese Sarasvatī) is in a Shōsōin document of 753, Tenpyō Shōhō 5, 5/21.<sup>89</sup> This was a painting, or conceivably more than one painting, produced by twenty-two painters, in the sutra-copying hall of Tōdaiji. On the basis of the context of the entry, it has been suggested that it was a colour picture for a text.<sup>90</sup>

One year later, another Shōsōin document from Tenpyō Shōhō 6 (754, 1/5) records a petition to set up an altar for the great goddess Benzaiten.<sup>91</sup> The request does not specify the hall within Tōdaiji in which the altar was to be set up. Permission was obviously granted, and quickly, because fragments of a banner and of a cotton cloth that would have been placed below an image of Benzaiten are inscribed with the date Tenpyō Shōhō 6,

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corn" [Emmerick 1996, p.51] ; Dharmakṣema p.345a25-26 所種穀米牙莖枝 葉果實滋茂。樹神歡喜出生無量種種諸物; Yijing p.439a7 常得豐稔。

<sup>87</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* 13, Tenpyō 11, 7/14. According to de Visser (1935, vol.1, p.402), this was a Kichijō *keka*, for, as we have seen, Kichijōten promises abundant harvests to the upholders of the sutra. See also Nedachi 1992, p.27.

<sup>88</sup> De Visser 1935, vol.1, p.309. For further references to the Kichijō *keka*, see de Visser 1935, vol.1, pp.313ff.

<sup>89</sup> The Shōsōin document appears in the *Dai Nihon komonjo*, vol.3, p.620.

<sup>90</sup> Nishikawa 1968, p.45, note 10.

<sup>91</sup> *Dai Nihon komonjo*, vol.3, p.650.

5/3—no less than two days later. These fragments, together with fragments of canopy which also belonged to a Benzaiten image, are preserved in the Shōsōin storehouse of Tōdaiji. On one of the remaining pieces (50.5 x 14 cm) of the banner, a black ink inscription on yellow silk reads:

長九尺  
大弁才(天)女壇幡 広九寸 東大寺 天平勝宝六年五月三日

Altar banner of the great goddess Benzai(ten). Length: 9 *shaku* [ca. 2.74m]. Width: 9 *sun* [ca. 27cm]. Tōdaiji. Tenpyō Shōhō year 6, 5th month, 3rd day.<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, two miscellaneous torn pieces of cloth which would have been placed on the altar below the image of Benzaiten read:

大弁才天女壇於敷緋絁長三尺三寸 天平勝宝六年五月三日

Scarlet cloth spread for the altar of the great goddess Benzaiten. Length: 3 *shaku* [ca. 91.5 cm]. Width: 3 *sun* [ca. 9 cm]. Tenpyō Shōhō year 6, 5th month, 3rd day.<sup>93</sup>

Hence a Benzaiten image would have been completed during the first two months of Tenpyō Shōhō 6, i.e. 754, or slightly earlier in the previous year.

Another piece of scarlet-coloured cloth fragments, as pointed out by Matsushima Junshō 松島順正 of the Shōsōin Office, bears Benzaiten's name:

大弁才天女[。]天井四角小灌頂方一尺六寸五分壇

<sup>92</sup> Shosoin Office, 1964, vol.2, p.34, fig.81. The first character of Benzaiten appears here in the abbreviated form 弁 (for 辯). This abbreviated form is not attested in Chinese.

<sup>93</sup> Ishida 1929, p.289; Nishikawa 1968, p.44.

The great goddess Benzaiten. Small *abhiṣeka* altar of 1 *shaku* and 6.5 *sun* [ca. 50 cm] for each of the four sides with a square ceiling.<sup>94</sup>

The *abhiṣeka* is an anointing ceremony for the installation of an image—probably the ceremony of the setting up of the altar as requested in the Shōsōin document of Tenpyō Shōhō 6, 1/5. Regrettably, however, there is no date here that might allow us to link it definitively with the banner and the cloth fragments of Tenpyō Shōhō 6, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. In fact, Matsushima Junshō points to yet another cloth fragment from the Shōsōin which reads ... 東大寺天平勝宝六年五月三日 (the beginning of the inscription is missing) and which he connects with this one. Furthermore, inscriptions in black ink, clearly related to the *abhiṣeka* one on the scarlet cloth fragment, are preserved on the four sides of a tenon inserted into the hub of a canopy's wood frame. They read: 大弁財、天女天、井四角、小灌頂.<sup>95</sup> It is possible then, although not definitively verifiable, that these items (the banner, the scarlet cloth fragments, as well as the canopy) belonged to one and the same Benzaiten image. Nevertheless, it is equally possible that the undated items belonged to a different Benzaiten image.

As the Chinese repentance texts of the *Sutra of Golden Light* prescribe,<sup>96</sup> images of Śrī (Kichijōten) and Sarasvatī (Benzaiten) were used in the ceremony called the Kichijō *keka* (Śrī repentance) in Japan. In Tōdaiji there was a Kichijōin 吉祥院, originally, as

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<sup>94</sup> Nishikawa 1968, p.45, note 10.

<sup>95</sup> Nishikawa 1968, p.45, note 10. The commas are mine, separating the inscriptions on each of the four sides of the tenon. The first character of the third tenon side inscription appears in Nishikawa as 井, but I presume it is an error for 天 with the 天 of 天井 at the end of the second tenon.

<sup>96</sup> See above pp.204ff.



Kuno Takeshi 久野健 explains, called the Kichijō kekasho 吉祥悔過所, and apparently also the Minami Kichijō kekasho 南吉祥悔過所.<sup>97</sup> There is no entry, either amongst the Shōsōin documents or in the *Tōdaiji yōroku* 東大寺要錄, recording when this hall was built. There is no known record, furthermore, indicating the location of the Kichijōin within Tōdaiji. The first mention of it appears in a Shōsōin document of 764.<sup>98</sup> It is possible, as Kuno Takeshi suggests,<sup>99</sup> that the third month of 764 was the first time the ceremony was celebrated in this hall. The Shōsōin repository has preserved two objects that would have been used in the Kichijōin: a white sandalwood octagonal box and an octagonal table painted with gold and silver, both inscribed “Kichijōdō” 吉祥堂 (= Kichijōin).<sup>100</sup>

It is almost certain that an image of Benzaiten would have been made for the Kichijō kekasho of Tōdaiji: a Shōsōin document of Tenpyō Hōji 天平宝字 8 (764), 3/27, records the list of offerings to be made to fourteen or eighteen images in the Kichijō kekasho,<sup>101</sup> one of which must have been Kichijōten and another very likely Benzaiten.

The earliest surviving image of Benzaiten in Japan is a large clay sculpture (ht. 219 cm) preserved, together with a clay sculpture of Kichijōten, in the Hokkedō 法華堂 (Sangatsudō 三月堂) of Tōdaiji. The images are severely damaged and date from the Tenpyō period.<sup>102</sup> Judging from the other images in the Hokkedō and their good condition,

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<sup>97</sup> Kuno 1947, p.22.

<sup>98</sup> Tenpyō Hōji 8, 4/29 (*Dai Nihon komonjo*, vol.5, p.470).

<sup>99</sup> Kuno 1947, p.22.

<sup>100</sup> Kuno 1947, p.22.

<sup>101</sup> *Dai Nihon komonjo*, vol.16, p.496.

<sup>102</sup> Opinions range from the early to the late Tenpyō. Kuno Takeshi (1947), for instance, places the image to about 764, as we have seen. Kanamori Jun 金森達 (1948, p.231) and Nishikawa Kyōtarō 西川杏太郎 (1968,

it is clear that the Benzaiten and the Kichijōten were not originally in this hall. The great damage on the two images, furthermore, would indicate they were involved in an accident.

We know from the *Tōdaiji yōroku* (ch. 4, p.93) that there was a fire in the Kichijōin: the hall burnt down in Tenryaku 天曆 8 (954). As a result, the text continues, the Kichijō *onegai* 吉祥御願 ([ceremony of] prayer to Kichijō[ten])—apparently referring to the Kichijō *keka*<sup>103</sup>—which used to be performed in Kichijōin, was then held in the Kenjakuin 絹索院, i.e. the Hokkedō, where the central image is Fukukenjaku Kannon 不空絹索觀音. Unfortunately the *Tōdaiji yōroku* does not tell us if some of the images from the Kichijōin were saved from the 954 fire, but, if they had been, they would have been moved to the Kenjakuin for the continued performance of the Kichijō *onegai* ceremony. From their condition, the highly damaged images of Kichijōten and Benzaiten in the Hokkedō could very well have been through this fire. Kuno Takeshi has argued, on the basis of Shōsōin documents and *Tōdaiji yōroku* records, as well as on the basis of the style of the Hokkedō sculptures of Kichijōten and Benzaiten, which seem to be of the period, that these two images were originally in the Kichijōin (Kichijō kekasho), enshrined in Tenpyō Hōji 8 (764) with the other images used for the Kichijō *keka*.<sup>104</sup> Machida Kōichi has made a list of the images which he conjectures would have been used for this *keka*: Śākyamuni (Shaka p.44), on the other hand, lean toward the early Tenpyō period. Machida Kōichi 町田甲一 (1954, pp.5-6) says it is from the first half of the Tenpyō period. For other opinions, see Nishikawa 1968, p.44. It should be noted, furthermore, that although the Benzaiten and Kichijōten images of the Hokkedō are, by a number of scholars (e.g. Kanamori 1948, p.229; Machida 1954, pp.6-8), considered to have been made as a group, this opinion is not unanimous: Kuno Takeshi (1947, pp.17-18) argues that the Benzaiten and Kichijōten sculptures are not of the same style (nor of the same height: Kichijōten is smaller, measuring 202 cm, whereas Benzaiten measures 219 cm; in contrast, the pair of clay images of Sūryaprabha [Nikkō] and Candraprabha [Gakkō] in the Hokkedō are of exactly the same size). He considers the Kichijōten sculpture to be later than the Benzaiten.

<sup>103</sup> Nishikawa 1968, p.44.

<sup>104</sup> Kuno 1947, especially pp.22-23.

釈迦), the Four Deva Kings (Shitennō 四天王), Brahmā (Bonten 梵天) and Indra (Taishakuten 帝釈天), Śrī (Kichijōten) and Sarasvatī (Benzaiten), Vajrapāṇi (Shūkongōjin 執金剛神), the great generals (*taishō* 大將) Sañci (Shōryōchi 正了知) and Mañibhadra (Hōken 寶賢), Mother Hārītī (Kariteimo 可梨帝母), Dṛḍhā Pṛthivī (Kenrōchijin 堅牢地神), and Bodhivṛkṣa (Bodaijujin 菩提樹神).<sup>105</sup> In terms of specific surviving images, besides the clay Kichijōten and Benzaiten which he also thinks were moved to the Hokkedō after the Kichijōin fire (but which he considers to have been produced in the first half of the Tenpyō Period), he identifies the clay sculptures of Brahmā and Indra (called Sūryaprabha [Nikkō 日光] and Candraprabha [Gakkō 月光]) as well as Vajrapāṇi preserved in the Hokkedō and the clay Four Deva Kings preserved in the Kaidanin 戒壇院 as belonging to the group of the fourteen or eighteen images of the 764 *keka* of the Kichijō kekasho.<sup>106</sup>

Is it conceivable, one might wonder, that the Benzaiten image for which an altar, including a banner and other paraphernalia, was set up in 754 could also have been used ten years later for the well-documented Kichijō *keka* performed in the Kichijō kekasho of the same temple, using fourteen or eighteen Buddhist images, one of which was very likely a Benzaiten and quite possibly the one preserved in the Hokkedō? The Shōsōin document from 764 (Tenpyō Hōji 8, 3/27) does not tell us anything about these images; it simply lists the offerings to be made to them. The possibility, therefore, that the Benzaiten image for which an altar was set up in 754 was used in the 764 Kichijō *keka* in the Kichijō kekasho cannot be excluded. At the same time, it must be emphasized that this is simply a possibility.

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<sup>105</sup> Machida 1954, p.9.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.11.

which at this point cannot be verified owing to lack of evidence.

Although the 764 Kichijō *keka* used sculptures, the *Sandai jitsuroku* 三代實錄 records the painting of an image of Śrī (Kichijōten) for use in the *keka* performed in the *kokubunji* of Izumo on New Year's day of Jingo Keiun 神護景雲 2 (768).<sup>107</sup> The repentance ritual was held every year on New Year's day, and as the years passed, the painting faded. Consequently, the *Sandai jitsuroku* continues, in Jōgan 貞觀 13 (871) a wooden sculpture of 5 *shaku* (about 1.5 m in height) was made. We know nothing of the other images which might have been used in the *keka*. Strictly in the case of the Kichijōten image then, this record indicates that between 768 and 871 a painting rather than a sculpture of Kichijōten was used for the Kichijō *keka* in the *kokubunji* of Izumo.<sup>108</sup> As we have seen, Yijing's translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light* advocates the painting of the image of the Buddha with Śrī and Vaiśravaṇa, and Zunshi's repentance ritual text refers back to this passage in Yijing, singling out the painting of the image of Śrī. Although Zunshi (T. vol.46, no.1945, p.959a9) is too late (946-1032) to have been followed in Izumo in 768, the Izumo *kokubunji* image could well have been made in compliance with Yijing's specification of the use of the medium of painting (T. vol.16, no.665, p.431b13-15). Every *kokubunji*, it will be remembered, was linked above all with the *Sutra of Golden Light* in Yijing's translation, after which it was named, a copy of which it necessarily had, and the study and recitation of which was mandatory.

It is interesting that there is actually only one surviving Tenpyō-period painting of Śrī

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<sup>107</sup> *Sandai jitsuroku*, Genkei 元慶 1 (877), 8/22.

<sup>108</sup> Although Machida Kōichi (1984, pp.7-8) seems to think the production of Kichijōten paintings for the *keka* between 768 and 871 hence applied to all the *kokubunji*, the *Sandai jitsuroku* refers only to the Izumo *kokubunji*, and there is no evidence that I am aware of, of the use of such paintings in other *kokubunji*.

from the first half of the eighth century. It belongs to Yakushiji 薬師寺 in Nara.<sup>109</sup> Temple tradition has it that it was the main image of the Kichijō *keka* celebrated annually in the Hachimansha 八幡社. Although there are claims that the Kichijō *keka* was first observed in the shrine in Hōki 2 (771) or 3 (772),<sup>110</sup> the Hachimansha dates from the Kanpyō 寛平 era (889-897), and hence the repentance rite could not have been performed at the shrine before this time. Furthermore, according to Machida Kōichi, the painting as it has come down to us is too small (53.3 x 32 cm) to have been the principal image of an important ritual like the Kichijō *keka*. He suggests that the painting was originally on a larger canvas depicting, besides Śrī on the left, one or two other figures, perhaps Vaiśravaṇa (in the center) and Sarasvatī. It is more likely, however, as Yijing's text instructs (T. vol.16, no.665, p.431b16-17), that a Buddha image was in center (above), with Śrī on his left and Vaiśravaṇa on his right.<sup>111</sup> The Śrī painting, Machida explains, was cut off around the end of the eighth century and remounted independently. Because it was used in private worship (and hence not for the Kichijō *keka*), he concludes, the painting is not mentioned in any temple documents. It is presumed, however, that the image was moved to the Hachimansha at some time around 1450, where it was used as the main image of the Kichijō *keka*. The painting was kept in the shrine until the beginning of the Meiji era (1868-1912).

In 780, Hōki 宝龟 11, the *Saidaiji shi zai rukichō* 西大寺資財流記帳 records that among the sculptures of the Shiōdō 四王堂 (Four [Deva] Kings Hall) of the temple, there were also images of Śrī (Kichijōten) and Sarasvatī (Benzaiten), each measuring 3 *shaku*

<sup>109</sup> See Machida 1984.

<sup>110</sup> The relevant texts, are mentioned in Machida 1984, p.7 and quoted in his notes on pp.11-12.

<sup>111</sup> See p.209 above.

[ca. 90 cm] in height.<sup>112</sup> These images have not been preserved.

According to the *Kōfukuji ruki* 興福寺流記, furthermore, images of various figures from our sutra, including the Deva Kings, Sarasvatī (Dai Benzai tennyō 大辯才天女), and others were represented on the pillars of the Tōkondō 東金堂 (Eastern Golden Hall) according to the Kōnin 弘仁 Era (810-824) record.<sup>113</sup> It is not clear when these images were drawn on the pillars, but they are not mentioned in the Enryaku 延曆 Era (782-806) record. The Tōkondō was not specifically related to the *Sutra of Golden Light*, however, as indicated by the sculptures in the hall noted in the [Tenpyō] Hōji (757-765), Enryaku, and Kōnin records. The principal image of Bhaiṣajyaguru (Yakushi 藥師) is noted already in the Hōji record, while Maitreya (Miroku 彌勒), for instance, appears in the Enryaku record, and Vimalakīrti (Yuima 維摩) and Mañjuśrī (Monju 文殊) are mentioned in the Kōnin record in the *Kōfukuji ruki*.<sup>114</sup>

Hence, it would seem that most of the early images of Benzaiten were produced in direct connection with the *Sutra of Golden Light* and for its repentance ritual, upheld for the protection of the state. The form of these images will be addressed following a discussion of the contents of the chapter dedicated to the goddess in the sutra.

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<sup>112</sup> *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 118, p. 165a6-7.

<sup>113</sup> *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 123, p. 10b13.

<sup>114</sup> *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 123, p. 10a12-b10.

## 2. Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*

### Introduction

The Sarasvatī chapter in the extant Sanskrit, in Baogui's edition, and in Yijing's translation of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, can be divided into three sequential parts, each of which presents the goddess in a different aspect: in the first part Sarasvatī appears as a deity of eloquence; in the second she teaches a ritual herbal bath; and in the third she is invoked by the *brāhmaṇa* Kauṇḍinya as a battle goddess. It is to this threefold division that I shall resort in our discussion of the representation of Sarasvatī in the sutra. My intention in what follows is not to make a word for word, character for character, minute comparative analysis of the extant Sanskrit with the Chinese translations, which could be another dissertation in itself, but to point out the salient features in each of the three parts of the Sarasvatī chapter, and to identify the substantial differences between the Sanskrit and Chinese versions.

Dharmakṣema's version of the chapter, which consists of twelve lines, includes only the first of these three parts, and hence presents her as goddess of eloquence. As mentioned above, the Sanskrit text Dharmakṣema was working with represents an earlier form of the sutra than we find in Nobel's edition of the Sanskrit. Dharmakṣema's version, furthermore, is reproduced in Baogui's edition, and finds its closely corresponding passages in the extant Sanskrit and in Yijing's more developed version. Dharmakṣema, therefore, represents

the first part, sequentially and chronologically, of the chapter. Significantly, it is the only one of the three parts which is directly in line with Sarasvatī's Vedic background.

### a. Great Eloquence Deity

The Chinese translators call Sarasvatī “Great Eloquence Deity” (Da Biantianshen 大辯天神 in Dharmakṣema, Da Biantian 大辯天 in Baogui) and “Great Talent of Eloquence Goddess” (Da Biancai tiannü 大辯才天女 in Yijing). This is, accordingly, the name in slightly simplified form<sup>1</sup> by which Sarasvatī is most commonly known in Japan, pronounced Benten 辯天 and Benzaiten 辯才天,<sup>2</sup> respectively.

In Dharmakṣema's version, the chapter of the Great Eloquence Deity consists in her address to the Buddha. She who governs over eloquence promises to augment the preacher's eloquence (p.344c21-23):

爾時大辯天白佛言。世尊。是說法者。我當益其樂說辯才。  
令其所說莊嚴次第善得大智。

At this time, the Great Eloquence Deity said to the Buddha:  
“Venerable One, as to this Dharma expounder, I must augment his joy in expounding and talent in speech (eloquence) so as to make his exposition magnificent in order that [his audience] obtain, soon (and) well, great wisdom.”

As goddess of knowledge she assures the preacher's attainment of wisdom and recovery, if

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<sup>1</sup> Omitting the character for “great” 大, the additional character identifying her as a deity 神, and the one specifying her gender 女.

<sup>2</sup> The middle character 才 also appears as 財 (辯財天). The first character 辯 (more exceptionally 辯), it may be added, is often written, in Japan, in the Japanese abbreviated form 弁.



need be, of his memory, not only of the text, but also of its meaning by way of a *dhāraṇī*, which is not given here.

若其經中有失文字句義違錯。我能令是說法比丘次第還得。  
能與總持令不忘失。

If in [expounding] this sutra there are missing words or the meaning<sup>3</sup> [he gives] to the phrases is erroneous, I will be able to make the *bhikṣu* expounding this Dharma regain [them] soon and (I) will (be able) to give him a *dhāraṇī* (總持) which will prevent loss of memory.<sup>4</sup>

Sarasvatī's primary concern in the preservation of the text, therefore, is the preacher's speech: his ability to speak eloquently on the basis of faultless memory of the text down to the letter, as well as understanding of it. Loss of memory, which would impede correct and eloquent speech, is prevented by way of *dhāraṇī*, a charm. *Dhāraṇī* comes from the root *dhr* "to hold, bear, maintain." That which Sarasvatī gives the preacher "to hold" is at the same time that which will allow him to hold on to what he may have forgotten. He thereby preserves the sutra from extinction and thus benefits sentient beings (344c25-27).<sup>5</sup> Sarasvatī then promises specific benefits which she herself will cause to accrue to these beings:

當令是等悉得猛利不可思議大智慧聚不可稱量福德之報。善解無量種種方便。善能辯暢一切諸論。善知世間種種技術。能出生死得不退轉。必定疾得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。

[I] must make them all obtain keen, inconceivable great wisdom; gather an unnameable amount of lucky and meritorious retribution; understand well the incalculable kinds of expedient means; be

<sup>3</sup> The extant Sanskrit does not say anything about "the meaning."

<sup>4</sup> Dharmakṣema, p.344c22-25.

<sup>5</sup> 若有衆生於百千佛所種諸善根。是說法者為是等故。於閻淨提廣宣流布是妙經典令不斷絕。

well capable of examining and penetrating all theories; know well the various arts of the world; be able to come out of (the cycle of) birth-and-death and attain the irreversible [stage] (*avaivartika*); certainly and quickly attain *anuttara samyak sambodhi* (highest perfect awakening).<sup>6</sup>

As the Great Eloquence Deity, Sarasvati will give them eloquence. As goddess of knowledge, she will endow them with worldly knowledge, spiritual wisdom, and the ultimate state of awakening resulting from the latter.

## **b. Instructions for the Ritual Medicinal Bath**

### **i. Introducing the Bath**

In the extant Sanskrit, in Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta's translation, and in Yijing's version, Sarasvatī continues her address to the Buddha, now turning to the mantric medicinal bath (*mantrauṣadhisamyuktam snānakarma*, 呪藥洗浴法).<sup>7</sup> In a clearly inserted sentence, she suddenly announces she will explain the bath, and then continues, as in Dharmakṣema, to list the benefits that she will provide. In Yijing the inserted sentence is more neatly tied in with what follows, for the subsequent list of benefits is intended "for one who performs [the bathing ritual]" (p.434c10 彼人所有). The benefits are no longer limited to the realms of eloquence, knowledge, and enlightenment—all of which are connected with Sarasvatī—but now extend into the practical, concrete matters of this world: calamities, epidemics, diseases.

<sup>6</sup> Dharmakṣema, p.344c27-345a3. The extant Sanskrit does not include, amidst the list of benefits, coming out of (the cycle of) birth-and-death and attaining *avaivartika* and *anuttara samyak sambodhi*.

<sup>7</sup> Sanskrit, p.104, line 1; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.386c6; Yijing, p.434c9-10.

birth and death; slander, quarrel, bureaucratic quarrels; bad dreams, supernatural obstacles, and mantric spells.<sup>8</sup>

In the extant Sanskrit, following the enumeration of benefits, Sarasvatī immediately, and once again abruptly, begins giving instructions for the bathing ritual (Sanskrit, p.104, lines 5ff.). In Baogui, on the other hand, an intervening passage functions as an introduction to the ritual instructions, connecting the sutra with the rite (p.386c11-12):

是諸衆生若有聽受是經法者。應當誦持此呪。呪藥作湯洗浴其身。是故我說呪藥之法

If some sentient beings hear this sutra and its rite, they should always recite and hold these mantras and bathe their bodies in the mantric medicinal bath. Therefore I will explain the mantric medicinal rite.

Being, in Baogui, connected with the sutra, the mantric medicinal bath must therefore now be explained. In Yijing, this correlation is not made, but Sarasvatī instructs “those who know” to perform the rite: 諸有智者。應作如是洗浴之法。(p.434c13).

If we compare the bathing ritual instructions as found in the Sanskrit (pp.104-107) and the two Chinese translations (Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, pp.386c13-387a23; Yijing, pp.434c13-435c5), the Sanskrit version is the most brief, while Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta have additional clarifications and details (although also omitting a couple of details found in the Sanskrit), and Yijing is certainly the most extensive. The increase in the number of details given from the Sanskrit to Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta to Yijing is an indication of the growth of

<sup>8</sup> Sanskrit, p.104 *sarvagrahanakṣatrajanmamaranapīḍā kalikalahakaluṣaḍimbaḍāmaraduḥsvapnavināyakapīḍāḥ sarvakākhordavetāḍāḥ praśamaṃ yāsyanti* ; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.386c8-10 為是人等能除一切惡星災怪。除其疫氣疾病生死之苦。惡口鬪靜縣官口舌。夜臥惡夢惡神障難。厭蠱呪咀一切惡障悉得除滅。; Yijing, p.434c10-13 彼人所有惡星災變與初生時星屬相違。疫病之苦鬪靜戰陣。惡夢鬼神蠱毒厭魅呪術起屍。如是諸惡為障難者。悉令除滅。

the text, and that the extant Sanskrit is quite possibly earlier than the Chinese translation of Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta.<sup>9</sup> Although the bathing ritual is interesting in itself, the details of its performance do not add to our knowledge of the conceptualization of Sarasvatī, and I will therefore limit myself to a description of it (without quoting the original text), noting the differences between the three versions.

## ii. Instructions for the Bath

Sarasvatī begins her instructions by listing the herbs to be gathered for the bath: twenty-five of them in Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta (p.386c13-17), thirty in the extant Sanskrit (p.104, line 6 - p.105, line 3), and thirty-two in Yijing (p.435a1-8). They are to be gathered, pounded and sieved on the day when the sun and the stars meet according to Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta (p.386c18), when Puṣya is in the asterism according to the extant Sanskrit (p.105, line 4) and Yijing (p.435a9), while a *dhāraṇī* is recited one hundred (Sanskrit, p.105, line 5) or one hundred and eight (Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.386c19; Yijing, p.435a10) times. The earth is smeared with cow-dung to delimit the ritual space (Sanskrit, p.105, line 9; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.386c25; Yijing, p.435a18), which according to Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta should be seven cubits in width and length (p.386c25), and according to Yijing eight cubits (p.435a18). Flowers are scattered, and gold and silver bowls are filled with honey and tasty drinks (Sanskrit, p.105, lines 9-10; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.386c25-27; Yijing, p.435a20-21). Four men in armour are stationed within the altar space (Sanskrit,

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<sup>9</sup> Although the number of medicinal herbs to be used for the bath in the Sanskrit is greater than in Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta.

p.106, line 1), one hidden in each corner according to Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta (p.386c27-28), a guardian at each gate according to Yijing (p.435a22). Four maidens carrying pots (Sanskrit, p.106, line 2) or flower vases (Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, pp.386c29-387a1), or four boys with water pots (Yijing, p.435a23) are placed, one in each corner according to Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta and Yijing. Incense is scattered, music is played, and banners, flags, and canopies are hung (Sanskrit, p.106, lines 3-4; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.387a1-2; Yijing, p.435a24-25). According to the Sanskrit (p.106, line 5) and Yijing (p.435a26), mirrors, arrows, and spears are placed in the altar space. In the Sanskrit (p.106, line 6 - p.107, line 3), the individual makes the boundary-line, recites a *dhāraṇī*, and bathes behind (the image of) the Buddha, while reciting a *dhāraṇī* and a request for protection. In Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta (p.387a2-23), vessels filled with aromatic liquid are placed in the center of the altar, where the individual bathes: he recites a *dhāraṇī* for binding the ritual space (twenty-four times), another for his body (one hundred and eight times), and while bathing, another one for the hot bath water (one hundred and eight times), and requests protection. In Yijing (p.435a27-b16), a large platter is buried in the center of the altar and a “leaking plank” is placed over it. Hot water is added to the previously prepared medicinal herb powder and placed on the altar. The individual recites the *dhāraṇī* for binding the altar space, enters it, consecrates the water (three times seven [3 x 7] times), and recites another *dhāraṇī* for the fragrant water (one hundred and eight times). Having placed a curtain on all four sides, he bathes. The bath water and the food and drinks offered are thrown into a river or a pond. He puts on purified clothing and enters a pure room. The *dhāraṇī* master teaches him to express the great vow.

In Yijing, the goddess states the purpose of the bath (p.435b17-22):

若有病苦諸衆生 種種方藥治不差  
若依如是洗浴法 并復讀誦琪經典  
常於日夜念不散 專想愍生信心

所有患苦盡消除 解脫貧窮足財寶  
四方星辰及日月 威神擁護得延年  
吉祥安隱福德增 災變厄難皆除遣

When illness torments sentient beings,  
and the various medicinal treatments are ineffective,  
If they resort to this method of bathing,  
and also to recitation of this text,  
Constantly, day and the night, concentrate,  
think exclusively of kindness, and produce a believing mind.

The distresses will disappear completely,  
they will be delivered from dire misery,  
and will be supplied with wealth.  
The constellations of the four directions and the sun and moon  
will protect [them] with their supernatural power,  
and [they] will attain longevity.  
Good luck, tranquillity, and good fortune will increase,  
and calamities and perils will all be removed.

Hence a clear connection is made here between the bath and the healing of illness, although the results extend beyond mere healing. In *Yijing* (p.435b23-c5), Sarasvatī adds one instruction: recitation of a *dhāraṇī* for the protection of the body (three times seven [3 x 7] times).

In the Sanskrit (p.107, lines 4-12) and in Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta (p.387a24-b5), Sarasvatī promises to come to the bathing ritual, and to remove all diseases and oppressions so that those who uphold the sutra can attain enlightenment. In *Yijing* (p.435c10-11), she promises to come to the dwelling of the upholders of the sutra. The Buddha then praises Sarasvatī—not for providing eloquence and knowledge, over which she governs—but for benefiting all

sentient beings by speaking about *dhāraṇīs* and medicaments. The extant Sanskrit reads:

*sādhu sādhu sarasvati mahādevi / bahujanahitāya  
tvam pratipannā bahujanasukhāya yat tvayedṛśān  
mantrauśadhisamṃyuktāni padāni bhāṣitāni //*

Bravo! bravo! great goddess Sarasvati! You have come for the welfare of many men, for the blessing of many men, since you have spoken such words concerning spells and medicaments.<sup>10</sup>

In Yijing (p.436a1) the Buddha concludes:

汝當擁護最勝經王。勿令隱沒常得流通。

You should protect this highest king of sutras (i.e. the *Sutra of Golden Light*) so that it will not disappear and can constantly be propagated.

### iii. Sarasvatī and the Bath

The obvious question here, more relevant than the ritual itself for this study, is why Sarasvatī teaches a ritual medicinal bath? Her knowledge of medicinal matters necessarily calls back to mind her healing of Indra in the *Yajur Veda*, likewise in a ritual context.<sup>11</sup> While in the *Yajur Veda* she gave rebirth to Indra, here the medicinal bath is intended to lead to the highest perfect awakening. There is, however, no indication here that whoever added the bathing ritual to this chapter knew of Sarasvatī's role in the *Sautrāmaṇī*. Nevertheless, the author would certainly have been aware of her river-goddess aspect, and

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<sup>10</sup> Sanskrit, p.107, lines 14-15. Translation by Emmerick in 1996, p.47. Cf. Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.387b6-9; Yijing, p.435c16-18.

<sup>11</sup> See above pp.47ff.

hence of the appropriateness of a water-related deity teaching a water-centred ritual.

## Medicine

In terms of medicinal matters, it is clear that behind this ritual bath lies a long tradition of Vedic medicine. Reaching even further back, bathing as such seems to have been rather important from pre-Vedic times, as the Great Bath found in Mohenjo-Daro indicates. Although concern for public health and sanitation were certainly an issue at the time, the Great Bath, like a tank in a Hindu temple, most probably had purificatory, and hence religious, functions.<sup>12</sup>

Later, in Vedic medicine, we do not find evidence of a medicinal bath, but we do find the different elements of the bath: water, medicinal herbs, recitation of mantras, and auspicious timing. In the *Rg Veda*, as we have seen, all remedies are said to dwell within the waters (10:9:6ab *apsú me sómo abravīd antár viśvāni bheṣajā /* ).<sup>13</sup> Reverence for the medicinal plant, as Kenneth G. Zysk explains,<sup>14</sup> is evident in Vedic medicine. In this magico-religious system, diseases were believed to occur when malevolent forces entered the body, and were then healed through an elaborate ritual, wherein the healer (*bhiṣaj*), who it would seem had knowledge of the preparation of medicines (in the form of water and pounded herbs),<sup>15</sup> recited incantations to draw out the malevolent forces. Astrology

<sup>12</sup> On the Great Bath, see Marshall 1931, vol.1, pp.24-26 (Sir John Marshall), pp. 131-143 (Ernest Mackay); Ernest Mackay et al. 1938, p.20, for instance. Marshall does not mention anything about the religious/purificatory function of the bath, but Mackay addresses the subject (Marshall 1931, vol.1, p.142; Mackay 1938, p.20).

<sup>13</sup> See p. 16 above. For further references see Zysk 1993, p.90, note 6.

<sup>14</sup> 1993, pp.3, 9, 96-102.

<sup>15</sup> Most Vedic remedies were either of a watery nature or of vegetal origin. See Zysk 1993, p.90.



played a significant part in these rituals, which were performed at auspicious times.<sup>16</sup> Although Vedic medicine was superseded by *āyurveda*, based on keeping the humours of the body (wind, bile, and phlegm) in a state of equilibrium and limiting the use of mantras to the treatment of certain ailments and the collection and preparation of certain medicines.<sup>17</sup> the belief in the efficacy—in the widest possible sense—of the combination of herbs and mantras persisted.

In connection with mantras and herbs, Nobel<sup>18</sup> points to a passage in the *Harivaṃśa* (Calcutta ed., 3218-3219)<sup>19</sup> which deals with the means of overcoming fate:

*śrūyatām yena daivam hi madvidhaiḥ pratihanyate //*

*mantragrāmaiḥ suvihitair auśadhaiś ca suyojitaiḥ /  
yatnena cānukūlena daivam apy anulomyate //*

Let it be heard whereby, with my help, fate can be mastered.

By way of well-executed mantras and well-administered herbs,  
by effort and blessing, fate can also be controlled.

In its application of wider efficacy to the combination of mantras and herbs, this passage is comparable to the ritual medicinal bath taught by Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. A herbal bath, however, is not mentioned here. In fact, herbal baths within a ritual context are, to say the least, hard to come by. Nobel was unable to find a precedent for this ritual and therefore quoted the *Harivaṃśa*. Although I too have been unsuccessful in finding a

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<sup>16</sup> Zysk 1993, pp.7-10.

<sup>17</sup> Zysk 1993, pp.1, 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> 1951, p.127.

<sup>19</sup> Corresponds, in the critical edition, to 47:3:6cd-7.

matching or closely related ritual, it is clear, as I have suggested above, that the different elements of the herbal bath can all be found in the Vedic magico-religious system of medicine.

Within the *Sutra of Golden Light*, it should be noted, there is another medically-related chapter (ch.16 in the extant Sanskrit; ch.15 in Dharmakṣema; ch.20 in Baogui.; ch.24 in Yijing) dealing with the healing of illnesses: Jalavāhana, son of the merchant Jaṭimdhara who is also “a doctor, a medical man, expert in the chief elements... fully versed in the eightfold treatise on medicine,”<sup>20</sup> is instructed by his father and heals all beings in the land of King Sureśvaraprabha. The context of this chapter, however, is not ritual. Furthermore, there is no mention whatsoever of medicinal baths.

### *Abhiṣeka*

Another avenue that might be pursued here is the possibility of an initiatory, empowerment ritual akin to or analogous with the *abhiṣeka*, consisting of anointing. This tantric ritual is derived from the elaborate Vedic royal consecration ceremony (Rājasūya), which symbolized, as J.C. Heesterman explains in his study of 1957, the cosmic process of birth - disintegration - rebirth through the person of the king as the cosmic man Prajāpati (p.122).<sup>21</sup> It is the water in the anointing (*abhiṣeka*), representative of primordial waters,

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<sup>20</sup> The elements here are the fundamental parts of the body, reinterpreted by Dharmakṣema and Yijing, however, as the *mahābhūtas* (earth, water, fire, and wind). For a list of the bodily elements and the eight branches of medicine, see Emmerick 1996, p.76, notes 150-151.

<sup>21</sup> All page references in this paragraph are to Heesterman's detailed study of the ancient Indian royal consecration (1957). See also Weber 1893. The Vedic *rājasūya*, it should be noted, was not a royal consecration to be performed once and for all. In fact, as Heesterman explains, originally it seems to have been a yearly ritual, comparable to annual festivals “by means of which the powers active in the universe are regenerated”

that brings about death and rebirth, disintegration and regeneration (p. 119). In the preparation of the consecration fluid, sixteen or seventeen different kinds of water, including that of the river Sarasvatī, are poured together into a vessel, purified, and then distributed into four cups (pp.79-85), using which four officiants standing in the cardinal points around the sacrificer-king consecrate him (p.114). A final, purificatory bath follows the consecration rite, at which time the remains of the sacrifice (pressed out soma plants, antelope skin, and garments) are disposed of in the water (pp.167-170). The regenerative nature of the ritual is further emphasized by the performance of the likewise regenerative Sautrāmaṇi at the end of the Rājasūya. The medieval royal consecration, it may be added, involved also a “bath with (various types of) earth” (*mṛttikasnāna*).<sup>22</sup>

The royal conception of the Buddha was discussed by Paul Mus in 1933.<sup>23</sup> where he compared the royal *abhiṣeka* to the bathing of the Buddha at birth: “deux nāga dans les sources anciennes, sept ou neuf par la suite, vomissent sur lui des torrents d’eaux célestes, chaudes et froides, se réunissant en un mélange agréable.”<sup>24</sup> I would emphasize here that, as in the case of our ritual bath, the Buddha is bathed rather than sprinkled.

*Abhiṣeka*, furthermore, consecrates the tenth and final stage of the bodhisattva’s career. In the Tantric traditions, the *abhiṣeka* functions as an initiation or empowerment by aspersion. It takes place within a delimited sacred space (in the Tantras called *cakra* or *mandala*), as the teacher sprinkles the student while reciting a mantra.<sup>25</sup> Buddhist *abhiṣeka* (pp.6-7, 222).

<sup>22</sup> Witzel 1987, pp.446-448.

<sup>23</sup> Mus 1933, pp.822-838.

<sup>24</sup> Mus 1933, p.825. Although Mus does not use the term “bathing,” this is clearly what is taking place.

<sup>25</sup> For Hindu tantric practice of the *abhiṣeka*, see Dirk Jan Hoens in Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan 1979, p.88. Although Hoens refers to a sixteenth or seventeenth century Hindu Tantra (*Tantrarājatāntra*), the

was likewise practised in China. According to Michel Strickmann, in surviving Buddhist literature, the earliest extant reference to *abhiṣeka* “as a concrete rite, performed by mortals rather than buddhas,” appears in the mid-fifth-century *Book of Consecration* (*Guanding jing* 灌頂經, T. vol.21, no.1331).<sup>26</sup>

The possible connection between our ritual, medicinal bath, as prescribed by Sarasvatī, and *abhiṣeka* in any context is obviously distant at best, for bathing is not sprinkling. At best we can point to the bath with different types of earth (*mṛttikasnāna*) of the medieval coronation ritual, but that too is not a herbal bath. There are, however, points in common between the *abhiṣeka* and our ritual bath, the use of water above all. Just as *abhiṣeka* is the central element in the elaborate Rājasūya, bathing is the central practice in the ritual bath. As sixteen or seventeen different kinds of water are gathered for the royal *abhiṣeka*, our bath requires the collection of a considerable number of different herbs. The end product, furthermore, is a kind of rebirth: in the case of the king, a rejuvenation of creation; and in our ritual herbal bath, the attainment of *anuttara samyak sambodhi*, preceded by the removal of every sort of obstacles.

Our herbal bath clearly deserves an entire study to itself, to which I am unable to do justice here. I have, therefore, simply presented some ideas as to its background, which, at some point, I would like to pursue further. As far as I am able to see, the connecting factors are the river goddess who knows medicine which is water-based, and the initiation rite involving water.

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tantric *abhiṣeka* in its basic elements was certainly performed in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist contexts long before this time. As we shall see, it was practised in China in a Buddhist context already in the fifth century.)

<sup>26</sup> Strickmann 1990, p.85.

### c. Eight-armed Battle Goddess

Following Sarasvatī's explanation of the ritual medicinal bath and the Buddha's words of approval, the *brāhmaṇa* Kauṇḍinya praises the goddess at length. While some of the praise is directed to Sarasvatī, the Great Eloquence Deity governing memory and knowledge, as we know her, other parts of the praise, especially in Yijing's far more elaborate version, do not correspond to her description in the Vedas, epics, or Purāṇas, but rather point to Pārvatī or Durgā, as we shall see.

Kauṇḍinya describes Sarasvatī as dwelling in the mountains, wearing grass garments, and standing on one leg (Sanskrit, p.108, lines 7-8; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.387b13-14; Yijing, p.436a7-8 ).<sup>27</sup> This depiction fits Śiva's consort Pārvatī, the daughter of the Mountain (Himavat), who, in order to win Śiva, the ultimate ascetic who dwells on Mt. Kailāsa absorbed in meditation, engaged in lengthy ascetic practices, including also standing on one leg.

The gods ask Sarasvatī to speak auspicious words (*vacanam śubham*; 善言).<sup>28</sup> In response, she teaches a partly intelligible *dhāraṇī* invocation (Sanskrit, p.108, line 11 - p.109, line 12; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.387b18-c9; Yijing, p.436a11-b7). While now, in the Sanskrit and Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, Kauṇḍinya launches back into the praise of the goddess, in Yijing (p.436b12-437a1), instead, Sarasvatī teaches yet another rite, wherein the *dhāraṇī* she has just taught should be recited in a quiet place. Yijing's Sarasvatī gives

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<sup>27</sup> These passages are quoted below on pp.255ff.

<sup>28</sup> Sanskrit, p.108, lines 9-10; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.387b15-17. In Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, they also request her to bestow wisdom, eloquence, and understanding. In Yijing (p.436a9-10) they beseech her to grant all with her wonderful words (妙言).

further directions for contemplation and concentration, instructing the individual to sit before an image of the Buddha. She interrupts for a moment her instructions to praise the mouth and tongue of the Buddha, and lists benefits to be attained by one who worships her and one who follows the teaching of his master. Sarasvatī then turns back to her instructions for the rite, specifying the purity of place and clothing, and how the altar should be adorned. Offerings are to be made to the Buddha and to her in order to behold their form. The practitioner is to recite the *dhāraṇī* for three times seven (3 x 7) days, facing Sarasvatī. If he fails to see the goddess he should continue for nine days. If that too fails, he should look for another place to practise and there draw an image of Sarasvatī, make offerings, and recite the *dhāraṇī* day and night. If yet again he does not succeed, he should keep asking to see the goddess for three months, six months, nine months, or a year. Then he will attain the divine eye and have all his wishes fulfilled.

We have here, then, a *dhāraṇī* -recitation rite wherein an image of Sarasvatī is used and wherein the practitioner tries to have a vision of the goddess. Although the individual is told to draw her image according to prescriptions (p.436c17 如法應畫辯才天), no directions are given, nor is the form of the goddess specified.

Only now, in Yijing's version, does Kauṇḍinya recommence his praise of the goddess. In the Sanskrit (p.110, line 3 - p.111, line 14) and in Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta (p.387c11-388a1), the *brāhmaṇa* describes her beauty, her superiority amongst beings, her knowledge, memory, and speech. She is then asked to protect Kauṇḍinya amidst enemies in the Sanskrit (*nityam ca rakṣatu mām śatrumadhye //*)—although he is not a warrior—and in places of fear in Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta (於怖畏處恆防護).<sup>29</sup> A combative goddess now begins to surface.

<sup>29</sup> Sanskrit, p.111, line 18; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta, p.388a3.

She is described as eight-armed:

Sanskrit text:

*stoṣyāmi tām... śimhottamāya naravāhanāya /  
aṣṭābhir bāhubhir alamkṛtāya.*

I will praise her... because she is the best of lionesses, because she is a vehicle for men, because she is adorned with eight arms.<sup>30</sup>

Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta translation:

乘師子上現人形 體有八臂莊嚴身

Superior like the excelling lion, she manifests a human form.  
As to the physique, she has an eight-armed adorned body.<sup>31</sup>

Yijing's translation, which lists the implements she carries:

猶如師子獸中上 常以八臂自莊嚴  
各持弓箭刀槩斧 長杵鐵輪繩索

And she is superior like the lion among beasts,  
always adorned with eight arms,  
Each holding bow, arrow, sword, long-handled spear, axe

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<sup>30</sup> Sanskrit, p.110, line 11... p.111, lines 6-7; translation by Emmerick 1996, pp.48-49. Some manuscripts read *siddhottamāya* (p.111, note 8) instead of *śimhottamāya*, which would make her "the best of *siddhas*," semi-divine beings endowed with supernatural faculties or sages. Clearly, the Sanskrit text used by Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta must have had *śimha* and not *siddha*, for they translate it as *shizi* 師子.

<sup>31</sup> p.387c25. The translation of the first verse is not evident and the normal reading at first glance should be "Mounted on a lion, she manifests a human form." However, the corresponding passage in the extant Sanskrit requires one to take into consideration the possibility of the above meaning—to which one would not usually resort—given that the character 乘 means not only "to mount," but also "excelling." As for the second verse, another possible translation of 體有八臂莊嚴身 is "(Her) physique has an eight-armed majestic body," where "majestic" 莊嚴 would explain the comparison of the goddess with the lion in the first part of the passage. I have given preference to "adorned" for 莊嚴 in light of the corresponding passage in the extant Sanskrit, which reads *alamkṛta* "adorned."

long vajra, iron wheel, and lasso.<sup>32</sup>

And this is the textual basis for the eight-armed form of the Chinese Biancaitian and the Japanese Benzaiten. There are no Indian images matching this description. Although Chinese examples of this form are very few indeed, Japanese images ranging from the eighth century to the present exist in considerable numbers. Before proceeding, then, with the remaining contents of the Sarasvatī chapter in Yijing's text, let us turn to some of these early images and compare them with the above description of the eight-armed weapon-bearing goddess found in Yijing. The remainder of his version of the Sarasvatī chapter will be discussed in the context of other such hymns in a subsequent section, for it requires an extensive explanation of its own, involving both textual and art historical material, in which it will be necessary to refer to these images of eight-armed Biancaitian/Benzaiten.

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<sup>32</sup> p.437c1-2. Nobel, in his German translation (1958a, p.257), calls the thunderbolt (vajra, *chu* 杵) a club ("Keule").



## V. CHINESE AND JAPANESE IMAGES OF SARASVATĪ

### 1. Eight-armed Form

#### a. Chinese and Japanese Images

The earliest surviving Japanese image of eight-armed Benzaiten (fig.24) dates from the early eighth century. It is the large (ht. 219 cm), severely damaged clay sculpture<sup>1</sup> preserved in the Hokkedō of Tōdaiji mentioned earlier.<sup>2</sup> Although it was probably made according to the specifications in Yijing, since part of her arms and all of her implements have been lost, this cannot be verified.

In China, there are very few surviving images of Biancaitian. An eight-armed representation of the goddess (fig.25A) appears in a small tenth-century Chinese painting on paper (27 x 43 cm) from Dunhuang, preserved at the Musée Guimet in Paris (Pelliot Collection). The painting depicts the Buddha Śākyamuni (Shijia 釈迦) preaching amidst divinities of the *Sutra of Golden Light*: Vaiśravaṇa (Pishamentian) standing on the earth goddess,<sup>3</sup> with two attendants, appears to the Buddha's right, while Biancaitian and

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<sup>1</sup> Hōbōgirin 1929 (fasc.1), "Benzaiten," p.65 mistakenly calls it a wooden statue.

<sup>2</sup> See p.221 above. The construction of the image is discussed in Nishikawa 1968, pp.42-45. The image was painted: the skin was red and it would seem that her clothing was white-green. There was also some cut gold. Colour was added in the mid-Heian period and at other, unknown times.

<sup>3</sup> Vaiśravaṇa is the only one of the Four Deva Kings who is worshipped and depicted independently of the three others. The form of Vaiśravaṇa standing on the earth goddess (Jap. Tobatsu Bishamonten 兜跋)

presumably Śrī (Jixiangtian) are to his left. Biancaitian (fig.25B) is depicted with three heads and eight arms carrying weapons. The objects in her two top arms are the trident in her right and the vajra in her left. In her other right arms she holds the sword, the arrow and the lasso, and, in her other left arms, the bow (being strung with the arrow) and the wheel (forming a pair with the lasso). The remaining left hands forms a *mudrā* (hand extended with palm out, third and fourth finger bent;<sup>4</sup> forming a pair with the sword).

This representation of the goddess is clearly not a perfect match with Yijing, for, apart from the fact that Biancaitian is three-headed here (a characteristic not to be found in Yijing),<sup>5</sup> instead of the long-handled spear she carries what seems to be a short-handled trident,<sup>6</sup> and instead of the axe she forms a *mudrā*. Although the Dunhuang painting is undoubtedly related to the *Sutra of Golden Light*, given that the figures represented all appear in the sutra, it may not be based either on Yijing's version, on the text Yijing was working from, or on the *chanfa* descriptions we have seen (one in the *Guoqing bailu* and one by Zunshi). In Yijing's translation, as we have seen, a painting is to be made with Vaiśravaṇa on the Buddha's right and Śrī on his left (p.431b16-17). The arrangement of the figures in the Dunhuang painting preserved in the Musée Guimet corresponds to this description in Yijing, with the addition of eight-armed Biancaitian on the Buddha's left.

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毘沙門天), with only the upper half of her body visible, seems to come from Khotan, where he was widely worshipped. On Tobatsu Bishamonten, see Hōbōgin 1929, "Bishamon," pp.81-83 and Granoff 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolas-Vandier 1974, vol.14, p.18. Explanations of this drawing appear in Nicolas-Vandier 1974, vol.14, plate 8, pp.18-19 and in Jarrige and Akiyama 1995, vol.2, pp.328-329. Nicolas-Vandier hesitantly identified the object in the goddess' top left hand as "le sceptre (?)" (p.18), but as the more complete illustration (5 mm extra on all sides, so that one can see more of the drawing) in Jarrige and Akiyama 1995 shows, it is indeed a vajra.

<sup>5</sup> The multiplication of limbs and heads is not an uncommon feature in tantric iconography, as we see, for instance, in images of the eleven-headed and thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara. The specific source for this three-headed Biancaitian, however, is less clear.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. early Kuṣāṇa image of Durgā with short-handled trident discussed on p.263 below.

According to the *chanfa* descriptions of the *Guoqing bailu* and of Zunshi, Biancaitian is to appear, together with the Four Deva Kings, on the Buddha's right (and not on his left as in the Dunhuang painting).

There is also a ninth- to tenth-century ink sketch (ht. 29.7 cm x w. 43 cm) of the eight-armed goddess (fig.26) from Dunhuang preserved at the British Museum (Stein Collection). Three-headed Biancaitian is seated, carrying trident and bow in her right upper arms, an arrow in her two central arms, an axe and sword in her upper left, and a lasso in her lower left. Her lower right forms a *mudrā*. The sketch is labelled Da Bian tiannü 大辯天女 (Great Eloquence Goddess) and numbered.

If we compare this sketch with Yijing's description, again we do not have a perfect match, for the goddess forms a *mudrā* with her lower right hand, the same *mudrā* as in the Musée Guimet painting, and does not carry vajra and wheel. In comparison with the previous painting, she is also three-headed, and carries largely the same implements. She does not, however, carry a wheel, and instead of the vajra, she has an axe.

A Japanese eight-armed weapon-bearing Benzaiten is painted on the back wall of a miniature shrine (*zushie* 厨子絵) (fig.27) for a Śrī (Kichijōten) sculpture from Jōruriji 浄瑠璃寺 near Nara. Both the sculpture and its shrine belong to the early Kamakura period.<sup>7</sup> While the sculpture of Śrī remains at the temple, her shrine was removed in the Meiji period and is now in the possession of the Tokyo University of Arts (Tōkyō geijutsu daigaku 東京芸術大学). Eight-armed Benzaiten appears in the center of the *zushie* (painted

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<sup>7</sup> Hōbōgirin 1929, plate VIII, facing p.64 (following S. Ōmura, *Zuzōshūko*, VI) mistakenly assigns the Benzaiten *zushie* to the eighth century, an error which is repeated in Nobel 1958, p.257, note 6. As explained by Nedachi (1992, p.46 and descriptions below figs.5 [Kichijōten sculpture] and 19 [Benzaiten *zushie*]), however, both the sculpture and the shrine paintings are from about 1212.

wood; 103.5 x 62.7 cm) surrounded by Mother Hārītī (Kariteimo) on her bottom right, Dṛḍhā Pṛthivī (Kenrōchijin) on her bottom left, and the great generals Sañci (Shōryōchi) and Mañibhadra (Hōken) above. In this painting we have a perfect match with Yijing's description, for Benzaiten holds the implements specified in the text: the arrow, the sword, the axe, and the iron wheel in her right arms, and the bow, the vajra, the particularly long-handled spear, and the lasso in her left. She and all the figures surrounding her on the back wall of the shrine, those depicted on the other walls and doors, including Brahmā (Bonten), Indra (Taishakuten), and the Four Deva Kings (Shitennō), and the sculpture of Śrī are defenders of the Dharma in the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

## **b. Identity of the Eight-armed Goddess**

This eight-armed Benzaiten, as noted above, has no analogous form as Sarasvatī in India.<sup>8</sup> An exclusively weapon-bearing figure, furthermore, is out of character for Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge, as she appears in Indian textual sources. The only Indian text in which a combative aspect of Sarasvatī emerges is the *Rg Veda*, where the powerful river goddess is invoked to conquer enemies and compared to Indra.<sup>9</sup> This aspect, however, does not re-surface in subsequent Vedic, epic, or early Puranic texts, where, as we have seen,

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<sup>8</sup> The twelfth century onwards, primarily South Indian sculptures of Sarasvatī, including the dancing form, which depict her holding, in addition to her other attributes, weapons such as the stick and the noose, are considerably later and entirely unrelated to the eight-armed Benzaiten form. In these images, Sarasvatī does not hold exclusively weapons, like our Benzaiten, and she is immediately identifiable by her characteristic manuscript, appropriate to the goddess of knowledge, her *vinā*, and her mount the *hamsa*—again quite unlike our Benzaiten. See, for example, the sculpture in the Lakṣmī-Narasimha Temple of Hosaholalu, Mandya, Karnataka (K. Bhattacharyya 1983, plate 32) and the sculpture from Halebid, now in the Indian Museum in Calcutta (K. Bhattacharyya 1983, plate 20).

<sup>9</sup> See pp. 15, 51ff. above.

Sarasvatī is transformed into a benevolent goddess of knowledge. Would the *Sutra of Golden Light*, in the extant Sanskrit and in the versions represented by the Chinese translations of Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta and Yijing—over two thousand years removed in time from the *Rg Veda*—have drawn on an aspect of the goddess which amongst the Hindus had been left behind, seemingly forgotten? Would the Buddhists have been studying the *Rg Veda* and its complex language so closely? Given that, in the first part of the Sarasvatī chapter of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, she is, just as in post-*Rg Veda* Vedic, epic, or early Puranic texts, represented as goddess of eloquence and knowledge, and that no sign of a combative attitude can be detected in her in either the first or the second part of the chapter, I do not think it is likely that Kauṇḍinya’s praise of Sarasvatī draws on the combative aspect of the river goddess as depicted in the *Rg Veda*.

Where, then, does this eight-armed, weapon-bearing goddess come from? Is it really Sarasvatī? As we saw at the beginning of Kauṇḍinya’s praise of the goddess, his description of her dwelling in the mountains, her grass clothing, and her ascetic practice of standing on one leg points to Pārvatī, rather than Sarasvatī. Pārvatī, however, is not a battle goddess. The identity of this eight-armed battle goddess is revealed, as we shall see, in a part of Yijing’s version of Kauṇḍinya’s praise which does not appear either in the extant Sanskrit or in Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta’s Chinese translation: we have, on p.437a6-25 of Yijing’s text, the Chinese translation of a part of a hymn from the *Harivaṃśa* to the demon-killing, weapon-bearing battle goddess Durgā!

The appearance of the *Harivaṃśa* hymn in Yijing has been noted previously: it is mentioned in the *Hōbōgirin* encyclopedic dictionary of Buddhism,<sup>10</sup> which does not specify

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<sup>10</sup> Hōbōgirin 1929, p.64.

which hymn of the *Harivaṃśa* it refers to, and quoted in Nobel's translation of *Yijing*.<sup>11</sup> Neither of these sources, however, seems to have realized that the goddess invoked in the *Harivaṃśa* is actually Durgā. The *Hōbōgin* tells us that "Benzaiten y est identifiée à la déesse Nārāyaṇī, épouse de Viṣṇu..." and then lists her manifestations—in the plural.<sup>12</sup> Her particular manifestation or incarnation described in the *Harivaṃśa*, however, is only one, as we shall see. And she who is given so many different names is not, ultimately, Nārāyaṇī.

Nobel, who is familiar with the *Hōbōgin*, likewise considers this to be a hymn to Nārāyaṇī. The goddess, he explains, is praised under many different names and is identified with other goddesses, such as the consorts of Śiva (including Durgā) and Indra, and also with Sarasvatī, in support of which he refers to passages in the *Harivaṃśa*. The term "Nārāyaṇī," he continues, is relatively rare in Sanskrit texts and often has a folk element to it. Nobel then draws attention to a hymn from the island of Bali, which shows similarity with the *Harivaṃśa* hymn. It is dedicated to Indrāṇī, who is invoked under numerous different names. In the *Harivaṃśa* hymn, he also notes the coexistence of brahmanical and folk elements, particularly in the invocation of the tutelary goddess of the mountain tribes, to whom animal offerings are made.<sup>13</sup> Although Nobel is incorrect in his identification of the goddess invoked in the *Harivaṃśa* hymn as Nārāyaṇī, in mentioning folk elements, plurality of names, and identification of different goddesses, he makes some very significant points, to which we will have occasion to return.

A correct identification of the goddess as Durgā appears in the *Kokuyaku Daizōkyō*.

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<sup>11</sup> Nobel 1958a, pp.249-250, note 3 (which begins on p.248).

<sup>12</sup> *Hōbōgin* 1929, pp.64-65. "Nārāyaṇī" on p.64 should read "Nārāyaṇī" (lengthening of the second syllable). Also on p.64, "Elle se montre aussi sous la forme de Vāsudeva..." is an error: she does not appear as Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa) himself, but as the sister of Vāsudeva. See below p.259.

<sup>13</sup> Nobel 1958a, p.249, note 3.

where Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 says in a very brief note that Kauṇḍinya's praise is taken from a laud of the goddess Durgā in the *Mahābhārata* epic and amplified.<sup>14</sup> Although, as noted above, the *Harivaṃśa* forms a supplement to the epic, it remains an entirely separate, independent text. Hence it is not referred to as the *Mahābhārata*, but always as the *Harivaṃśa*. I am assuming, therefore, that Watanabe meant the *Māhābhārata* and only the *Mahābhārata*. As we shall see, there is more than one hymn to Durgā in the epic, so it is unclear which one Watanabe refers to. At any rate, Kauṇḍinya's praise in Yijing is drawn from a *Harivaṃśa*—rather than a *Mahābhārata*—hymn, so the wrong text is mentioned, but the right goddess is recognized. Likewise, Nagano Sadako 長野禎子, a more recent voice in the discussion of the identity of the goddess and of the source of Kauṇḍinya's hymn in Yijing, also identifies the goddess as Durgā.<sup>15</sup> In 1988 she published a brief study on the characteristics of Benzaiten in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. Noting the incongruous battle aspect attributed to Benzaiten in the sutra, Nagano explained the identity of the goddess as Durgā, pointing to a specific hymn to Durgā in the *Mahābhārata* (see 1. Yudhiṣṭhira's Hymn to Durgā, below).<sup>16</sup>

### c. Sarasvatī and Durgā

In this section, we will look at the remainder of Yijing's version of Kauṇḍinya's praise of the goddess in the context of related hymns. I will present textual evidence from

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<sup>14</sup> Watanabe 1932, p. 145, note.

<sup>15</sup> Nagano 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Nagano 1988, p. 239 (p. 720).

the Durgā hymns of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, in parallel with Yijing's Chinese translation of one of the *Harivaṃśa* hymns, for the identification of eight-armed Biancaitian with Durgā. I will also discuss certain early images of Durgā, primarily from India, but also from Afghanistan and Southeast Asia, to show the iconographic similarity with eight-armed Benzaiten. I will then discuss the reasons for the appearance of Durgā under the guise of Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

### i. Hymns to Durgā

Let us, then, turn to the small number of hymns to Durgā in the vulgate *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa*. There are five hymns, to which must be added Nārada's description of Durgā in the *Harivaṃśa*, for, although not a hymn in itself, it is closely related in content to the five hymns. Together with the fifth- or sixth-century *Devi Māhātmya* (DM) of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, these are the earliest textual sources we have on the goddess.<sup>17</sup> Their contents are reflected, and in the case of one of the *Harivaṃśa* hymns (see 3. below)

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<sup>17</sup> The *Mahābhārata* in its present form, as noted above, is generally accepted to date from about 400 B.C.E. to 400 C.E. (see van Buitenen 1973, p.xxv), while the *Harivaṃśa* is ascribed to a period between the first and the third century C.E. (see Ingalls 1968, p.394; Couture 1991, p.77). Most of the Durgā hymns, as we shall see, are not included in the critical editions of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, for the editors have considered them later interpolations. The methods and decisions of the editors, however, have been called into question. Regarding specifically two of the Durgā hymns I will discuss below (1. Yudhiṣṭhira's hymn and 2. Arjuna's hymn), Madeleine Biardeau (1977, 1981) has argued that these hymns form an integral part of the epic, giving meaning to each episode, and that their exclusion renders the text less intelligible. Jagdish Narain Tiwari, on the other hand, accepts the choices made by editors of the critical edition, and thinks the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* hymns to the goddess "clearly fall in the same class as the *Devi-māhātmya* and make no significant additions to the concept of the Great Goddess as presented in that text" (1985, p.75). According to Thomas Coburn, the hymns, whether in the constituted text or in the appendices of the critical edition, "clearly feed into the understanding of the Goddess found in the *Devi Māhātmya*" (1984, p.45) and hence are earlier. Coburn (1984, pp.267-289) has collected and translated the Durgā hymns of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*. For the dating of the *Devi Māhātmya*, see Pargiter 1904, p.xx. To this list might be added Bhāsa's *Bālacarita*, part of which is discussed in Coburn 1984, pp.234-236.



reproduced, in Kauṇḍinya's praise of Sarasvatī. Their context, furthermore, explains the otherwise entirely incomprehensible characterization of the goddess in Kauṇḍinya's invocation.

The following hymns and description of the goddess appear in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*:

1. **Yudhiṣṭhira's Hymn to Durgā** : appears in Appendix I, No.4 in the Virāṭa Parvan (around 4:5) of the critical edition (vol.5, pp.300-305) of the *Mahābhārata*, which gives seven versions of it. I will refer below to the most widely attested version, which may be found under (D) in Appendix I, No.4 (pp.301-302) and is translated in Coburn 1984, pp.268-271 under the title "Durgā Stava." Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍava brothers, who have just emerged from twelve years in exile in the forest and are about to begin a year in disguise, requests Durgā's protection from being discovered and subsequent success against their enemies.
2. **Arjuna's Hymn to Durgā** : appears in Appendix I, No.1 in the Bhīṣma Parvan (inserted after 6:22:16) of the critical edition (vol.7, fasc.2, pp.710-711) of the *Mahābhārata* and is translated in Coburn 1984, pp.272-275 under the title "Durgā Stotra." Just before the great battle at Kurukṣetra, a few verses before the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna to recite a hymn to Durgā for the purpose of defeating his enemies. Arjuna invokes the goddess, requesting her to make him victorious in battle.
3. **Viṣṇu's Hymn to Nidrā** : appears in part in the *Harivaṃśa* (47:38-57) and in part in Appendix I, No.8 (inserted after 47:52) in the critical edition of the *Harivaṃśa* (Appendix I, No.8 is in vol.2, pp.34-37). It is translated in Coburn 1984, pp.276-281, under the title "Viṣṇu's Praise of Nidrā." The latter part of the praise as found in the appendix of the critical edition has a colophon identifying it as the Āryā Stava ("hymn to Āryā").<sup>18</sup> The context is Kṛṣṇa's complex birth story. The hymn is offered by Viṣṇu when arranging the births to Devakī (Kṛṣṇa's mother) and Yaśodā (Kṛṣṇa's surrogate mother, from whom he will be born following a foetus exchange between Devakī and Yaśodā). Wicked King Kāṃsa knows he is to be slain by one of the children of Devakī and Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa's parents), and hence confines them and slays their children as each one is born. Viṣṇu requests the goddess Nidrā to arise in the womb of Yaśodā and then to change places with Kṛṣṇa, who in the meantime will have arisen in Devakī's womb. Hence when Devakī's eighth child is born (not Kṛṣṇa, but Nidrā who has taken

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<sup>18</sup> Āryā is yet another name attributed to the goddess.

the place of Kṛṣṇa), evil Kāṃsa dashes the baby girl against a rock, while Kṛṣṇa is saved. Viṣṇu's request ends in a praise of the goddess, which indicates that she is actually Durgā. Further confirmation of the goddess's identity appears later in the *Harivaṃśa* (65:49-57), noted below under 6. It is a portion of the latter part of Viṣṇu's praise (Āryā Stava) which finds its way into Yijing's Chinese text (p.437a6-25).

4. **Pradyumna's Hymn to Durgā** : appears in Appendix I, No.30 (inserted after 99:26), lines 361-375 in the critical edition (vol.2, pp.377-378) of the *Harivaṃśa* and is translated in Coburn 1984, p.283 under the title "Pradyumna's Hymn." Pradyumna, the son of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī, invokes the goddess, who is here identified as Pārvatī, the beloved of Śiva (line 359), requesting that the powerful club she once gave to the demon Śambara should not harm him.
5. **Aniruddha's Hymn to Durgā** : appears in Appendix I, No.35 (inserted after 108 or 109) in the critical edition (vol.2, pp.486-491) of the *Harivaṃśa* and is translated in Coburn 1984, pp.285-289 under the title "Aniruddha's Hymn." Aniruddha, son of Pradyumna, is imprisoned by the demon Bāṇa, and calls on Durgā for help.
6. **Nārada's Description of Durgā** : appears, in the form of a recollection by Kāṃsa, in the critical edition of the *Harivaṃśa* (65:49-57) and is translated in Coburn 1984, pp.233-234. Here the sage Nārada reveals the true identity of the baby girl as Durgā. Although this is not a hymn, it is included here because it describes the goddess.<sup>19</sup>

Two of the salient features discernible from the context of the above hymns and of Nārada's description of Durgā are the goddess's connection with battle and her presence in Kṛṣṇa mythology. In terms of the latter feature, it may be added that the story of Durgā's slaying of the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha, which appears as the third myth of the *Devi Māhātmya*, is also found in early sources dealing with the Kṛṣṇa story (e.g. *Harivaṃśa* 65:51). As Charlotte Vaudeville and Thomas Coburn following her have pointed out, the heroic exploits of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla first came to be known amongst the non-Aryan tribes of

<sup>19</sup> I will refer to these hymns and to Nārada's description of Durgā by the name of the speaker, i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna, Viṣṇu, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, and Nārada. References to the earlier part of Viṣṇu's hymn are to stanzas (e.g. Viṣṇu, 47:38), while those to the latter part of the hymn (Āryā Stava) are to lines (e.g. Viṣṇu, line 42).

Northern India, who were also worshippers of the goddess—hence the interrelatedness of their cults.<sup>20</sup>

In these hymns to Durgā and in Kauṇḍinya’s praise of the goddess, who is actually Nidrā (=Durgā), she is described as a mountain-dwelling goddess worshipped by mountain tribes, as an ascetic goddess, as Kṛṣṇa’s sister, and as a battle goddess.

## Mountain Goddess

Kauṇḍinya tells us that the goddess dwells in the mountains (恒在山中),<sup>21</sup> or more specifically on a mountain peak (*sikhare samāśritā*; 依高山頂勝住處).<sup>22</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira praises the goddess as follows: “Your eternal abode is upon that best of mountains, Vindhya” (*vindhye caiva nagaśreṣṭhe tava sthānaṃ hi śāśvatam /*),<sup>23</sup> echoed by Nārada, Viṣṇu, and Pradyumna.<sup>24</sup> Aniruddha says she dwells in the Malaya (*malayavāsini*), a mountain range on the west of Malabar, Vindhya, and Kailāsa mountains (*vindhyakailāsavāsini*),<sup>25</sup> more generally on all mountains (*sarvaparvatavāsini*).<sup>26</sup> Pradyumna calls her the “goddess of the mountains” (*giriśā*),<sup>27</sup> and invokes her as Pārvatī, the beloved of Śiva (*pārvatī śaṅkarapriyā*),<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Vaudeville 1968, pp.750-759; Coburn 1984, pp.237-241.

<sup>21</sup> Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta’s text, p.387b13.

<sup>22</sup> *Suvarṇabhāṣottama Sūtra*, p.108, line 7; Yijing’s text, p.436a7. In this section I will refer to the extant Sanskrit text of the *Sutra of Golden Light* as edited by Nobel by its title in Sanskrit (rather than simply “Sanskrit” as previously when I was dealing with only one text in Sanskrit).

<sup>23</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 33.

<sup>24</sup> Nārada, 65:51, 65:56; Viṣṇu 47:48; Pradyumna, line 367.

<sup>25</sup> Aniruddha, lines 31, 33. Cf. Arjuna, line 7, where she is said to dwell on the celestial Mt. Mandara (*mandaravāsini*).

<sup>26</sup> Aniruddha, line 38.

<sup>27</sup> Pradyumna, line 363.

<sup>28</sup> Pradyumna, line 359.

who is the daughter of the mountain (*pārvatī parvatātmaḥ*).<sup>29</sup> We see here early signs of what will become a standard identification, where the hitherto independent, celibate<sup>30</sup> goddess Durgā will become Śiva's consort.

Durgā's dwelling in the Vindhya mountains is in dreary forests filled with wild animals. Nārada tells us she inhabits

*dṛptakukkuṭasamṇādam vanam vāyasanāditam /  
chāgayūthaiś ca sampūrṇam aviruddhaiś ca pakṣibhiḥ //*

*siṃhavyāghravarāhāṇām nādena pratināditam /  
vṛksagambhīranibīḍam kāntāraiḥ sarvato vṛtam //*

A wood that resounds with the cries of wild cocks and crows,  
Filled with throngs of goats and wild birds,

Resounding with the cry of lions, tigers, and boars  
Thick and impenetrable with trees, surrounded on all sides with  
deep woods.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, the Viṣṇu, followed by Yijing, tells us she is surrounded by animals: cocks, goats, sheep, lions, and tigers in Viṣṇu's hymn (*kukkuṭaiś chāgalair meṣaiḥ siṃhair vyāghraiḥ samākulā /*); lions, tigers, wolves, oxen, sheep, cocks, and so on, according to Yijing's version (師子虎狼恒圍遶 牛羊雞等亦相依).<sup>32</sup> Viṣṇu expands her dwelling places to include mountain peaks, rivers, caves, forests and groves: *parvatāgreṣu ghoreṣu nadiṣu ca guhāsu ca / vāsas tava mahādevi vaneṣūpavaneṣu ca //*; 或在山巖深險處 或居坎窟及

<sup>29</sup> Aniruddha, line 41. Cf. line 92 *sailaputri*. In Viṣṇu, line 42, among women in the Purāṇas she is known as Pārvati.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Arjuna, line 8; Yudhiṣṭhira, line 11; Pradyumna, line 365; Viṣṇu 47:45.

<sup>31</sup> Nārada, 65:54-55. Translation by Coburn in 1984, pp.233-234.

<sup>32</sup> Viṣṇu, line 11; Yijing's text, p.437a18.

河邊 或在大樹諸叢林).<sup>33</sup>

It is precisely because of the environment she dwells in and because of her excellence that she has the lion as her mount. In Pradyumna's hymn, Durgā is "the one mounted on a lion" (*siṃhavāhā*) and her ensign is likewise a lion (*siṃhapravaraketanā*).<sup>34</sup> Aniruddha also mentions her lion mount (*siṃharathā*), but her ensign, he says, is a bull (*vṛṣadhvajā*).<sup>35</sup> Arjuna assigns her the face of a wolf (*kokamukhā*).<sup>36</sup> She is bedecked with peacock feather ornaments, such as a bracelet, and peacock feathers (*mayūrāṅgadacitrais ca barhabhārais ca bhūṣitā //*).<sup>37</sup> and her banner is likewise made of peacock feathers (*mayūrapakṣadhvajini*: 以孔雀羽作幡旗).<sup>38</sup>

In her abode in the forests of the Vindhya mountains, the goddess is worshipped by non-Aryan, tribal peoples of the mountains. Nārada refers to them as *daśyu*.<sup>39</sup> Viṣṇu as *śabara*, *barbara*, and *pulinda*.<sup>40</sup> and Yijing as wild men of mountain forests (山林野人輩).<sup>41</sup> According to Aniruddha, thieves are her worshippers (*corasenānamaskṛtā*).<sup>42</sup> The goddess herself is called a *kirāti*,<sup>43</sup> a woman of the Kirāta mountain-tribe. They worship her with animal sacrifices and alcohol, for, we are told, she is fond of flesh and liquor (*sīdhumāmsupaśupriyā*).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Viṣṇu, lines 7-8; Yijing's text, p.437a14-15.

<sup>34</sup> Pradyumna, line 372.

<sup>35</sup> Aniruddha, line 34.

<sup>36</sup> Arjuna, line 16.

<sup>37</sup> Nārada, 65:53. Cf. Viṣṇu 47:44 ; Yudhiṣṭhira, line 14.

<sup>38</sup> Viṣṇu, line 10; Yijing's text, p.437a17. Cf. Yudhiṣṭhira, line 26; Arjuna, line 12; Viṣṇu 47:44.

<sup>39</sup> Nārada, 65:52.

<sup>40</sup> Viṣṇu, line 9.

<sup>41</sup> Yijing's text, p.437a16.

<sup>42</sup> Aniruddha, line 37.

<sup>43</sup> Aniruddha, line 37.

<sup>44</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 34. Cf. Viṣṇu 47: 51; Nārada, 65:52-53; Viṣṇu, line 19. The reference in the latter

## Ascetic Goddess

Regarding the clothing of the goddess, the *Sutra of Golden Light*, as we have seen, tells us that she is clad in a garment made of grass (... *darbhacivaravāsītā / darbhavastram dhārayanti* ... ; 常披草衣; 恒結軟草以爲衣).<sup>45</sup> Yijing adds that she lives in a room with a grass roof (葺茅爲室在中居).<sup>46</sup> Likewise, pursuing the theme of asceticism, Viṣṇu and Aniruddha say the goddess wears bark clothing (*cīravāsā*).<sup>47</sup> Arjuna, on the other hand, speaks of yellow clothes (*pītavāsini*).<sup>48</sup> while Viṣṇu, in the earlier part of his hymn, mentions a dark-blue linen or silken garment with a yellow upper garment (*vasānā mecakam kṣaumaṃ pītenottaravāsasā /*).<sup>49</sup> In yet another passage of Viṣṇu's hymn, followed by Yijing, the goddess is said to have blue silk clothing (*nilakauśeyavāsani*; 常著青色野蠶衣).<sup>50</sup> As for her hairstyle, Yijing mentions that she wears her hair in a topknot (頭圓髮),<sup>51</sup> an ascetic hairstyle like Śiva's.

Durgā is given to great asceticism (*mahātapā*), as Viṣṇu and the extant Sanskrit of

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part of Viṣṇu's hymn (*māmsaudanapriyā*) does not appear in the part of the hymn translated in Yijing.

<sup>45</sup> *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra*, p.108, lines 7-8; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta's text, p.387b14; Yijing's text, p.436a8.

<sup>46</sup> Yijing's text, p.436a7.

<sup>47</sup> Viṣṇu, line 18 (quoted); Aniruddha, line 37.

<sup>48</sup> Arjuna, line 15.

<sup>49</sup> Viṣṇu 47:41.

<sup>50</sup> Viṣṇu, line 4; Yijing's text, p.437a11.

<sup>51</sup> Yijing's text, p.437a20. The corresponding passage of Viṣṇu's hymn (line 13) reads, instead, that she carries a spear (*paṭṭisa*), which fits the line far better: "Carrying trident and sharp-edged spear, having the sun and moon as (your) emblem..." (*triśūlapaṭṭisadharā sūryacandrapatākinī* ). Cf. Yijing's text, p.437a20 或執三戟頭圓髮 左右恒持日月旗 "She carries a trident and [wears] a round topknot on her head. On her right and on her left she always holds sun and moon banners."

the *Sutra of Golden Light* tell us.<sup>52</sup> The sutra states, in particular, that she stands on one leg (*ekapādena tiṣṭhati*; 一脚而立; 在處常翹於一足).<sup>53</sup> There seems to be, as noted above, a connection here with Pārvatī (and likewise Satī) who practised severe austerities, including standing on one leg, to win her spouse Śiva.<sup>54</sup>

## Kṛṣṇa's Sister

Apart from the later Śaivite connection, there is, as noted above, an earlier Kṛṣṇa-mythology connection. The goddess Nidrā (=Durgā) is the daughter of Nanda (*nandagopasutā*),<sup>55</sup> who is the husband of Yaśodā, in whose womb she arises (*yaśodāgarbhasambhūtā*).<sup>56</sup> Following the exchange of the foetuses, when she is born of Devakī, Kṛṣṇa's mother, evil Kamsa dashes her against a stone precipice and she rises up into the sky (*śilātataṅviniḥṣiptām ākāśam prati gāminim /*).<sup>57</sup> In relation to Kṛṣṇa, here referred to by his patronymic appellation Vāsudeva (for his father is Vasudeva), she is his sister (*bhagini vāsudevasya*; 或現婆蘇大天妹).<sup>58</sup> With Durgā's help, Kṛṣṇa is born and

<sup>52</sup> Viṣṇu, line 2; *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra*, p.108, line 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra*, p.108, line 8; Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta's text, p.387b14; Yijing's text, p.436a8. Cf. Aniruddha, line 27, which calls her a *yogini*.

<sup>54</sup> For the story of Satī and Pārvatī, see Kinsley 1986, pp.37-46, and Mani 1975, pp.576-580, for instance.

<sup>55</sup> Viṣṇu, line 17. Cf. Yudhiṣṭhira, line 4; Arjuna, line 14; Aniruddha, line 14; Yijing's text, p.437a24.

<sup>56</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 3. Cf. Nārada, 65:49; Aniruddha, line 13.

<sup>57</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 6. Cf. Nārada, 65:49.

<sup>58</sup> Viṣṇu, line 15; Yijing's text, p.437a22. Cf. Yudhiṣṭhira, line 7; Arjuna, line 14. Yijing actually reads "great god Vasu" (Vāsumahādeva, 婆蘇大天), which indicates that the reference is not to Vasudeva the father, who is not a god, but to his son, the great god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The basic text adopted by the Taishō edition, furthermore, has *nū* 女 (婆蘇大天女), but in note 7 (p.437) it is said that many other collated texts have, more specifically, *mei* 妹, younger sister, instead of 女. As we see in the Sanskrit hymns, the goddess is certainly Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa's sister, and hence I use the character 妹.

eventually slays evil Kāṃsa, and hence, through her involvement, it is she who causes the destruction of Kāṃsa (*kāṃsavidrāvāṇakari*).<sup>59</sup> She does so, not through battle, which would be more characteristic of her, but through delusion (*māyā*), a form of sleep. She is therefore called Nidrā (Sleep)<sup>60</sup> or Mahānidrā (Great Sleep),<sup>61</sup> deluding Kāṃsa (*mohayitvā ca taṃ kāṃsam...*)<sup>62</sup> to his eventual death at the hands of Kṛṣṇa.

## Battle Goddess

Durgā's fundamental nature is that of a battle goddess, as is continuously emphasized in all contexts she appears in. Even in the birth story of Kṛṣṇa, she plays a decisive role in his success against evil Kāṃsa. She who is fond of war (*raṇapriyā*)<sup>63</sup> has arms like iron bars (*bāhubhiḥ parighopamaiḥ //*),<sup>64</sup> broad like Indra's banner (*bibhrati vipulau bāhū śakradhvajasamucchraya /*).<sup>65</sup> According to Yudhiṣṭhira, she has four arms (*caturbhujā*), and also four faces (*caturvaktṛā*).<sup>66</sup> In Aniruddha's hymn, the number of arms rises to eighteen (*aṣṭādaśabhujā*),<sup>67</sup> and in the *Devi Māhātmya*, to one thousand (*bhujasahasreṇa*).<sup>68</sup> As battle goddess she is endowed with weapons: lofty spear (*aṭṭasūlapraharāṇā*),<sup>69</sup> sword

<sup>59</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 5.

<sup>60</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 45.

<sup>61</sup> Arjuna, line 21. Cf. Yoganidrā-nidrā in Coburn 1984, pp.191-195, 234; *viṣṇu-māyā* in Coburn 1984, pp.195-196.

<sup>62</sup> Viṣṇu 47:56.

<sup>63</sup> Arjuna, line 16.

<sup>64</sup> Viṣṇu 47:43.

<sup>65</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 18.

<sup>66</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 13.

<sup>67</sup> Aniruddha, line 62.

<sup>68</sup> DM 2:38.

<sup>69</sup> Arjuna, line 13.



and shield (*khadgaketakadhāriṇi*),<sup>70</sup> noose, bow, and great wheel (*pāśaṃ dhamur mahācakram...*),<sup>71</sup> and a trident (*triśūlini*).<sup>72</sup> In the *Devī Māhātmya* we find the sword, spear, cudgel, wheel, conch, bow and arrows, sling, and iron mace (*khadgini śūlini ghorā gadini cakriṇi tathā / śaṅkhini cāpini bāṇabhusuṇḍīparighāyudhā //*).<sup>73</sup> In another passage the *Devī Māhātmya* also provides a long list of weapons Durgā is endowed with by the gods for the purpose of slaying Mahiṣa, the chief of the demons: Śiva gives her a trident, Kṛṣṇa a wheel, Varuṇa a conch and noose, Agni (Fire) a spear, Vāyu (Wind) a bow and two quivers of arrows, Indra a vajra and a bell, Yama (Death) a staff, Kāla (Time) a sword and shield, and Viśvakarman (the architect of the gods) an axe and weapons, as well as armour.<sup>74</sup> It is also at this time that Himavat gives her the lion as her mount.<sup>75</sup>

Durgā is described as violent, literally “Rudra-like” (*raudri*),<sup>76</sup> and her valour as hard to surpass (*durgaparākramā*).<sup>77</sup> She is indeed difficult to conquer (*durjayā*).<sup>78</sup> She is death itself (*mṛtyu*),<sup>79</sup> striking terror into enemies (*ripūṇāṃ trāsajanani*),<sup>80</sup> whose destroyer she is (*śatruvināśini*).<sup>81</sup> She is Jayā (Victory) and Vijayā (even fuller Victory), as she is repeatedly

<sup>70</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 8; Arjuna, line 13.

<sup>71</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 20.

<sup>72</sup> Pradyumna, line 371.

<sup>73</sup> DM 1:61.

<sup>74</sup> DM 2:19-27 *śūlaṃ śūlād viniṣkṛṣya dadau tasyai pinākadhṛk / cakram ca dattavān kṛṣṇaḥ samutpātya svacakrataḥ // [2:19] śaṅkham ca varuṇaḥ śaktim dadau tasyai hutāśanaḥ . māruto dattavāms cāpaṃ bāṇapūrṇe tathēṣudhī // [2:20] vajram indraḥ samutpātya kulīśādamarādhipaḥ / dadau tasyai sahasrākṣo ghaṇṭām airāvatād gajāt // [2:21] kāladaṇḍād yamo daṇḍam pāśaṃ cāmbupatir dadau ... [2:22] ... kālās ca dattavān khadgaṃ tasyāś carma ca nirmalam // [2:23]... viśvakarmā dadau tasyai paraśuṃ cātinirmalam // [2:26] astrāṇy anekarūpāṇi tathābhedyam ca daṃśanam // ... [2:27].*

<sup>75</sup> DM 2:28 ... *himavān vāhanam śimhaṃ ratnāni vividhāni ca //*

<sup>76</sup> Viṣṇu, line 18.

<sup>77</sup> Aniruddha, line 67.

<sup>78</sup> Aniruddha, line 35.

<sup>79</sup> Viṣṇu, line 19.

<sup>80</sup> Nārada, 65:57.

<sup>81</sup> Pradyumna, line 363.

invoked.<sup>82</sup> She brings about the victory of the gods (*devānāṃ vijayāvahā*),<sup>83</sup> destroying their foes (*surārināśini*).<sup>84</sup> The opponents of the gods are the demons, and Durgā is a demon-killer (*asurānāṃ kṣayaṃkarī*).<sup>85</sup> Specifically, she conquers the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha (*hatvā śumbhaniśumbhau...*),<sup>86</sup> Kaitabha (*kaiṭabhanāśini*),<sup>87</sup> and Mahiṣa (*mahiṣāsuranāśini*).<sup>88</sup> The *Devi Māhātmya* recounts three mythological narratives of her demon-slaying feats: in the first, her opponents are Madhu and Kaitabha (who in the *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, are slain by Viṣṇu); in the second and most illustrious of the myths, from which she derives her well-known epithet “Mahiṣāsuramardini,” “slayer of the demon Mahiṣa,” she slays the demon in the form of a buffalo known as Mahiṣa; in the third myth, she battles Śumbha and Niśumbha.<sup>89</sup>

## ii. Images of Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardini

### India

While the above references to the slaying of the demon buffalo Mahiṣa belong, at the latest, to a period between the fourth and the sixth century, the cult of Durgā, and specifically of Mahiṣāsuramardini, is attested from the Kuṣāṇa period by surviving images. There are

<sup>82</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 31; Arjuna, line 11; Viṣṇu, line 3; Pradyumna, line 368.

<sup>83</sup> Viṣṇu, line 17. Cf. Yijing’s text, p.437a24: “When she fights together with the gods, she is always victorious” (與天戰時常得勝).

<sup>84</sup> Aniruddha, line 84.

<sup>85</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 5. Cf. Arjuna, line 28; Aniruddha, lines 15, 94.

<sup>86</sup> Nārada, 65:51. Cf. Viṣṇu 47:49; Pradyumna, line 364; Aniruddha, line 39.

<sup>87</sup> Arjuna, line 17.

<sup>88</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, line 29. Cf. Arjuna, line 15; Pradyumna, line 371.

<sup>89</sup> See Coburn 1991.

also Śunga-period examples of a goddess with weapons in her hair, such as a very small bronze (ht. 5.6 cm) from about the second century B.C.E. and a terracotta plaque (ht. 26.7 cm) from the first century B.C.E. from Chandraketugarh in West Bengal, both at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>90</sup> This type of image has been identified either as the conceptual prototype of the later Durgā images<sup>91</sup> or as the earliest representations of Durgā herself.<sup>92</sup>

The earliest extant representations of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī are from the Kuṣāṇa period.<sup>93</sup> The Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich has two small votive tablets made of sandstone from Rajakhera (Agra District): in the one listed as MU 199 by the museum, the better preserved of the two, the four-armed goddess holds a short-handled trident and a shield and strangles the buffalo with her lower arms.<sup>94</sup> The Mathurā museum has a similar image of unknown provenance from the later Kuṣāṇa period, where the lion appears below.<sup>95</sup> There are also six-armed representations of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from the Kuṣāṇa period, in which she often holds a lotus garland in horizontal position above her head with her uppermost pair of arms, such as in an image from Mathurā, now in the Ashmolean

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<sup>90</sup> See Lerner and Kossak 1991, fig.10, pp.53-55 for the bronze, and Kossak 1994, figs.9-10, pp.65-66 for both images. Another example of a terracotta image of this type appears in Pal 1987, fig.3, p.39.

<sup>91</sup> Pal 1987, p.39.

<sup>92</sup> Kossak in Lerner and Kossak 1991, p.54. It is worth noting, however, that in Kossak's 1994 article, although he writes of the images as "Durga," the labels for his figures read "proto-Durga" (p.65).

<sup>93</sup> The terracotta plaque from the ancient site of Nagar (Jaipur Unit, Rajasthan), now in the Museum in Amber near Jaipur, was dated middle of the first century B.C.E. or first century C.E. by R. C. Agrawala (see 1958, p.124, fig.1). Gritli von Mitterwallner, however, has shown the plaque belongs to about the last quarter of the fourth century (1976, pp.203-205).

<sup>94</sup> Mitterwallner 1976, figs.1-2 (MU 199-200, respectively). The other image (MU 200) is of slightly later date than MU 199, and the implements are no longer clearly discernible. MU 199 measures 18.5 cm in height, while MU 200 measures 22 cm. Mitterwallner discusses these images on pp.196-198. The goddess is mentioned as four-armed, as we have seen (p.261 above), in Yudhiṣṭhira, line 13.

<sup>95</sup> Mitterwallner 1976, fig.3. Here the goddess carries trident and spear in her upper arms. For further Kuṣāṇa-period examples, see Härtel 1973, figs.12, 15; Viennot 1956, fig.1.

Museum in Oxford.<sup>96</sup> A notable iconographic feature of the early Kuṣāṇa images is that the goddess does not subdue the buffalo-demon with her weapons, but rather with her bare hands. By early Gupta times, already foreshadowed in late Kuṣāṇa examples, she pierces his back with her now long-handled trident.<sup>97</sup>

The *Mahābhārata* in 3:221, it may be noted, attributes the slaying of Mahiṣa to the warrior god Skanda. These early images of the goddess—and not of Skanda—slaying Mahiṣa suggest, as Heinrich von Stietencron explains, that the epic tried to replace the non-Brahmanical cult of the battle goddess by a male Hindu god of war, but failed. Not only was the goddess not driven out, but she acquired for herself the very implements of the Brahmanical gods responsible for victory, most particularly the vajra, the weapon of the king of the gods Indra, who is the conqueror of the enemies of the gods *par excellence*.<sup>98</sup> The attempt at fully integrating the goddess into the Brahmanical fold is most clearly seen in the *Devī Māhātmya* passage where the gods each endow her with their particular implement,<sup>99</sup> and with which she is represented in images.

Apart from early four-armed and six-armed representations of Mahiṣāsūramardini, surviving images of different periods depict her with arms in different numbers still, including two-armed, eight-armed, ten-armed, twelve- and more-armed examples.<sup>100</sup> Of particular interest to us here are the eight-armed images, for in Kauṇḍinya's praise of

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<sup>96</sup> Harle 1970, fig.1. For other Kuṣāṇa-period six-armed examples, see Agrawala 1958, pp.123-124 and Harle 1970, p.147, 153, figs.6-7. For the identification of the garland over her head, which has been the subject of speculation amongst art historians, see Harle 1970.

<sup>97</sup> See Mitterwallner 1976, pp.199-200. A good typological study of iconographic representations of Mahiṣāsūramardini from Kuṣāṇa to modern times is found in Stietencron 1983.

<sup>98</sup> Stietencron 1983, pp.129-130.

<sup>99</sup> See p.261 above.

<sup>100</sup> See, for instance, representations listed and illustrated in Agrawala 1958, Harle 1970, Iyer 1969, Kalidos 1989, and Stietencron 1983.

Sarasvatī, she is described as such.

An early eight-armed example is the late third-century stele from Mathurā, now in the Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin (fig.28).<sup>101</sup> Here Mahiṣāsūramardīnī holds the lotus garland above, the sun and the moon, what appears to be a sword and another weapon, and subdues the buffalo demon with her lowermost hands. She stands upon two lions, representing a lion throne.

Other eight-armed images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, of which there are many, include an early medieval example from Ramghat, Mathura, now in the Mathura Museum.<sup>102</sup> two sixth-century examples at Aihole (fig.29).<sup>103</sup> three representations of the seventh century in Mamallapuram (fig.30),<sup>104</sup> and some eighth-century images from Alampur, now in the Alampur Museum (fig.31).<sup>105</sup> As some of the arms have been broken or damaged, it is sometimes not possible to identify certain objects held by the goddess. Fig.29 from Aihole, for instance, shows Durgā standing with her left foot (leg missing) on the back of the buffalo, carrying the trident (with which she stabs the demon), the wheel, the vajra, and what remains of the sword in her right hands (from the top), with only the bell and the conch surviving in what remains of her left hands. Her lion appears below to her right. In fig.30 from Mamallapuram, Durgā rides on her lion, fighting the buffalo-headed demon with less-easily discernible objects: she reaches back with her top right hand to pull out an

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<sup>101</sup> Stietencron 1983, fig.2.

<sup>102</sup> Harle 1970, fig.2.

<sup>103</sup> The one illustrated here (fig.29, stone, ht. 125 cm) is in the Durgā Temple and the other in the Rāvāṇa Phadī Cave (see Coburn 1991, fig.4.1).

<sup>104</sup> The one illustrated here (fig.30, granite) is found in the Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Maṇḍapa, another appears in the Trimūri Maṇḍapa, and a third in the Ādivarāha Maṇḍapa of Mamallapuram (see Kalidos 1989, fig.16).

<sup>105</sup> Fig.31 is a stone image, measuring 81 x 65 cm.

arrow, while her other right hands hold the wheel, the bell and the sword; in her left hands, she carries the conch, the lasso, the bow, and the shield. In fig.31 from Alampur, with her right hands Durgā pulls out an arrow, holds the wheel and the sword, and stabs with the trident the human-looking demon figure emerging from the neck of the buffalo. In her left hands, she carries the bow, the conch, and the bell, holding the head of the demon figure with her central hand. The lion is seated to her lower right.

## Afghanistan

Depictions of the demon-buffalo-slaying goddess, furthermore, have been discovered in Afghanistan. A number of finds, such as the seventh or eighth century Scorretti Marble in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome and the marble said to be from Gardez, which used to be in the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul (fig.32),<sup>106</sup> indicate that she was worshipped there during the Turki Šāhi period.<sup>107</sup> Although it is not possible to know how many arms the Scorretti Mahiṣāsūramardīnī originally had, the Gardez image (fig.32) is eight-armed: while the goddess's front right arm stabs Mahiṣa with a dagger, her front left arm holds his head; another right arm holds his tail, and although two right arms are missing, one of them seems to have held the trident which is stabbing the demon's rump; one of the left arms is also missing, while the two others hold what seems to be a

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<sup>106</sup> The collection of the National Museum in Kabul was dispersed, and the location of the Gardez group is not known. The marble image measures ca. 60 cm.

<sup>107</sup> Taddei 1973, pp.207-208. On the Scorretti Marble, see Schlumberger 1955, Goetz 1957, and especially Kuwayama 1976, pp.378ff. (figs.7-8). On the marble group from Gardez, see Kuwayama 1976, pp.379ff. (fig.9), who provides further references.

wheel and a less easily identifiable object.<sup>108</sup> Although the Scorretti marble and the one from Gardez are Hindu images, an eighth-century, highly damaged clay sculpture of a four-armed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī discovered by Maurizio Taddei in 1969 appears in the Buddhist site of Tapa Sardār, a hillock near Ghaznī.<sup>109</sup> Of the objects held by the goddess, whose image survives in fragments, only the vajra in one of her right hands is clearly discernible. The presence of her mount is indicated by the lion's paw still visible on the hind portion of the almost entirely surviving buffalo.<sup>110</sup>

## Southeast Asia

Further examples of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī images are also to be found in Southeast Asia. The National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, for instance, has seventh- to eighth-century sandstone sculptures depicting the goddess with four arms.<sup>111</sup> The National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta has a number of eighth- to ninth-century examples, representing Durgā in eight-armed form (fig.33, eighth century, from Semarang in Central Java, stone, ht. 77cm), holding the usual set of implements. Further eight-armed Indonesian images of the goddess are, for instance, in Prambanan and Sambisari. Perhaps the best known example of an eight-armed Indonesian Mahiṣāsūramardīnī image is the beautiful

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<sup>108</sup> Kuwayama (1976, p.379) describes these last two objects as "undidentified."

<sup>109</sup> Taddei 1973, 1989; Taddei and Verardi 1978.

<sup>110</sup> See also Tucci 1963, who discusses an eighth- or ninth-century image discovered in Swat in 1962. It represents a fierce, eight-armed goddess with her foot on a wild goat or an ibex. Clearly this is not Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, but, as Tucci explains, "must represent a peculiar local variety of some homologous religious entities..." (p.152).

<sup>111</sup> One of these appears in Boisselier 1955, pl.24A. For other early examples, see Boisselier 1963, figs.26 (discussed on p.73), 65 (discussed on pp.130-131).

late thirteenth-century Hindu-Javanese stone sculpture in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden (fig.34).<sup>112</sup>

From the early surviving images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, we can see that the goddess was worshipped from at least the Kuṣāṇa period and depicted with different numbers of arms and implements. Her worship, furthermore, was not confined to India, as attested by surviving images from Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. To this one might add the Buddhist worship of Durgā in different forms in Tibet and China.<sup>113</sup> For example, Tang-period *dhāraṇīs* invoke the goddess under the name Caṇḍī or Cuṇḍī (Zhunti 准胝),<sup>114</sup> who comes to be identified with Mārīcī (Molizhi 摩利支) and from whom the Japanese Juntei Kannon 准胝觀音 (Cuṇḍī Avalokiteśvara) derives her name.

Eight-armed representations of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, as we have seen, were produced from at least the late third century and in significant numbers. The implements with which the eight-armed goddess was endowed in these images are all listed in the *Devi Māhātmya*, but they are not, as a rule, always placed in the same hands.

### iii. Iconography

If we now compare the sculptures of Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī with the eight-armed Biancaitian/Benzaiten images discussed above, clearly there is no perfect match. The Chinese

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<sup>112</sup> See Zimmer 1983, vol.1, p.104; vol.2, pls. 502-503; Fontein et al. 1990, fig.23, p.158-159.

<sup>113</sup> See Whitaker 1963.

<sup>114</sup> T. vol. 20, no.1034, p.17a; no.107, p.173a; no.1076, p.178c; no.1077, p.185a; no.1078, p.186b. See Whitaker 1963.



and Japanese images appear neither with a buffalo, nor with a lion. Furthermore, we do not find precisely the same set of objects in Biancaitian/Benzaiten's hands. It cannot be denied, however, that eight-armed Biancaitian/Benzaiten carries weapons (bow, arrow, sword, spear, axe, vajra, wheel, and lasso), appropriate to a battle goddess like Durgā, and that all of these weapons appear in at least one of the lists of Durgā's weapons: the **bow** and **arrow** are mentioned in the *Devī Māhātmya* (DM 1:61; 2:20), the **sword** in Yudhiṣṭhira's hymn (line 8), Arjuna's hymn (line 13), and in DM 1:61 and 2:23, the **spear** in Arjuna's hymn (line 13) and in DM 1:61 and 2:20, the **axe** in the DM 2:26, the **vajra** in DM 2:21, the **wheel** in DM 2:19, and the **lasso** in Yudhiṣṭhira's hymn (line 20) and in DM 2:22.

There may, furthermore, be a connection between Durgā's trident and Biancaitian's spear. Durgā is generally not depicted with a spear, in addition to her vital instrument the trident, which is, in fact, a three-pronged spear.<sup>115</sup> While the spear is rather neutral in that it has no particular connection with one single god, the trident has Śaivaite connotations: it is specifically Śiva's, and hence, in DM 2:19, is given to Durgā by Śiva, who pulls it out of his own trident. Although Durgā is an independent figure in the *Devī Māhātmya*, she does come to be identified as Śiva's consort. From this point of view, if a choice need be made, the allocation of the spear instead of the trident to Biancaitian/Benzaiten does seem more appropriate.

In terms of the connotations of implements, furthermore, the wheel, given to Durgā by Kṛṣṇa in DM 2:19, acquires, in a Buddhist context, the connotation of the Wheel of the Law. "La roue de la Loi," as Robert Duquenne puts it, "brise dans sa course les Obstacles

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<sup>115</sup> One exception is the Kuṣāṇa image in the Mathura museum mentioned in note 112 above. A trident is a combination of vajra and spear according to Stietencron (1983, p.130).

suscités par l'Inscience et délimite un territoire de B[uddha] (*Butsудо* 仏土, *buddhakṣetra*), un Cercle autour de la Terrasse de l'Eveil..."<sup>116</sup> More specifically it delimits the territory wherein the *Sutra of Golden Light* is being upheld and protects that country.<sup>117</sup>

Hence, it is possible to account for all of Biancaitian/Benzaiten's weapons in textual sources on Durgā. We can, likewise, find these same weapons in extant images of Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī. In the eight-armed images discussed above, we have noted the **bow** and **arrows**, the **wheel**, the **sword** (fig.31 from Alampur, for instance), the **vajra** (fig.29 from Aihole), the **lasso** (fig.30 from Mamallapuram), not to mention the trident related to the **spear**. The **axe** can be seen in slightly later images, such as a tenth-century sculpture of the ten-armed Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī from Bihar, now in the National Museum in New Delhi.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, in addition to textual evidence for the appearance of Durgā under the guise of Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*, particularly so in Yijing, there is also iconographic similarity between eight-armed Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī and likewise eight-armed, weapon-bearing Biancaitian/Benzaiten.

#### iv. Context

If we now compare the contexts of some of the early Durgā hymns with that of the chapter on Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*, the contextual parallel is particularly striking. Not unexpectedly, as noted above, we find battle goddess Durgā associated with

<sup>116</sup> Hōbōgin 1994, "Dairin 大輪," p.963. On the wheel, see also Auboyer 1965. Further references in Hōbōgin 1994, p.963.

<sup>117</sup> See p.193 above.

<sup>118</sup> I am grateful to Prof. Koezuka Takashi 肥塚隆 of Osaka University for showing me his slide of this image.

human, as well as celestial, military success.<sup>119</sup> In the *Mahābhārata*, just before the great battle at Kurukṣetra, Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna to recite a hymn to Durgā for the purpose of defeating his enemies (Arjuna). Arjuna invokes the goddess, requesting her to make him victorious in battle after battle: *jayo bhavatu me nityam tvatprasādād rane rane* /.<sup>120</sup> Durgā then appears to Arjuna, assuring him of victory,<sup>121</sup> and, the text adds, whoever recites this hymn at dawn will have nothing to fear from anyone and will always be victorious in battle.<sup>122</sup> Similarly in Yudhiṣṭhira's hymn, the goddess assures him of success in battle and of a trouble-free kingdom:

*bhaviṣyaty acirād eva samgrāme vijayas tava /  
mama prasādān nirjītya hatvā kauravavāhinim /  
rājyam niṣkaṅṭakam kṛtvā bhokṣyase medinim punaḥ /*

Victory in battle will soon be yours.  
Having by my grace conquered (and ) slain the Kaurava army,  
Having made (your) kingdom free from troubles, you will again  
enjoy the earth.<sup>123</sup>

Patronage of Durgā by rulers and warriors (*kṣatriyas*) is reflected in representations of the goddess and the mention of her in inscriptions. As a first sign, the small votive plaques of the Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta periods are superseded by the large and complex cliff-reliefs of Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh at the beginning of the fifth century. Amongst

<sup>119</sup> Durgā's association with military prowess is briefly discussed in Kinsley 1986, pp.106-111.

<sup>120</sup> Arjuna, line 26.

<sup>121</sup> Arjuna, lines 35-37, especially line 35: *svalpenaiva tu kālena śatruṅ jeṣyasi paṇḍava*

<sup>122</sup> Arjuna, lines 42-48: "The man who, having arisen at daybreak, recites this hymn, never knows any fear from Yakṣas, Rakṣas, or Piśācas, and he has no enemies among those who are serpents, etc., who have tusks... He is always victorious in battle..." (*ya idaṃ paṭhate stotraṃ kalya utthāya mānavaḥ yakṣarākṣaḥpiśācebhyo na bhayaṃ vidyate sadā : na cāpi ripavas tebhyaḥ sarpādya ye ca daṃṣṭriṇaḥ* [lines 42-44]... *samgrāme vijayen nityam...* [line 48]). (Translation by Coburn in 1984, pp.274-275. I do not include here the promise of good fortune, health, strength, and long life in lines 48-49.)

<sup>123</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira, lines 55-57. Translation by Coburn in 1984, p.271.

inscriptions, one from Choṭī Sādri in Rajasthan dated 491, the earliest that clearly suggests a cult to the goddess, records that Mahārāja Gauri built a palatial shrine to the goddess.<sup>124</sup> *Kṣatriya* patronage, as Stietencron points out, is certainly an important reason for the existence of so many sculptures of the goddess.<sup>125</sup>

In the *Sutra of Golden Light*, the Four Great Kings, likewise defeaters of *asuras*,<sup>126</sup> prophesy the continued reign and prosperity of the ruler who upholds the sutra. It is in this connection that the text acquires importance in China and Japan for the protection of the state. The fact that the queen of battle Durgā, here under the guise of Sarasvatī, should appear following the prophecy of the Kings,<sup>127</sup> who “turn back foreign armies” (*paracakrāṇi ca pratinivartayisyāmah* // ),<sup>128</sup> is indeed fitting—certainly more so than the manuscript-bearing, *viṇā*-playing goddess of knowledge, as Sarasvatī is usually depicted.

## v. Identification

The obvious question is why Durgā appears in the sutra under the guise of Sarasvatī.

<sup>124</sup> Tiwari 1985, p.76.

<sup>125</sup> Stietencron 1983, p.129, 137.

<sup>126</sup> *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra*, p.69 *tena yuṣmākam caturṇām mahārājñām sabalaparivārāṇām anekeṣām ca yakṣasatasahasrāṇām devāsurasamgrāmam abhirūḍhānām jayo bhaviṣyati / asurāṇām ca parājayo bhaviṣyati* “Therefore there will be victory for you, the four great kings, together with your armies and retainers and numerous hundreds of thousands of Yakṣas, when you enter the conflict of the gods and Asuras. And there will be defeat for the Asuras.” (Emmerick 1996, p.26).

<sup>127</sup> In the extant Sanskrit (and Dharmakṣema’s version), the Sarasvatī chapter immediately follows that of the Four Great Kings. In Baogui’s edition, a short chapter entitled “Chapter of the Silver Lord *Dhāraṇī*” (“Yinzhū tuoluoni pin” 銀主陀羅尼品), and in Yijing two chapters called “Chapter of the Non-clinging *Dhāraṇī*” (“Wuranzhuo tuoluoni pin” 無染著陀羅尼品) and “Chapter of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel” (“Ruyi baozhu pin” 如意寶珠品) appear between the Sarasvatī and Four Great Kings’ chapters.

<sup>128</sup> *Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra*, p.71 (translation in Emmerick 1996, p.27). Yijing’s text, p.427b29-c2, seems to be the corresponding passage.

Nothing is said about the matter by Watanabe in the Japanese translation of the sutra (in the *Kokuyaku Dai-zōkyō*). Nagano, on the other hand, tries to explain it by calling to attention the rise of faith in the great mother goddess in India at the time. Under this influence, she states, Biancaitian in Yijing's translation of the sutra has been granted the characteristics of Durgā, including also her combative aspect, and became the eight-armed Biancaitian who battles in the defence of Dharma.<sup>129</sup> As we have seen, the presence of Durgā can already be surmised in the extant Sanskrit and in Baogui's edition of the sutra (Yaśogupta/Jñānagupta translation). In terms of the rise of the great goddess cult, as Jagdish Narain Tiwari explains, it becomes recognizable from the Gupta period onwards and the evolution of the great goddess may be presumed accomplished by the seventh century.<sup>130</sup> Yijing's translation of our sutra in 703, therefore, falls just after this period. In pointing to the rise of the goddess cult, Nagano is certainly correct, but her point requires further explanation. There were very definite, and more specific, reasons for the appearance of Durgā under the guise of Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. As noted above, there is a sovereignty- and battle-related contextual affinity between the sutra and certain Durgā hymns. Given the context, the appearance of the battle-goddess, not only in the sutra, but in this precise place in the sutra, is particularly appropriate.

It must be pointed out, moreover, that we find identifications of Durgā with Sarasvatī, goddess of knowledge, and other related goddesses already in the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* hymns and in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Durgā is on three occasions in our *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* hymns called Sarasvatī: Arjuna, line 23; Viṣṇu, line 29; Aniruddha, line

<sup>129</sup> Nagano 1988, p.239 (p.720).

<sup>130</sup> Tiwari 1985, pp.61-94 (especially pp.74, 80).

28. In Viṣṇu's hymn, however, Durgā is being invoked not as the goddess Sarasvatī, but perhaps as speech or knowledge<sup>131</sup>—the speech or knowledge of Vālmīki (traditional author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic)—parallel to the memory of Dvaipāyaṇa (traditional author of the *Mahābhārata* epic): *sarasvatī ca vālmikeḥ smṛtir dvaipāyaṇe tathā* // She is likewise invoked as Sarasvatī in DM 11:22.

Durgā is also called Sāvitrī,<sup>132</sup> a goddess who by the late third or early fourth century is identified with Sarasvatī.<sup>133</sup> Durgā is, furthermore, Gāyatrī, yet another form of Sarasvatī.<sup>134</sup> Sāvitrī, like the goddess of speech Vāc, with whom Sarasvatī is identified,<sup>135</sup> is the mother of the Vedas.<sup>136</sup> The Gāyatrī Mantra, of which the goddess Gāyatrī is a deification, is an invocation to the Sun (Savitṛ) in the *Rg Veda* (3:62:10), and thus also known as the Sāvitrī. The Gāyatrī Mantra is believed to embody the essence of the Vedas. Durgā, identified in the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* hymns with both Sāvitrī and Gāyatrī, is called Veda (like Vāc long before her) and Śruti.<sup>137</sup>

Hence, we find, in these hymns to Durgā in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, associations and identifications of Durgā with the Vedas, with Vāc, and with Sarasvatī. It must be mentioned at this point that there are some who consider Durgā's connection with Vāc to extend much further back in time than epic literature. Asko Parpola, who has tried to “[make] it look probable that the myth and cult of Durgā and the Buffalo Demon have

<sup>131</sup> Coburn (1984, p.280) translates it as “blessed words.”

<sup>132</sup> Arjuna, lines 24,30; Pradyumna, line 374; Aniruddha, line 29.

<sup>133</sup> See MP 3:30-32 quoted on pp.131-32 above.

<sup>134</sup> Pradyumna, line 373. For Gāyatrī as a form of Sarasvatī, see MP 3:32 quoted on p.132 above.

<sup>135</sup> E.g. TS 2:1:2:6; SB 4:2:5:14 *vāg vai sārāsvatī*.

<sup>136</sup> See, for instance, Arjuna, line 24; Aniruddha, line 29 for Sāvitrī as the mother of the Vedas. For the much earlier identification of Vāc as the mother of the Vedas, see p.68 above.

<sup>137</sup> Arjuna, line 19. For Vāc as the Vedas, see pp.68-69 above.

been current in South Asia at least two thousand years earlier than is usually assumed,<sup>138</sup> ultimately finding connections with Ishtar,<sup>139</sup> identifies Durgā with Vāc, and hence also with Sarasvatī, already in Vedic texts.<sup>140</sup> From this point of view, therefore, the appearance of Durgā as Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light*, especially in Yijing's translation of the text, would not present any problem whatsoever. Parpola's arguments for the identification of Durgā and the Vedic Vāc, however, seem to me tenuous and misleading. In the discussion of specific Brāhmaṇa passages, neither what immediately follows in the text nor the wider, general context are taken into consideration. I will limit myself here to Parpola's references to two passages.

As evidence for his understanding of Vāc as a "goddess of victory associated with the lion,"<sup>141</sup> Parpola refers, for instance, to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3:5:1:23), wherein the high altar (*uttara-vedi*) corresponds to Vāc, and, while clarified butter is poured on the altar, the words "Thou art a lioness. Hail!" (VS 5:12) are uttered.<sup>142</sup> In this passage, however, the sacrifice is also equated with Vāc. Furthermore, immediately following, in 3:5:1:24, we are told why Vāc is like a lioness: because she "roamed about unappeased" (*āśānta*). This is to say, that Vāc is not likened to a lioness because she is a goddess of victory, but because of her restless preying. Then, in 3:5:1:25, the sacrificial fee (*dākṣiṇā*) is said to turn into a lioness and destroy the sacrificer under certain conditions. Hence the

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<sup>138</sup> Parpola 1992, p.300.

<sup>139</sup> As explained on p.301, note 1, Parpola's 1992 article is only a fragment of a much longer one entitled "From Ishtar to Durgā: Sketch of a prehistory of India's feline-riding and buffalo-slaying goddess of victory," which he intends to publish as a monograph. Some references to goddesses of war in the ancient Near East appear in Parpola 1988, pp.258-259.

<sup>140</sup> Parpola 1992, pp.281-284 and personal communication.

<sup>141</sup> Parpola 1992, p.281.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283.

association with the lioness is by no means exclusive to Vāc. In the context of the Brāhmaṇas, we cannot forget, identifications occur continuously.

Having referred to ŚB 3:5:1:23, Parpola immediately (without even as much as a word in between) ties this in with a passage in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (6:2:7:2), which deals with the construction of the *uttara-vedī* and where TS 1:2:12:2 is restated: “Thou art a lioness; thou art a buffalo.”<sup>143</sup> The problem is that there is no reference whatsoever to Vāc in this passage, and it should not necessarily be assumed that the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, like ŚB 3:5:1:23, takes the altar to correspond to Vāc, besides to a lioness and a buffalo.

Besides Parpola, others before him have found a connection between Vedic Vāc and Durgā: A.C. Das, for instance, saw Vāc as the origin of Durgā, and K. C. Chatterji stated that the *Devī Māhātmya* is regarded as a lengthy commentary on the famous hymn to Vāc in the *R̥g Veda* (10:125).<sup>144</sup> The perception of the *Devī Māhātmya* as a commentary on the Vedic Vāc hymn is clearly a matter of interpretation. Although I do not think Durgā can be identified with the Vedic Vāc, the connection between Durgā and Vāc does deserve our attention—but in the historically more immediate context.

The *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* hymns to the goddess are, in their small number and overall length, low-key hymns, which, especially amidst the huge epic, the reader might easily overlook. The *Devī Māhātmya* represents the first comprehensive account of the originally non-Aryan goddess in Sanskrit, the language affirming “the respectability, dignity, sanctity, antiquity, and even eternity” of the text.<sup>145</sup> The *Devī Māhātmya*, Coburn

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Referred to in Coburn 1984, p.255. In studies on the rise of Śaktism, one might add, the Vedic Vāc is always mentioned.

<sup>145</sup> Coburn, 1984, p.19.



explains, represents a wide-ranging effort to establish the identity, significance, and full-blown worship of the goddess,<sup>146</sup> deploying with its myths previously discrete motifs, which are here crystallized.<sup>147</sup> Many different names are applied to the goddess, “clearly chosen for their Vedic resonance,”<sup>148</sup> as Coburn’s study of the epithets used in the *Devi Māhātmya* shows.<sup>149</sup> Durgā, as the Great Goddess, is identified with all goddesses (DM 10:3-5). In her identification with goddesses associated with the Vedas as a whole, the eternal knowledge which they are believed to embody, and the very language in which they are conveyed, Durgā is given a link with the Vedic tradition. It is for this reason that her connection with Vāc, who is speech, the Vedas, and all knowledge, and hence also her connection with Sarasvatī, who is identified with Vāc already in the Vedic period, are of particular significance. Such connections, however, are given—rather than drawn from the Vedas and hence traceable therein—for the express purpose of integrating and firmly positioning the non-Aryan goddess in the center of tradition, as attested in the low-key efforts of the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* hymns and the full-blown efforts of the *Devi Māhātmya*.

It is under the influence of the purposefully applied identification of Durgā with the Vedas and with Sarasvatī and other related goddesses that Durgā suddenly appears in the Sarasvatī chapter of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. We have here a mirror reflection: while Durgā is identified with Sarasvatī in Durgā hymns, Sarasvatī is identified with Durgā in the sutra. The mirror reflection, furthermore, reflects also mutual need: while Durgā requires authentication and approval by the Vedic tradition and hence forms ties with goddesses

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., pp.89-208.

related to the Vedas and to knowledge, such as Sarasvatī; the manuscript-bearing, *viñā*-playing goddess purposefully takes on the appearance of a battle goddess, especially suitable to a defender of the Dharma, following the model, in general function and appearance, of the Four Deva Kings. It is this form of eight-armed, weapon-bearing Durgā, whose ferocity and bloody violence is no longer apparent in the Buddhist context, which we then find in images of the eight-armed Buddhist Biancaitian/Benzaiten.

## 2. Two-Armed Form

### a. The *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* and the Mandala Image

The other principal way of representing Sarasvatī in Japan is in the two-armed lute-playing form analogous to the *viṇā*-playing Sarasvatī of India. I say in Japan because, surprisingly, I have not found any Chinese representations of the goddess with a lute (Chi. *pipa* ; Jap. *biwa* 琵琶). The Japanese representations are based on her depiction in this form (fig.35B) in the esoteric Womb World Mandala (*Garbadhātu maṇḍala*; *Taižangjie mantuluo* 胎藏界曼荼羅) (fig.35A). Although there are no surviving Chinese Womb World Mandala representations, we know that they were made and that some were brought to Japan, as we shall see.

The Womb World Mandala is based on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*,<sup>1</sup> which was translated into Chinese in 725 (Kaiyuan 13) by Śubhakarasiṃha (Shanwuwei 善無畏; 637-735) and Yixing 一行 (683-727) under the title *Da Piluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing* 大毘盧遮那成佛神變加持經, better known as the *Dari jing* 大日經 (T. vol.18, no.848). The sutra lists her following the earth deities (p.8a12): “various earth deities of the west side, Eloquence Talent, and Viṣṇu...” (西方諸地神 辯才及毘紐...). Yixing wrote a commentary on the sutra entitled *Da Piluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing shu* 大毘盧遮那成佛神

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<sup>1</sup> The Sanskrit title is restituted on the basis of Tibetan sources.

變加持經疏, but also called *Dari jing shu* 大日經疏 (T. vol.39, no.1796). Here (p.634c3-4) he is a little more specific regarding her location (i.e. in the western direction, near the gate are placed the earth deities; she is to the north of them) within the mandala, and tells us Sarasvatī's name is translated as Wonderful Sound(s) Music Deity (Miaoyinletian 妙音樂天) or Eloquence Talent Deity (Biancaitian 辨才天): 西方近門置地神衆。次北置薩隄薩伐底。譯云妙音樂天。或曰辨才天。He adds that her consort is also placed to the north (次北并置其妃),<sup>2</sup> but does not give his name. On p.755c9-10 of Yixing's commentary, furthermore, we read that her name is Wonderful Sound(s) (Miaoyintian) and that in the *Jingguangming[jing]* she is called Great Eloquence Goddess (Da Bian tiannü): 妙音是天名也。金光明云大辯天女。

Miaoyintian's *mudrā*, Yixing explains, takes the form of playing a zither (p.721c16-18): "looking in front, the left hand on the navel in the posture of holding a zither (*se* 瑟), the right hand as if pulling and releasing [the strings of the *se*], the body, frontal, moves as if pulling the strings. This is the *mudrā* of Miaoyintian" (先仰左手當臍。如承把瑟狀。右手風空捻餘散申之。向身運動如彈絃之狀。是妙音天印也).<sup>3</sup> The *se*, an ancient type of zither first mentioned in sources of the Zhou dynasty (1122-221 B.C.E.),<sup>4</sup> is obviously intended to be a translation of *vinā*. As we have seen, the zither, which in India also falls under the name *vinā*, is most commonly seen in images of the Indian Sarasvatī from about

<sup>2</sup> Despite the radical 女, *fei* 妃 also has the meaning of male consort. See Luo Zhufeng 1986-94, vol.4, p.280. Since Yixing evidently knows Sarasvatī to be a goddess (p.755c9-10 quoted in main text), the consort he mentions in relation to her can only be male.

<sup>3</sup> Oda (1917, p.1164a) emends 瑟 to 琵琶 as Yixing's original text. No variants, however, are noted by the T. editors.

<sup>4</sup> On the *se*, see Sadie 1984, vol.3, p.340.

the sixth century onwards (figs. 14-15). It is, however, a lute (*pipa* 琵琶), rather than a zither, that one finds in the hands of the Wonderful Sound(s) Deity in surviving Womb World Mandala representations. Further research would be required to determine why the zither was replaced by the lute. It may be noted, however, that after the Han 漢 dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 220 C.E.), the *se* declined in China, although its use continued in state rituals. The *pipa*, on the other hand, a foreign instrument from Central Asia first mentioned in ca. 200 C.E. Chinese sources, was pictorially represented from the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (386-534 C.E.) onwards. Initially considered barbaric, in time it became an important part of Chinese musical culture. The *pipa* came to be associated with refinement and high culture, and was always the principal entertainment at court banquets.<sup>5</sup> It may, therefore, have been considered more appropriate to supply the Wonderful Sound(s) Deity with the dominant, refined *pipa*.

The earliest surviving Womb World Mandala, which forms a pair with the Diamond World Mandala (*Vajradhātu maṇḍala*; *Jingangjie mantuluo* 金剛界曼荼羅), is a Japanese copy of the set brought back from China by Kūkai 空海 (774-835), founder of the Japanese Shingon 真言 school of Buddhism, in 806.<sup>6</sup> The original pair, which is no longer extant, was a coloured set reputedly commissioned by Kūkai's teacher Huiguo 惠果 (746-805), himself a disciple of Amoghavajra (705-774), in 805 and executed by a group of more than ten painters, including the famous court painter Li Zhen 李真 (T. vol. 55, no.2161, p.1065b12).<sup>7</sup> It is preserved at Jingoji 神護寺 in the mountains northwest of Kyoto, where

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<sup>5</sup> On the *pipa*, see Picken 1955 and Sadie 1984, vol.3, p.115.

<sup>6</sup> For Kūkai's life, see Hakeda 1972.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the different sets of the Two World Mandalas of Japan, see ten Grotenhuis 1999, pp.78-95 (Takao Mandalas, pp.80-84).

Kūkai spent fifteen years (809-823) following his return from China and a period in Kyushu. The pair is known as the Takao [Two-Worlds 兩界] Mandala 高雄曼荼羅 after the mountain on which Jingoji is located (Jingoji itself was called Takaosanji 高雄山寺 in Kūkai's time). The pair of mandalas, made in Kūkai's lifetime (between 829 and 833), were drawn in gold and silver pigment on damask dyed a deep purple. Unfortunately, many of the figures in the mandala set are now either entirely obscured or barely discernible.<sup>8</sup>

For a depiction of Sarasvatī in the Womb World Mandala, then, we must turn to the second oldest known Two-Worlds mandala pair: the Saiin Mandala 西院曼荼羅 of the Saiin (Western subtemple) of Tōji 東寺 in Kyoto produced between 859 and 880 (Womb World Mandala, fig.35A).<sup>9</sup> Like the mandalas commissioned by Huiguo, this pair is brightly coloured, and fortunately, beautifully preserved. Here Sarasvatī (fig.35B), in bodhisattva form, is represented seated, upper half of the body unclothed, playing the *biwa*. A very similar representation can be found in the five-storey pagoda of Daigoji 醍醐寺 in Kyoto of 951 (fig.36). Although the Two-Worlds Mandala generally appears as a pair of hanging scrolls, the different figures of the Mandala can also be painted inside certain temple pagodas, on the walls, pillars, and interiors of the window shutters. The Daigoji pagoda interior mandala paintings constitute the oldest extant such example.

Yixing, identifying Sarasvatī as Miaoyinletian 妙音樂天 and Biancaitian 辨才天 (T. vol.39, no.1796, p.634c3-4), and then Miaoyintian as the Great Eloquence **Goddess** of the

<sup>8</sup> The Takao Mandalas, as well as other famous sets, were recently shown in an exhibition on Heian and Kamakura period Buddhist paintings held at the Kyoto National Museum. See Kyōto kokuritsu hakubutsukan 1998, pl.77. The dating of the Takao Mandalas is briefly discussed on p.335 under pl.77.

<sup>9</sup> The Saiin Two-Worlds Mandala pair (for a long time erroneously identified as belonging to Shingonin in the Imperial Palace of Kyoto) has been extensively studied by Yanagisawa Taka 柳澤孝 (see, for instance, Yanagisawa 1994, which also has some beautiful illustrations). For a discussion in English, see Grotenhuis 1999, pp.84-87, who bases her discussion on Yanagisawa's work.

[Sutra] of *Golden Light* (金光明云大辯天女) (Ibid., p.755c9-10), was evidently aware of her female gender. Her depiction in the mandala, however, is more ambiguous, suggesting, as in the well-known case of Avalokiteśvara, the indeterminate sex of a Chinese bodhisattva.

The Wonderful Sounds Deity, Myōonten in Japanese pronunciation, survives in some Japanese representations in the bodhisattva form of the Womb-world Mandala. Tsurugaoka Hachimangū 鶴岡八幡宮 in Kamakura has a famous sculpture dating from 1266 (fig.37) and Ninnaji 仁和寺 in Kyoto has a painting from 1407 (fig.38). Both these images are closely connected with music.<sup>10</sup> In Japanese representations, however, Myōonten is almost always depicted, like Sarasvatī in India and the eight-armed Biancaitian/Benzaiten, as a goddess of clearly female gender. This is also the case in the few surviving Chinese representations of two-armed Biancaitian with objects (or hand postures) other than a *pipa*, appearing in Avalokiteśvara's (Guanyin 觀音) entourage.

## **b. In Avalokiteśvara's Entourage**

Sarasvatī appears in Avalokiteśvara's entourage in a small number of tenth-century paintings from Dunhuang in the Pelliot and Stein collections. Although she is not one of Avalokiteśvara's twenty-eight attendants (*ershībabuzhong* 二十八部衆), as listed in the *Qianshi Guanyin zaocidi fayigui* 千手觀音造次第法儀軌 (Ritual rules when making the thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara) by Śubhakarasiṃha (d.735). Śrī (Gongdetian), quite possibly confused with Sarasvatī, is referred to partly by the name given to Sarasvatī (Da

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<sup>10</sup> Both of these images are discussed briefly in Nedachi 1992, pp.74-75.

Bian[tian]):

十四大辨功德娑怛那。帝釋天王主之女子大德天女也。多聞天之大妃也。。。

14. Da bian gongde Suodana [?].<sup>11</sup> She is the goddess of great merit, daughter of the king of the gods Indra (Dishi). She is the great consort of Vaiśravaṇa (Duowentian)."<sup>12</sup>

Despite being called “Great eloquence and merit” (Da bian gongde), a kind of amalgamation or confusion of Biantian and Gongdetian, the fact that she is identified as the consort of Vaiśravaṇa is a clear indication that the intended goddess is indeed Śrī (Gongdetian), and not Sarasvatī (Biantian). One cannot help but wonder if this amalgamated name, itself perhaps rooted in confusion, might not in turn be the possible cause for the depiction of Sarasvatī in some Dunhuang paintings of Avalokiteśvara with entourage, and of Śrī in others.

One painting on silk, preserved at the Musée Guimet, is both dated (Tianfu 天福 8 = 943) and the figures appearing in it are labelled and hence conclusively identifiable (fig.39). Thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Avalokiteśvara occupies the center of the painting, surrounded by fourteen figures, including the Four Deva Kings, Sarasvatī (Da Biancai tiannü 大辯才天女), Vināyaka (Pinayege 毗那耶歌), etc.<sup>13</sup> Sarasvatī (on Avalokiteśvara’s right) kneels, with one knee up, on a lotus, holding out a platter on which is placed a

<sup>11</sup> 娑怛那 does not appear in Buddhist dictionaries. Although I presume it is supposed to be the Sanskrit name of the goddess, I am unable to recognize a comparable Sanskrit correspondent.

<sup>12</sup> T. vol.20, no.1068, p.138b23-24.

<sup>13</sup> A detailed explanation of the different figures in the painting appears in Nicolas-Vandier 1974, pl.101, pp.198-202 and in Jarrige and Akiyama 1994 (vol.1), pl.96, pp.357-361 (plate explanation by Akiyama). This painting was shown at the 1996 Grand Exhibition of Silk Road Buddhist Art at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum: see Tōkyō kokuritsu hakubutsukan 1996, fig.218, p.205.



flaming jewel between two pearls in offering to Avalokiteśvara.

The Musée Guimet has another, similar painting, this one on hemp, from Dunhuang dating from the tenth century (fig.40). It is, however, neither dated nor labelled. Eleven-headed, ten-armed Avalokiteśvara is surrounded by fourteen figures, each with a blank label. The female figure kneeling, one knee up, with folded palms to Avalokiteśvara's lower right is identified by Nicolas-Vandier, as "Śrī devī (?) ou Sarasvatī."<sup>14</sup> The same identification is suggested by Akiyama Terukazu 秋山光和 and also in the 1996 Grand Exhibition of Silk Road Buddhist Art catalogue produced by the Tokyo National Museum.<sup>15</sup> The latter, however, leans more toward Sarasvatī, for its explanation reads: "弁財天 (または功德天=左)." Śrī, and not Sarasvatī, appears in Avalokiteśvara's entourage in a dated (981) and labelled painting from Dunhuang from the same period (fig.41A-B).<sup>16</sup> She offers Avalokiteśvara a large fully opened flower with leaves on a platter.

Sarasvatī also appears in the top left corner of a fragmentary painting of eleven-headed, thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara in the Stein collection, preserved in the Museum of Central Asian Antiquities in Delhi. A label identifies her as Da Biancai tiannü 大辯才天女 (Great Eloquence Talent Goddess).<sup>17</sup>

The best known Japanese representations of the twenty-eight attendants of Avalokiteśvara, known in Japan as Kannon, is the sculptural set in the Sanjūsangendō 三十

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<sup>14</sup> Nicolas-Vandier 1974, pl. 98, p.191. Her description of the painting appears on pp.189-193.

<sup>15</sup> Jarrige and Akiyama 1994 (vol.1), pl.91, p.354; Tōkyō kokuritsu hakubutsukan 1996, fig.216, p.203.

<sup>16</sup> See Nicolas-Vandier 1974, pl.103, pp.207-215; Jarrige and Akiyama 1994 (vol.1), pl.98, p.361-365 (plate explanation by Akiyama).

<sup>17</sup> Waley 1931, p.292. There is a rather bad illustration of this painting in Matsumoto 1937, pl.CLXX. From this illustration, I can see neither the label nor what the goddess carries.

三間堂 of Kyoto, dating from the early Kamakura period (1185-1333).<sup>18</sup> Amongst them is Daibenkudokuten 大辯功德天 (Great Eloquence and Merit Deity). By appearance she is certainly closer to the way Śrī (Kichijōten) is usually represented, and if we look to the *Qianshi Guanyin zaocidi fayigui*, then that is who it should be.

We have, then, a Sarasvatī devoid of distinguishing features, who appears in at least two representations of Avalokiteśvara with entourage. She can be identified with certainty only by a label, if there is one. Her presence, furthermore, may well be based on a misunderstanding of the identity of “Da bian gongde” in the list of Avalokiteśvara’s twenty-eight attendants according to the *Qianshi Guanyin zaocidi fayigui*. As far as I am aware, this Sarasvatī experienced no further developments in Japan. The *biwa*-playing form of the Womb World Mandala, on the other hand, moved on, in Japan, to a versatile career. It is to Japanese developments, then, that we now turn.

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<sup>18</sup> Most of the group is illustrated in Itō 伊藤 and Kobayashi 小林 1968, pp.210-211, figs.129-145. Daibenkudokuten appears in fig.133.

### 3. Japanese Developments

From the *Sutra of Golden Light*'s eight-armed, weapon-bearing Durgā under the guise of Sarasvatī, the Eloquence Talent Goddess 辯才天女, and from the Womb World Mandala's two-armed, lute-playing Wonderful Sound(s) Deity 妙音天 developed exclusively Japanese forms, which testify to the popularity of the goddess from the late Heian period (794-1185) to the present. In this chapter we will look briefly at Sarasvatī's legacy in Japan.

This chapter is intended to be a summary, rather than a detailed study of any or all of the goddess's developments in Japan. I do not discuss here, furthermore, topics such as the relationship of popular or contemporary religion to its traditional roots. Such a discussion presupposes an in-depth study of popular and contemporary religious phenomena, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I limit myself, therefore, to providing a summary overview of Japanese developments.

#### a. Uga-Benzaiten

Eight-armed Benzaiten, as we usually see her in Japan, is known as Uga-Benzaiten 宇賀辯才天 and is based on a textual source other than the *Sutra of Golden Light*. This is a Japanese form dating from about the thirteenth century, but it is in fact derived from the

description in *Yijing* and the corresponding images of the goddess. Uga-Benzaiten representations are characterized by the appearance of Ugajin 宇賀神, an ancient *kami* of food with the face of an old man and the body of a white snake, as well as a *torii* 鳥居, on Benzaiten's head. A well-known example is the mid-Kamakura-period (1185-1333) Uga-Benzaiten sculpture of Enoshima Jinja 江の島神社 near Kamakura (fig.42), one of the three principal places of worship of Benzaiten in Japan.

The textual basis for the form of Uga-Benzaiten is the first of a set of three apocryphal texts popularly known as the *Benten sanbukyō* 辯天三部經 (Three Sutras of Benten) composed sometime from the late Heian to the Kamakura period:

1. *Bussetsu saishōgokoku Ugaya tontoku nyōihōju daranikyō* 仏説最勝護國宇賀耶頓得如意寶珠陀羅尼經 (*Dhāraṇī* Sutra of the Buddha's Teaching for the Greatest Protection of the Country by Uga's Sudden Attainment Wish-fulfilling Jewel);
2. *Bussetsu sokushin hin den fukutoku enman Uga shinshō bosatsu byakuja jigen sannichi jōjūkyō* 仏説即身貧転福德円満宇賀神将菩薩白蛇示現三日成就經 (Sutra of the Buddha's Teaching for Changing Poverty into Complete Good Fortune While Still Alive by the Manifestation of the Divine General and Bodhisattva Uga as a White Snake in the Three-day Attainment);
3. *Bussetsu Ugajinnō fukutoku enman daranikyō* 仏説宇賀神王陀羅尼經 (*Dhāraṇī* Sutra of the Buddha's Teaching for [Attaining] Complete Good Fortune through King Ugajin).<sup>1</sup>

In these texts, Ugajin and Benzaiten are identified. Benzaiten, who is Ugajin, is described as eight-armed, carrying spear, jewel wheel, jewel bow, and wish-fulfilling jewel in her left

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<sup>1</sup> See Yamamoto 1998, pp.475-482, who collates and reprints the three texts as appearing in the *Ugakyō* 宇賀經 (Uga Texts) and the *Benzaiten sanbukyō ryakuso* 弁天三部經略疏 (Brief Commentary on the Three texts of Benzaiten) of the Mt. Hiei Library (Eizan Bunko 叡山文庫).

arms (from the top), and sword, stick, key, and jewel arrow in her right.<sup>2</sup> Yijing's axe, vajra, and lasso are here replaced with the stick, wish-fulfilling jewel, and key. The wish-fulfilling jewel and the key to the treasure house<sup>3</sup> indicate that Benzaiten is worshipped as a deity of wealth (*zaihōjin* 財寶神), apparently owing to her identification with Ugajin, the vision of whose very form immediately makes a person "fortunate," i.e. wealthy.<sup>4</sup>

Eight-armed Uga-Benzaiten sculptural and pictorial representations, such as the above mentioned sculpture in Enoshima Jinja (fig.42, wood, ht. 59.3 cm), exist in large numbers.<sup>5</sup> She is not, furthermore, always eight-armed. A two-armed sculptural example (fig.43) in a private collection preserved at the Tokyo National Museum, for instance, dates from the second half of the Kamakura period. The goddess holds a sword and jewel, which, in comparison with the Enoshima sculpture (fig.42), suggests an abbreviated form of the eight-armed goddess, preserving only the two central arms with their respective implements. There are also a couple of rare six-armed Uga-Benzaiten examples, largely corresponding to the eight-armed variety.<sup>6</sup> A late Kamakura-period hanging scroll depicting a six-armed Uga-Benzaiten surrounded by a retinue of fifteen boys (*jūgo dōji* 十五童子) belongs to Kotohiragū 金刀比羅宮 shrine in Kagawa Prefecture (fig.44). The fifteen boys are mentioned in the first text of the *Benten sanbukyō* as attendants to Ugajin, who surround Uga-Benzaiten,

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<sup>2</sup> Text 1: 有八臂左第一鉞第二輪寶第三宝弓第四寶珠右第一劍第二棒第三鑰第四寶箭 (Yama-moto 1998, p.476, line 8. I do not include here the text marks, including periods, in Yamamoto).

<sup>3</sup> Text 2: 以寶藏印鑰施妙弁才 (Yamamoto 1998, p.479, line 9).

<sup>4</sup> Text 2: 見我色像現形者須臾之間成福人決定無疑 (Yamamoto 1998, p.479, lines 9-10).

<sup>5</sup> For a comparison of Uga-Benzaiten images with the textual prescriptions of Text 1 of the *Benten Sutras*, see Ludvik 1999. An iconographic study of Uga-Benzaiten representations also appears in Nedachi 1992, pp.67-73.

<sup>6</sup> No separate textual source is known for the six-armed goddess.

and whose names are listed.<sup>7</sup> Representations of Uga-Benzaiten, especially of the eight-armed variety, accompanied by the fifteen boys (Benten jūgo dōji 辯天十五童子) appear in both sculptural and especially pictorial representations from the late Kamakura period onwards.

While the small figure of Ugajin usually appears on Benzaiten's head, he is also represented independently. Already in the Nanbokuchō-period (1333-1392) hanging scroll of Benzaiten Jūgo dōji from Hōgonji 寶嚴寺 on Chikubushima 竹生島 island on Lake Biwa, another one of the three principal places of worship of Benzaiten in Japan, a white snake is drawn below the eight-armed goddess (fig.45). An Edo-period (1615-1868) independent sculpture of Ugajin in the form of a snake (fig.46) can be found in Chōkenji 長建寺 near Kyoto, for instance, in front of the central image of Uga-Benzaiten dating from the Kamakura period onwards. There are also separate halls set aside for the worship of Ugajin, such as the one in Chōjuin 長壽院 (better known as Ōhora Benzaiten 大洞辯財天) in Hikone, where the Ugajin sculptural image can only be seen once every sixty years.

Another kind of Benzaiten image, clearly related to Ugajin and known as Tenkawa Benzaiten 天川辯才天, is pictorially represented in a few hanging scrolls of the Muromachi period (1392-1573), such as the one in Ishiyamadera 石山寺 in Shiga Prefecture (fig.47) and those of Hasedera's Nōman'in 長谷寺能満院 in Nara Prefecture. Here, Benzaiten and the snake are completely identified, for her head is now replaced with those of three snakes. The ten-armed image of Ishiyamadera holds objects such as treasure-jewels, and is surrounded by her fifteen boys and snake divinities. The identification of Benzaiten with

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<sup>7</sup> Text 1: 復有十五王子其形童子 (Yamamoto 1998, p.476, line 9). Their names appear on pp.477 (lines 7-19) - 478 (lines 1-3).

the white snake<sup>8</sup> can also be seen in modern times in Hakuja Kudokuin 白蛇功德院 in Uji, where the goddess is worshipped in the form of a live white snake. How far indeed from the battle goddess of the *Sutra of Golden Light* !

## b. Biwa-playing Benzaiten

During the Kamakura period, images of Benzaiten playing the *biwa* sculpted in naked or almost naked form, and then covered with clothing, began to appear. This form is popularly known as the “Naked Benten,” Hadaka Benten 裸辯天. The most famous example is from Tsurugaoka Hachimangū 鶴岡八幡宮 in Kamakura and is dated 1266 (fig.37). Although, as noted above, this rendering follows quite faithfully the Womb World Mandala representation, other images of Hadaka Benten are unmistakably female, such as the Nanbokuchō sculpture of Enoshima Jinja (fig.48).

There are also fully clothed *biwa*-playing images (largely paintings) of Benzaiten dating from the late Kamakura period onwards. In these pictorial representations, the goddess, exquisitely dressed and adorned, is seated on a rock jutting out over the water’s edge, against a contrasting landscape of mountainous wilderness, as in the Nanbokuchō period painting in the Seikadō Bunko Museum 静嘉堂文庫美術館 in Tokyo (fig.49). One might call this kind of representation “Elegant concerts in the wilderness.”

Through her identification with Ugajin, Benzaiten also became a deity of wealth and was integrated into the group of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune (Shichifukujin 七福神).

<sup>8</sup> Ugajin is in fact identified as a white snake 白蛇 in the *Benten sanbukyō* (Text 1, Yamamoto 1998, p.476, line 6).

This group of gods was brought together sometime in the fifteenth century and found great popularity from the Edo period onwards. The seven gods, consisting of Vaiśravaṇa (Bishamonten 毘沙門天), Mahākāla (Daikokuten 大黒天, Pañcika) and our Benzaiten 辯才天 from India, Budai 布袋 (Hotei), Shoulaoren 壽老人 (Jurōjin) and Fulushou 福祿壽 (Fukurokuju) from China, and Ebisu 恵比壽 from Japan, are very often depicted on a ship, sailing from China to Japan (fig.50). This type of painting is called the “Treasure Ship” (Takarabune 寶船). When amongst the Shichifukujin, Benzaiten almost always appears with a *biwa* in her hands.

In order to emphasize her good fortune aspect in the form of wealth, during the Edo period the middle character of her name (才) was increasingly written with the character for wealth (財). Her connection with money is particularly evident today at the Zeniarai Benten 銭洗辯天 (Money-washing Benten) shrine of Kamakura, where people wash their coins and even bills in a stream running through a cave, for, the shrine claims, the amount of money washed will become multifold.

Benzaiten is particularly closely connected with Daikokuten (Mahākāla), also associated with wealth, who appears in Benzaiten Jūgo dōji paintings from the Nanbokuchō period onwards (fig.45). In the Edo period, three-headed (*sanmen* 三面) Daikoku images, in which the heads of Benzaiten and Bishamonten (Vaiśravaṇa) are attached to the left and right of his own, came to be produced. One such example can be found in the main hall of Ōhora Benzaiten in Hikone.

In modern times, sculptures of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune appear in a great many temples and shrines, and are popularly sold all over Japan. There are countless



Shichifukujin pilgrimage rounds incorporating temple and shrine halls dedicated to the different members of the group. While some of these circuit pilgrimages are within one temple (e.g. the Sennyūji Shichifukujin of Kyoto 京都泉湧寺七福神), others are within a neighbourhood (e.g. a number of them exist in Tokyo, such as the Tōkai Shichifukujin 東海七福神 of Shinagawa and the Shinjuku Yamanote Shichifukujin 新宿山ノ手七福神), others still cover a city (e.g. Kyoto's Kyō no Shichifukujin 京の七福神) or extend over an even wider area (e.g. the Shichifukujin of Awaji Island 淡路島七福神).<sup>9</sup> The joyful gods are depicted on beer cans and on ceramics, most particularly on sake cups.<sup>10</sup> To usher in good luck for the new year, New Year's cards with pictures of the Shichifukujin are produced. The lovely young woman on camera shop posters and pamphlets advertising New Year's cards with family photos represents Benzaiten (fig.51).

I have come across only one pilgrimage circuit dedicated exclusively to Benzaiten: the San dai Benten 三大辯天 (Three Great Benten) of Mt. Hiei, just northeast of Kyoto. She has, however, major independent pilgrimage sites which are not, at this time, linked up into a circuit. There are three main places of Benzaiten worship in Japan, also called the San dai Benten 三大辯天, including Chikubushima 竹生島 on Lake Biwa, Itsukushima 嚴島 near Hiroshima, and Enoshima 江の島 near Kamakura, all three of which are islands. To these are also added two sites to form the Go dai Benten 五大辯天 (the Five Great

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the Shichifukujin pilgrimages are listed in Shiraki 1995 and Sanjō 1998. All of the above mentioned ones appear in Shiraki 1995. There are even bus tours of some of the pilgrimage routes, such as the one in Kyoto and the one in Nara Prefecture (Yamato Shichifukujin 大和七福神). For pilgrimages by railway, see Reader 1991, p.166.

<sup>10</sup> For the Asahi beer can publicizing the Izumo 出雲 Shichifukujin pilgrimage, see Reader 1991, p.167. The Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto has a set of twentieth-century sake cups depicting the Seven Gods of Good Fortune. A great many contemporary examples can be found in shops selling ceramics.

Benten), Tenkawa 天川 near the river Tenkawa in southern Nara Prefecture and Kinkazan 金華山 on an island not far from Sendai, all of which clearly show her connection with water. With the exception of Kinkazan, all these sites, as well as a few others, are mentioned by the Tendai monk Kōshū 光宗, who was active between 1311 and 1348, in his *Keiran shūyōshū* 溪嵐拾葉集 (T. vol.76, no.2410, p.626a28ff.). We do know, however, that Benzaiten was worshipped at some of these places centuries earlier, such as Chikubushima, for the twelfth-century *Besson zakkī* 別尊雜記 (T. *Zuzō* 圖像, vol.3, no.3007, p.495, image no.240) by the Shingon monk Shinkaku 心覺 (1117-1180) illustrates an eight-armed standing Benzaiten and identifies her as “Chikubushima Benzaiten.”

Today the goddess is worshipped all over Japan in countless small shrines located on artificial ponds and on lakes, which often also bear her name: Benten ike 弁天池 (Benten Pond). There is, furthermore, a new religion called the Bentenshū 辯天宗, centering on the goddess. It was founded by Ōmori Chiben 大森智辯 (1909-1967), a charismatic healer, after whose death the sect specialized itself in *mizuko kuyō* 水子供養 (ritual offering for the aborted foetus) to increase its membership.<sup>11</sup> The most recent development in Benzaiten worship in Japan is the construction of an enormous 18.5 m wood sculpture of the goddess installed (eye-opening ceremony 開眼) in Saifukuji 最福寺 in Kagoshima Prefecture on May 14, 2000. It is indeed, as the temple pamphlet indicates, “the world’s biggest wooden sculpture of Great Benzaiten” (世界最大木彫大弁財天). If the construction of this image is any sign of things to come, there may be much more still to be studied of Sarasvatī’s legacy in Japan.

<sup>11</sup> See Inoue 井上 et al. 1990, pp.773, 839; Hardacre 1997, pp.184-190.

## CONCLUSION

Here ends, then, our long journey from Sarasvatī to Benzaiten. We began by looking at the Vedas, where the mighty river goddess, through her association, on the one hand, with the recitation of hymns accompanying rituals performed on her banks, and, on the other hand, with inspired thought (*dhi*) inseparably tied to the composition of these hymns, was identified with speech (*vāc*). Through speech, embodying knowledge, most particularly the Vedas, Sarasvatī became goddess of knowledge in her own right, as we saw in the *Mahābhārata* and the early Purāṇas. Her river aspect, however, was not forgotten: sacrificial sessions continued to be held on her banks in the Brāhmaṇas, and a lengthy pilgrimage upstream, introduced in the Brāhmaṇas, was fully developed in the *Mahābhārata*. She also became goddess of music in the early Purāṇas and was connected with the *viṇā*. The elaborate Puranic myth of Brahmā and his daughter-consort Sarasvatī evolved from the Brāhmaṇa stories of Prajāpati and Vāc, and her iconography was defined.

Hence, as we have seen, textual sources from the Vedas to the early Purāṇas present Sarasvatī under four distinct aspects: as river goddess, to identify her physical aspect; as goddess of knowledge and as goddess of music, to define her functions; and as daughter-consort of Brahmā, to locate her in a wider mythological context, where gods and goddesses are paired, in relation to a specific god.

Amongst the early Sarasvatī images, her functional aspects surface: she appears as goddess of knowledge in five Jain images, one from about the third century C.E. and others

from 600-700, and as goddess of music in two sixth-century sculptures, one presumably Hindu and the other possibly Buddhist. Both in the iconography of the early Purāṇas and in post-eighth-century images, however, the features defining her functional aspects, i.e. the manuscript and the *viṇā*, are combined. It is as goddess of knowledge, nevertheless, that she predominates.

The earliest known introduction of Sarasvatī into China occurred in the early fifth century through the Buddhist *Sutra of Golden Light*, which includes a chapter dedicated to the goddess. In Dharmakṣema's 417 Chinese translation of the sutra, Sarasvatī is represented as goddess of eloquence, preserving, through the flawless speech and memory of the preacher, the sutra. To this sequentially and chronologically first section of the Sarasvatī chapter were then added two more, not found in Dharmakṣema's version, but included in the extant Sanskrit, in Baogui's edition of 597, and in Yijing's translation of 703: Sarasvatī teaches a ritual herbal bath, and is then praised by the *brāhmaṇa* Kauṇḍinya as an eight-armed goddess. The most extensive version of Kauṇḍinya's praise appears in Yijing's translation, where we find a list of the weapons carried in Sarasvatī's eight arms. Images of this eight-armed, weapon-bearing goddess were then produced in China and Japan. This eight-armed form represents one of the two principal ways of depicting Sarasvatī in Japan even today.

This eight-armed, weapon-bearing goddess, however, has no analogous form in India as Sarasvatī, and is not, in fact, Sarasvatī at all. She is, rather, the demon-slaying goddess Durgā, a Chinese translation of whose hymn from the *Harivaṃśa* appears in Yijing's version of the Sarasvatī chapter. As we have seen, there are close iconographic similarities between the *Sutra of Golden Light's* eight-armed goddess and the representations of eight-

armed, weapon-bearing Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardini of India, Afghanistan, and Southeast Asia. The appearance of Durgā under the guise of Sarasvatī in the *Sutra of Golden Light* occurred already in India, but was not clearly perceptible, for the Durgā hymn from the *Harivaṃśa* does not appear in the extant Sanskrit version of the sutra, nor are the implements carried in the eight arms of the goddess mentioned in the Sanskrit, nor do we have eight-armed, weapon-bearing representations of Sarasvatī in India. The Sanskrit text Yijing was working from, however, obviously had both the *Harivaṃśa* hymn and the list of weapons carried by the goddess—unless we consider these to be Yijing’s interpolations. There is, however, no evidence that I am aware of to suspect this. If we accept, then, that the hymn and the list of weapons were in the Sanskrit original, it is from China that we learn of the impact of the Durgā cult on the Buddhist Sarasvatī in India. Through knowledge of epic sources and the growth of the Durgā cult in India, on the other hand, we find, under the guise of Sarasvatī, unexpected Śākta influences reaching the shores of Japan and gaining widespread popularity, under modified form, to this day.

While the worship of Sarasvatī in India, at least during the period covered in this study, does not appear to have been related to politics, the same cannot be said of the situation in Japan, where the *Sutra of Golden Light* was held to be of tremendous political importance for the protection of the state. Although we know less about the sutra in China, it may be surmised that, as China was the model followed by Japan at the time, the sutra must have had some political significance in China as well. Not only was the sutra read in Japan for the express purpose of well-being in the state, and were state monasteries (*kokubunji*) connected with the sutra set up throughout the country, but a repentance ceremony associated with the sutra was practised both in China and in Japan, in the latter case also expressly for

the protection of the state. Chinese descriptions of the repentance ceremony, the earliest one found in a compilation of 607 (*Guoqing bailu*), specify amongst the images to be used in the ritual the image of Sarasvatī. Hence representations of the goddess would have been made in China in the context of the repentance ceremony at least by the sixth century, if not as early as the fifth. While no Chinese images of the period survive, we do have a Japanese sculpture of the eighth century, the earliest extant Japanese image of the goddess, that was in all likelihood used for the repentance ceremony of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. The first Japanese Sarasvatī images, then, representing Durgā under the guise of Sarasvatī, were politically inspired: they were produced under the auspices of the state for the protection of the country. Such images, furthermore, would not have been made independently for a cult specifically directed to the goddess, but rather in a wider context, together with other images representing figures from the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

The other principal form of Sarasvatī in Japan is the two-armed *biwa*-playing form connected with music, analogous to the *vinā*-playing Sarasvatī of India. It was introduced both to China and to Japan later than the eight-armed Durgā form. The lute-playing Sarasvatī appears among 408 other figures in the esoteric Womb World Mandala based on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* translated into Chinese in 725. The mandala itself was first brought to Japan from China by Kūkai in 806. Again, Sarasvatī does not have an independent existence here, but belongs within a much wider context, i.e. the mandala.

Both the eight-armed and the two-armed forms eventually acquired independent existences and followings of their own. The weapon-bearing figure was identified with the *kami* of food, and hence also of wealth, Ugajin, in the apocryphal *Benten sanbukyō* of the late Heian to the Kamakura period. Under the name Uga-Benzaiten, she is represented with

Ugajin as a human-headed white snake on her head, and some of her weapons are exchanged for a wish-fulfilling jewel and the key to the treasure house. The *biwa*-playing Sarasvatī has been worshipped in Japan as a deity of music from the Kamakura period onwards. Distinct types of images derived from it include the “Naked Benten” sculptures, as well as paintings of the exquisitely dressed and adorned goddess seated on a rock jutting out over the water’s edge, against a contrasting landscape of mountainous wilderness. When she appears amongst the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, furthermore, it is in this *biwa* -playing form that we usually find her.

Depicted differently through successive periods and in different environments, Sarasvatī, who began as a river in India, became also goddess of knowledge and music; through identification with Durgā was transformed into a Dharma-defending battle goddess; and eventually turned also into a goddess of wealth in Japan. Through the numerous functions gradually attributed to her in the course of her lengthy conceptual development, Sarasvatī addresses in different forms the needs of her worshippers in different times and environments. Through her ongoing metamorphosis, she maintains her appeal to peoples of different times, places, and social spheres.

My study of the conceptual development of Sarasvatī from India to Japan cannot, by its very nature, be fully comprehensive. It is a very wide subject, which I have tried to narrow down in various ways. For the time-frame, I have set a cut-off date of ca. 700 C.E. for India, and focused on the fifth to the eighth century in China, and on the seventh to the ninth century in Japan. I have chosen to deal with certain topics more closely than with others, for reasons which I have outlined. I have, for instance, concentrated on the eight-armed form of the goddess in China and Japan, the first to be introduced, and given less attention

to the two-armed form. I have not attempted to resolve every single problem that presented itself, which, in every case, would have required a considerable amount of further research. I have tried to address the problems I considered vital to my thesis, such as the identity of the eight-armed goddess, and have left others, such as the exchange of the zither for the lute in surviving Japanese mandala representations of the two-armed form, for future research. I have not discussed every implication of the data I have presented in terms of larger issues, such as the relationship of religion and the state in Tenpyō-period Japan, because, again, discussions of larger issues, if they are to be serious, informed discussions, rather than vague personal reflections, require considerable further research.

What I have tried to do, in my own small way, is to gather information and to assess it critically. I have questioned what has been taken for granted, I have tried to establish what can be known with certainty about the goddess, and I have outlined existing problems to be pursued in future research. In this way, I hope to have laid the groundwork, not only for further inquiries into questions concerning Sarasvatī/Benzaiten, but for consideration of larger issues.



## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGICAL CHART <sup>1</sup>

#### INDIA TEXTS AND RECORDS

1750-600 BCE Vedic literature  
RV, AV, *Yajur Veda*, *Brāhmaṇas*

400 BCE-CE Epic literature  
Mbh (-400 CE)

1st c. SGL preached in  
small kingdom (?)

200-650 early Puranic literature  
MkP (3rd-6th c.)  
MP (3rd c.-650)  
VāyuP (4th-5th c.)  
VdP (400-1000)

#### INDIA IMAGES

ca. 3rd c. Jain sculpture  
from Kankālī Tīlā

6th c. Los Angeles  
County Museum of  
Art sculpture from  
Uttar Pradesh

6th c. Sārnāth sculpture

#### CHINA TEXTS AND RECORDS

417 Chi. transl. of SGL by Dharmakṣema

1st half of 5th c. Xuangao performs an  
SGL repentance ritual to intervene in  
court strife

515-518 *Chu sanzangji ji* mentions SGL  
repentance ritual

552 Chi. transl. of SGL by Paramārtha

558 Emperor Chen Wudi studies SGL

563 Emperor Chen Wendi has a  
repentance ritual performed

561-578 Chi. transl. of SGL by  
Yaśogupta and Jñānagupta

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<sup>1</sup> This chart includes ONLY entries discussed in the dissertation. Pages 302-303 should be read facing one another, as should pp.304-305. For contents of Indian texts (with the exception of the SGL), see the table on pp.157-58. SGL=*Sutra of Golden Light* ; VāyuP=*Vāyu Purāna* ; VdP=*Viṣṇudharmottara Purāna*.

**INDIA  
TEXTS AND RECORDS**

**INDIA  
IMAGES**

**CHINA  
TEXTS AND RECORDS**

2nd half of 6th c. Zhiyi, on the basis of an SGL story, establishes 55 ponds for releasing fish; writes commentaries on Dharmakṣema's transl. of SGL and possibly also the SGL repentance ritual instructions of the *Guoqing bailu*

early 590s Zhiyi performs a 7-day SGL repentance ritual to cure the illness of consort Xiao

597 Baogui ed. of SGL

600-700 Jain bronzes of Ākoṭā and Vasantgarh

7th c. sculpture of Brahmāṇi, now in Museum of Baroda

703 Chi. transl. of SGL by Yijing

**CHINA  
IMAGES**

**JAPAN  
TEXTS AND RECORDS**

**JAPAN  
IMAGES**

677 Emperor Temmu sends  
messengers to expound SGL  
(Dharmakṣema transl. or  
Baogui ed.)

680 SGL expounded in palace  
and various temples

686 SGL read in palace by  
100 monks

692 SGL expounded in capital  
and 4 home provinces as a result  
of great floods

694 100 copies of SGL sent to  
provinces for reading during 1st  
month

696 SGL read

702 SGL expounded in 4  
home provinces when Emperor  
Mommu was ill

703 SGL read at 4 great  
monasteries

705 SGL read in 5 great  
monasteries to relieve suffering  
due to drought

**INDIA    INDIA  
TEXTS AND RECORDS**

**CHINA  
IMAGES**

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725 Chi. transl. of *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* by Śubhakarasiṃha and Yixing, almost contemporary with Yixing's commentary on the sūtra

before 735 *Qianshi Guanyin zaocizhu fayigui* by Śubhakarasiṃha (Da bian gongde amidst 28 attendants of Guanyin)

8th-10th c.  
Ellora images  
of Sarasvatī

**CHINA  
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725 Yijing's SGL (*Saishōōkyō*) first mentioned as alternate to older transl.(s)

728 chapters of older transl. SGL distributed to provinces for peace in the country

734 *Saishōōkyō* memorized by all who wish to enter religious order

737 monks and nuns of all provinces read *Saishōōkyō* 2-3 times each month;  
700 monks expound *Saishōōkyō* in palace for peace of state

738 *Saishōōkyō* to be read throughout country for peace

741 edicts summarizing plans for the establishment of state monasteries (*kokubunji*) connected with the *Saishōōkyō* and nunneries (*kokubunni*)

743 *Saishōōkyō* read at Tōdaiji for 7 days and nights for happiness and purity of country

745 *Saishōōkyō* read in all temples of the capital for 7 days due to earthquake

749 repentance rites performed and *Saishōōkyō* read in all temples in the country during 1st 7 days of year

early 8th c. sculpture of 8-armed Benzaiten of Hokkedō in Tōdaiji

753 Benzaiten painting(s) produced in sutra-copying hall of Tōdaiji

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805 Two-worlds  
mandala set  
commissioned by  
Huiguo for Kūkai

9th-10th c. ink sketch of  
8-armed Biancaitian from  
Dunhuang, now in British  
Museum (Stein Collection)

10th c. painting on paper  
of 8-armed Biancaitian  
and others from Dunhuang,  
now in Musée Guimet  
(Pelliot Collection)

764 repentance ritual performed  
in Kichijō kekasho of Tōdaiji for  
22 days

767 high priests of all great temples  
expounded *Saishōōkyō* and  
Kichijōten *keka* took place at all  
*kokubunji* during 1st 7 days of year

754 petition to set up  
Benzaiten altar; inscribed  
fragments of a banner and  
cloth that would have been  
placed below a Benzaiten  
image of Tōdaiji; other  
undated fragments with her  
name, including 4 sides of  
a tendon that would have  
been inserted into hub of  
canopy frame

764 offerings for 14 or 18  
Buddhist images used in  
the repentance ritual held in  
the Kichijō kekasho of  
Tōdaiji

780 Benzaiten sculpture in  
Shiōdō of Saidaiji

806 Chi. Two-worlds  
mandala set brought by  
Kūkai to Japan

810-824 Benzaiten image  
drawn on pillar of Tōkondō  
of Kōfukuji

829-833 Takao Mandala set  
of Jingōji

859-880 Saiin Mandala set  
of Tōji

## CHINA IMAGES

943 painting on silk  
of Guanyin sur-  
rounded by 14 figures,  
including 2-armed  
Biancaitian, from  
Dunhuang, now in  
Musée Guimet  
(Pelliot Collection)

10th c. painting on silk  
of Guanyin surrounded  
by 14 figures, including  
possibly (?) Biancaitian  
(2-armed), from  
Dunhuang, now in  
Musée Guimet  
(Pelliot Collection)

10th c. fragmentary  
painting of Guanyin  
and attendants,  
including 2-armed  
Biancaitian, from  
Dunhuang, now in  
Museum of Central  
Asian Antiquities  
in Delhi (Stein  
Collection)

## JAPAN TEXTS AND RECORDS

954 Kichijōin of Tōdaiji burnt  
down; Kichijō *keka* thence held  
in Kenjakuin (Hokkedō)

late Heian- to Kamakura-period  
*Benten sanbukyō* (Three Benten  
Sutras)

## JAPAN IMAGES

951 Two-worlds mandala  
figures, incl. Benzaiten,  
painted inside Daigoji  
pagoda in Kyoto

1170-80 *Besson zakki*  
illustration of 8-armed  
Benzaiten of Chikubushima

ca. 1212 Jōruriji *zushie* of  
8-armed Benzaiten, now in  
Tokyo University of Fine  
Arts

early Kamakura period  
sculpture of Daiben-  
kudokuten in Sanjūsan-  
gendō

1266 sculpture of *biwa*-  
playing "naked" Benzaiten  
of Tsurugaoka Hachimangū

**CHINA  
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1311-1348 *Keiran shūyōshū*  
mentions Chikubushima,  
Itsukushima, Enoshima,  
Tenkawa as places of worship  
of Benzaiten

13th c. sculpture of Uga-  
Benzaiten of Enoshima  
Jinja

2nd half of Kamakura  
period sculpture of Uga-  
Benzaiten from private  
collection, now in  
Tokyo National Museum

14th c. painting of Uga-  
Benzaiten with 15 *dōji* of  
Kotohiragū

14th c. painting of Uga-  
Benzaiten of Hōgonji,  
Chikubushima

14th c. sculpture of *biwa*-  
playing "naked" Benzaiten  
of Enoshima Jinja

14th c. painting of *biwa*-  
playing Benzaiten of  
Seikadō Bunko Museum

Muromachi-period  
paintings of snake-headed  
Tenkawa Benzaiten of  
Ishiyamadera and  
Nōman'in, Hasedera

Edo period popularity of  
Shichifukujin

2000 Saifukuji 18.5 m Uga-  
Benzaiten



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## ABBREVIATIONS

### Sanskrit Texts (Bibliography A.)

AB	<i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>
AV	<i>Atharva Veda</i>
BAU	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
DM	<i>Devi Māhātmya</i>
JB	<i>Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa</i>
KB	<i>Kauṣitaki Brāhmaṇa</i>
KpS	<i>Kapiṣṭhala Kāṭha Saṃhitā</i>
KS	<i>Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā</i>
Mbh	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
MkP	<i>Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa</i>
MP	<i>Matsya Purāṇa</i>
MS	<i>Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā</i>
PB	<i>Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (or Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa)</i>
RV	<i>Ṛg Veda</i>
ŚB	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
TB	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
TS	<i>Taittirīya Saṃhitā</i>
VS	<i>Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā</i>

### Chinese and Japanese Buddhist Texts (Bibliography A.)

T.	<i>Taishō shinshū Dai-zōkyō.</i>
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### Other (Bibliography B.)

EVP	<i>Études Védiques et Pāṇinéennes [= Renou 1955-69]</i>
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## A. Text Editions Used

My translation of Chinese and Japanese titles appears in parentheses in roman script and without quotation marks. In the case of monographs and articles already supplied with an English title, this has been indicated by italics for monographs and quotation marks for articles. Translations of primary sources are noted here only if they have been cited in the main text.

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## **ILLUSTRATIONS**



Fig.1 *Yakṣi* on a stupa pillar from Bhārhut (Indian Museum, Calcutta).  
Second century B.C.E. Red sandstone.



Fig.2 Panel depicting the Indraśālā cave with Pañcaśikha playing the *vīṇā* on the left, stupa railing from Bhārhut (Indian Museum, Calcutta). Second century B.C.E. Red sandstone.



Fig.3 Part of incised scene on a vase from Gondla, Himachal Pradesh (British Museum).  
First century B.C.E. Bronze. Ht. of vase 15.2 cm.



Fig.4 Modern Sarasvati carved on a defaced second- or third-century C.E Buddhist image from Ghantashala, Andhra Pradesh (Śiva Temple). Marble.





Fig.5 Female musician from Gandhāra (Lahore Museum).  
Early centuries C.E. Stone. Ht. 23 cm.



Fig.6 Female musician from Swāt (Peshawar Museum).  
Early centuries C.E. Stone. Ht. 38 cm.



Fig.7 Male musician from Yusufzai (L. Dames, Berlin).  
Early centuries C.E. Stone.

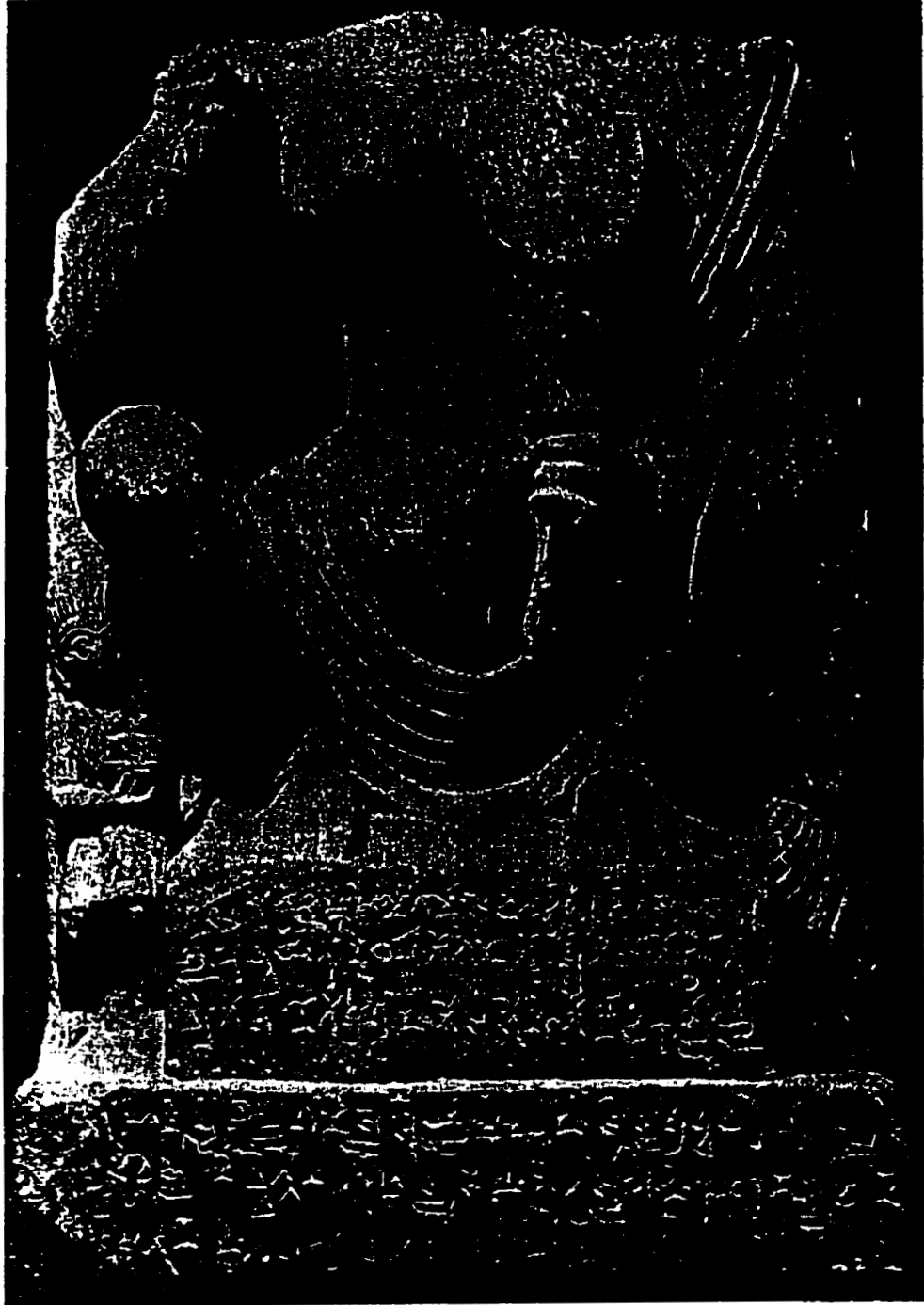


Fig.8 Jain Sarasvatī from Kaṅkāli Tīlā, ancient site near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh (State Museum of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Ca. third century C.E. Red sandstone. Ht. 57 cm.



Fig.9 Obverse of Samudragupta lyrist type coin showing the king playing the *vina* (Lingen Collection, The Netherlands). R. ca. 350-375. Gold. Diameter 2.20 cm. Thickness 1 mm.



Fig.10 Reverse of Samudragupta lyrist type coin showing Lakṣmī with fillet and horn of plenty (Lingen Collection, The Netherlands). R. ca. 350-375. Gold. Diameter 2.20 cm. Thickness 1 mm.



Fig. 11 Reverse of Samudragupta battle-axe type coin showing Lakṣmī with fillet and horn of plenty (Private collection, Basel). R. ca. 350-375. Gold. Diameter 2.1 cm.



Fig.12 Obverse of Samācāradeva *rājalilā* type coin showing the king seated at ease (Indian Museum, Calcutta). R. ca. 550-575. Gold. Diameter 2.03 cm.



Fig.13 Reverse of Samācāradeva *rājalilā* type coin showing a female figure standing amidst lotuses with a *haṃsa* below (Indian Museum, Calcutta). R. ca. 550-575. Gold. Diameter 2.03 cm.



Fig.14 Sarasvati sculpture from Uttar Pradesh (Los Angeles County Museum of Art).  
Sixth century. Sandstone. Ht. 83.8 cm.





Fig.15 Sarasvatī sculpture from Sāmāth, Uttar Pradesh (Sāmāth Museum of Archaeology).  
Sixth century. Reddish Chunar sandstone. Ht. 35.5 cm.



Fig.16 Sarasvati from Ākoṭā. Gujarat.  
Ca. 600-620. Bronze. Ht. 26.67 cm.



Fig.17 Sarasvatī from Ākotā, Gujarat (Baroda Museum).  
Late seventh century. Bronze. Ht. 31.24 cm.



Fig. 18 Sarasvatī from Ākoṭā, Gujarat.  
Ca. 700. Bronze. Ht. 13.46 cm.



Fig.19 Sarasvatī from Vasantgarh, Rajasthan (Mahāvīrasvāmī Temple, Pindawara).  
Ca. 700. Bronze. Ht. 31.24 cm.



Fig.20 Brahmani from northern Gujarat (Baroda Museum).  
Sixth to seventh century. Stone. Ht. 60.96 cm.



Fig.21 Shrine of the river goddesses in the left courtyard of cave 16 (Kailāsanātha) of Ellora, Maharashtra. Eighth to ninth century. Stone.



Fig.22 Sarasvati in the shrine of the river goddesses of cave 16 of Ellora, Maharashtra.  
Eighth to ninth century. Stone.





Fig.23 Sarasvati sculpture from Mathura, Uttar Pradesh (British Museum).  
Tenth century. Stone.



Fig.24 Eight-armed Benzaiten from the Hokkedō of Tōdaiji in Nara.  
Eighth century. Clay. Ht. 219 cm.



Fig.25A Buddha Śākyamuni (Shijia) with Vaiśravaṇa (Pishamentian),  
Biancaitian, and Śrī (Jixiangtian) from Dunhuang (Musée Guimet).  
Tenth century. Painting on paper. 27 x 43 cm.



Fig.25B Detail of fig.25A. Three-headed, eight-armed Biancaitian.



Fig.26 Three-headed, eight-armed Biancaitian from Dunhuang (British Museum).  
Ninth to tenth century. Ink on paper. 29.7 cm x 43 cm.



Fig.27 Eight-armed Benzaiten surrounded by Hārīti (Kariteimon), Dr̥dhā Pṛthivī (Kenrochijin), and two divine generals (Sañci [Shōryochi] and Mañibhadra [Hōken]) on the back wall of a Śrī (Kichijōten) miniature shrine (*zushie*) from Jōruriji near Nara (Tokyo University of Arts). Ca. 1212. Colour on wood. 103.5 x 62.7 cm.



Fig.28 Eight-armed Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from Mathura, Uttar Pradesh (Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, no.199). Late third century. Stone.

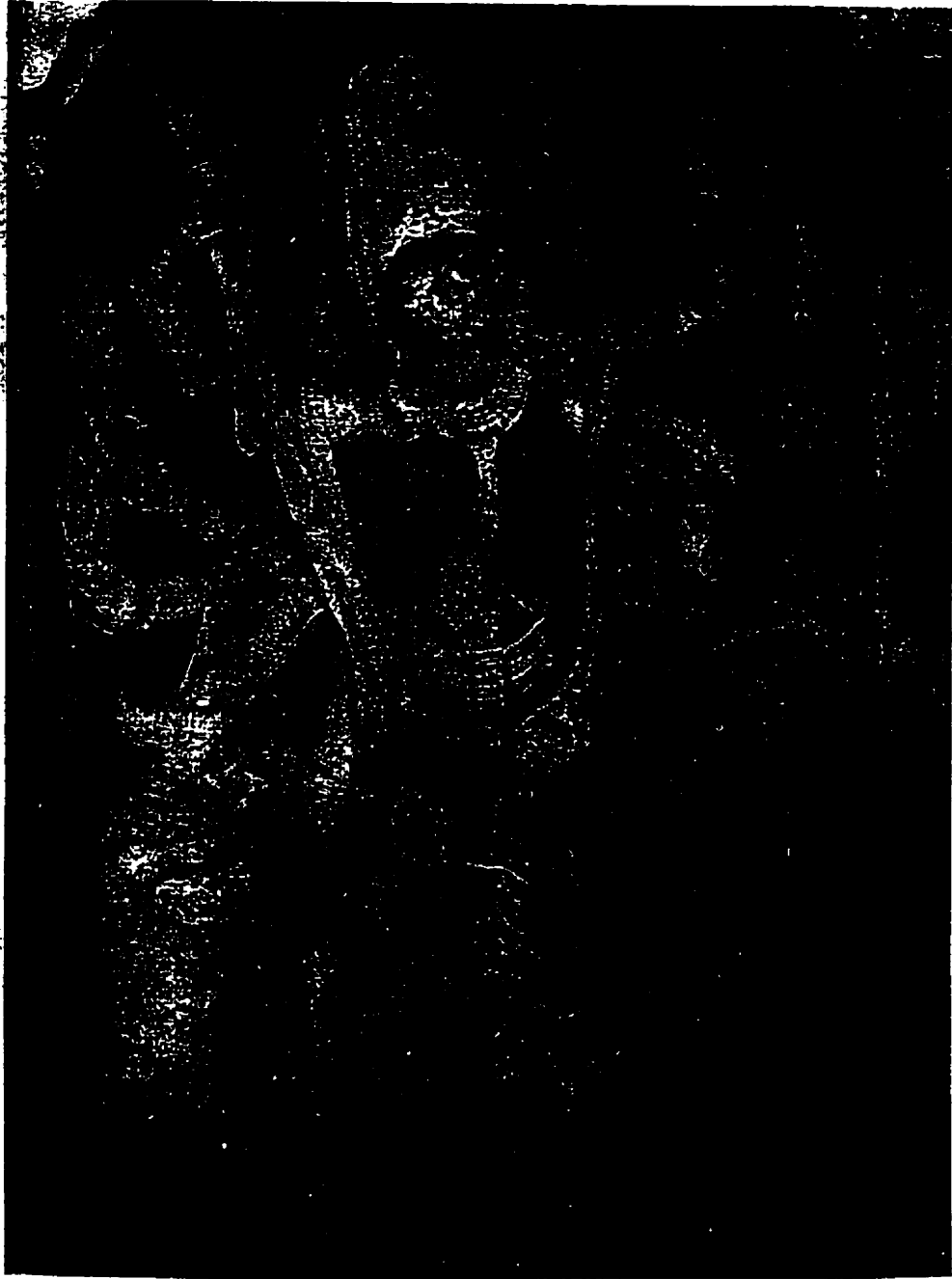


Fig.29 Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from Durgā Temple in Aihole, Karnataka.  
Sixth century. Stone. Ht. 125 cm.





Fig.30 Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Maṇḍapa of Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu. Seventh century. Granite.



Fig.31 Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from Alampur, Andhra Pradesh (Alampur Museum).  
Eighth century. Stone. 81 x 65 cm.



Fig.32 Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from Gardez, Afghanistan  
(used to be in the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul).  
Seventh or eighth century. Marble. Ht. ca. 60 cm.



Fig.33 Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from Semarang, Central Java.  
Eighth century. Stone. Ht. 77 cm.

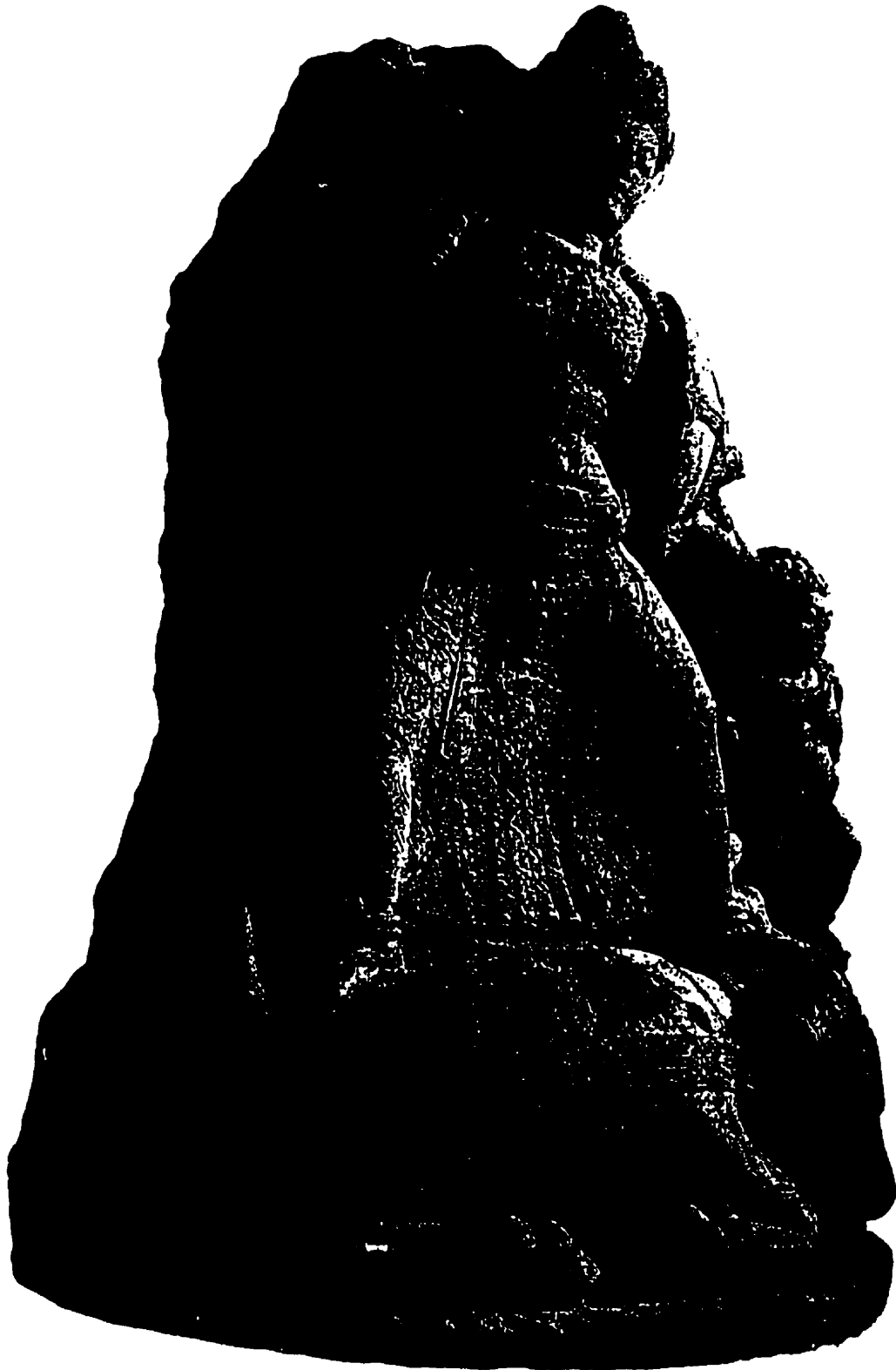


Fig.34 Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardini from a Durgā Temple in Singasāri,  
eastern Java (Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden).  
Thirteenth century. Volcanic stone. Ht. 157 cm.

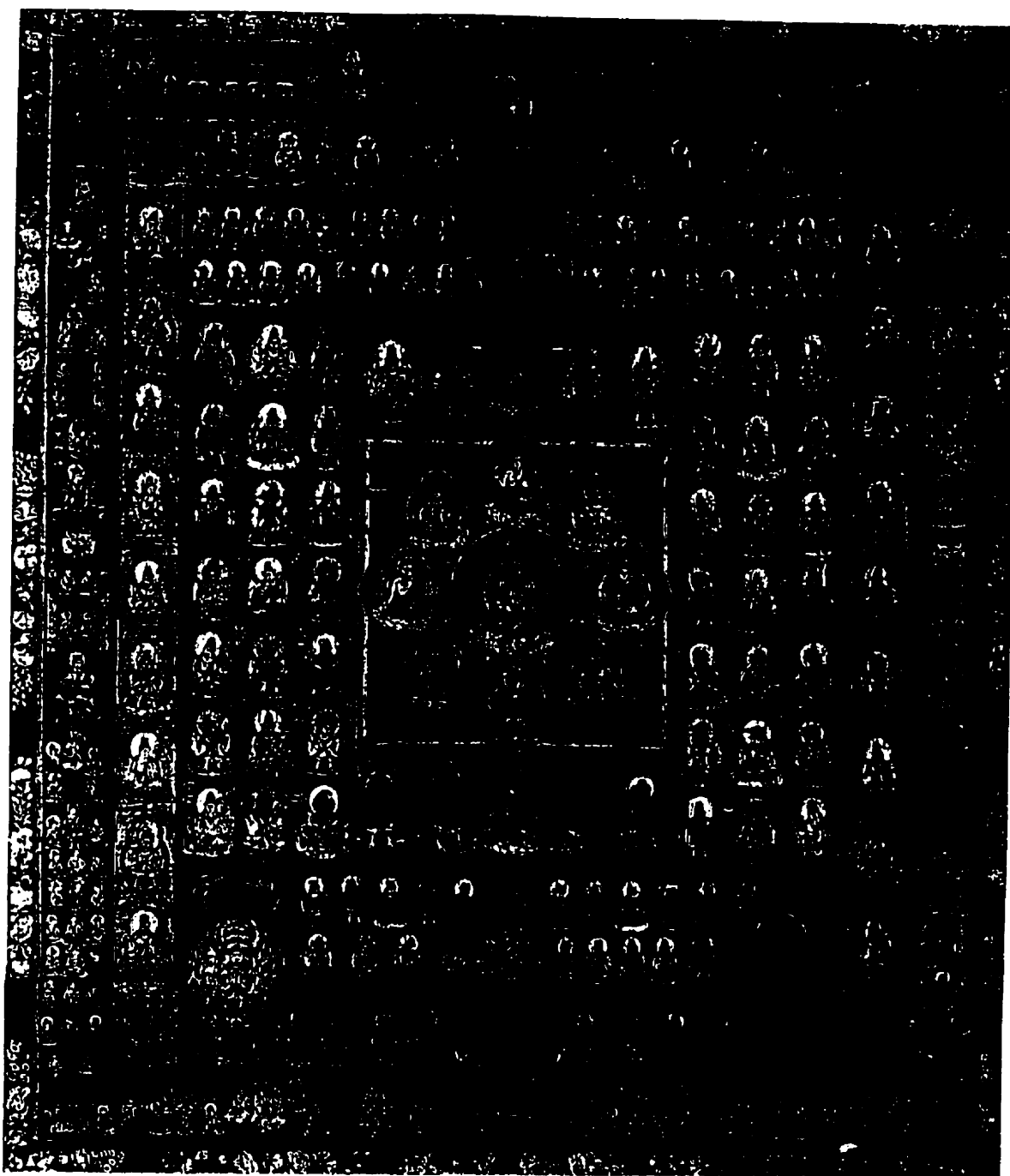


Fig.35A Womb World Mandala, Saiin Mandala of Tōji in Kyoto.  
859-880. Colour on silk. 183.6 x 164.2 cm.



Fig.35B Detail of fig.35A. Sarasvatī as the Wonderful Sounds Deity (Jap. Myōonten) in the Womb World Mandala, Sain Mandala.



Fig.36 Sarasvatī as Myōonten in the Womb World Mandala represented in the five-storey pagoda of Daigoji in Kyoto. 951. Colour on wood.





Fig.37 Sarasvatī as Myōonten from Tsurugaoka Hachimangū in Kamakura.  
1266. Wood. Ht. 95.7 cm.

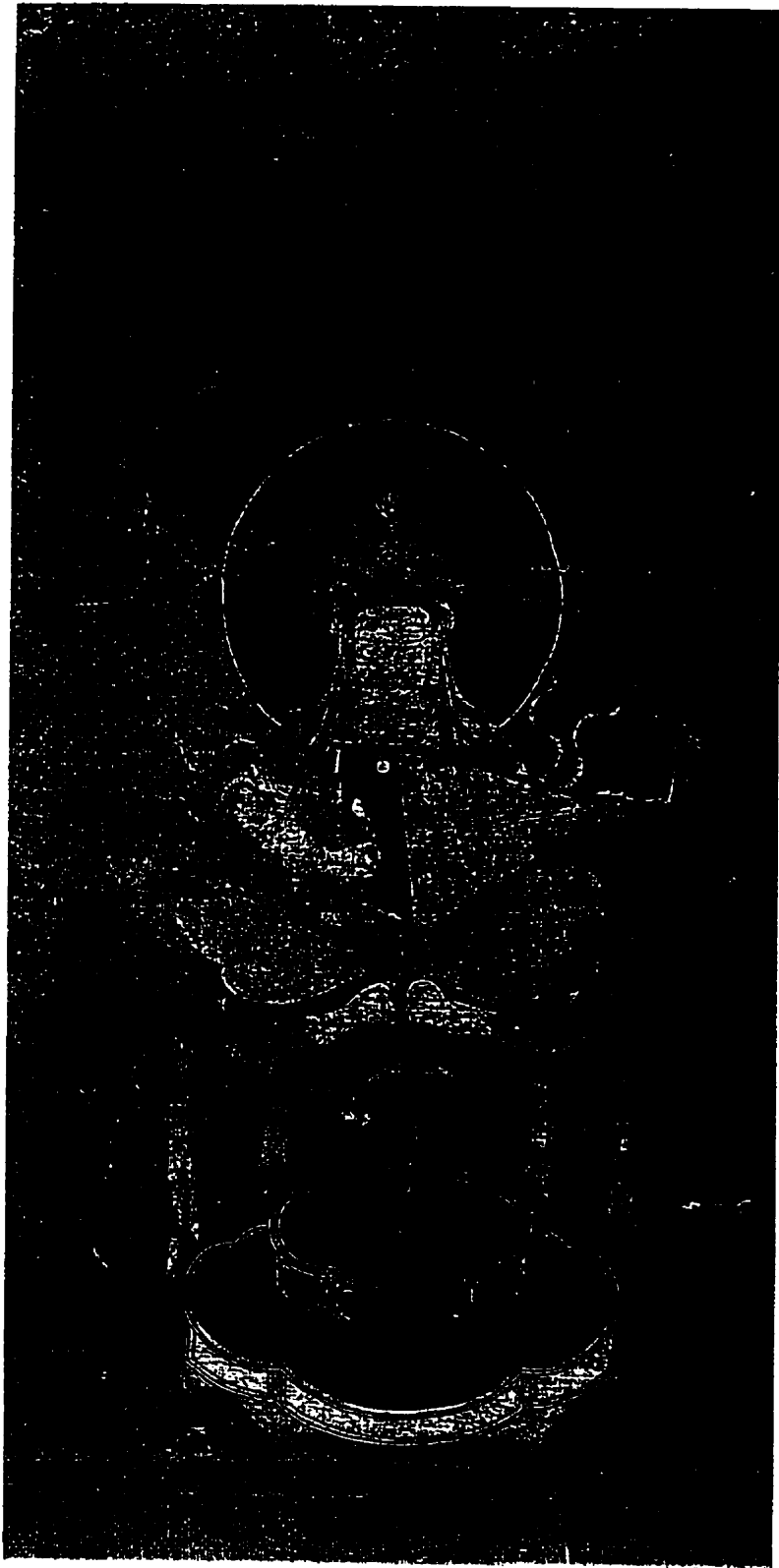


Fig.38 Sarasvatī as Myōonten from Ninnaji in Kyoto.  
1407. Colour on silk. 76.6 x 40.8 cm.

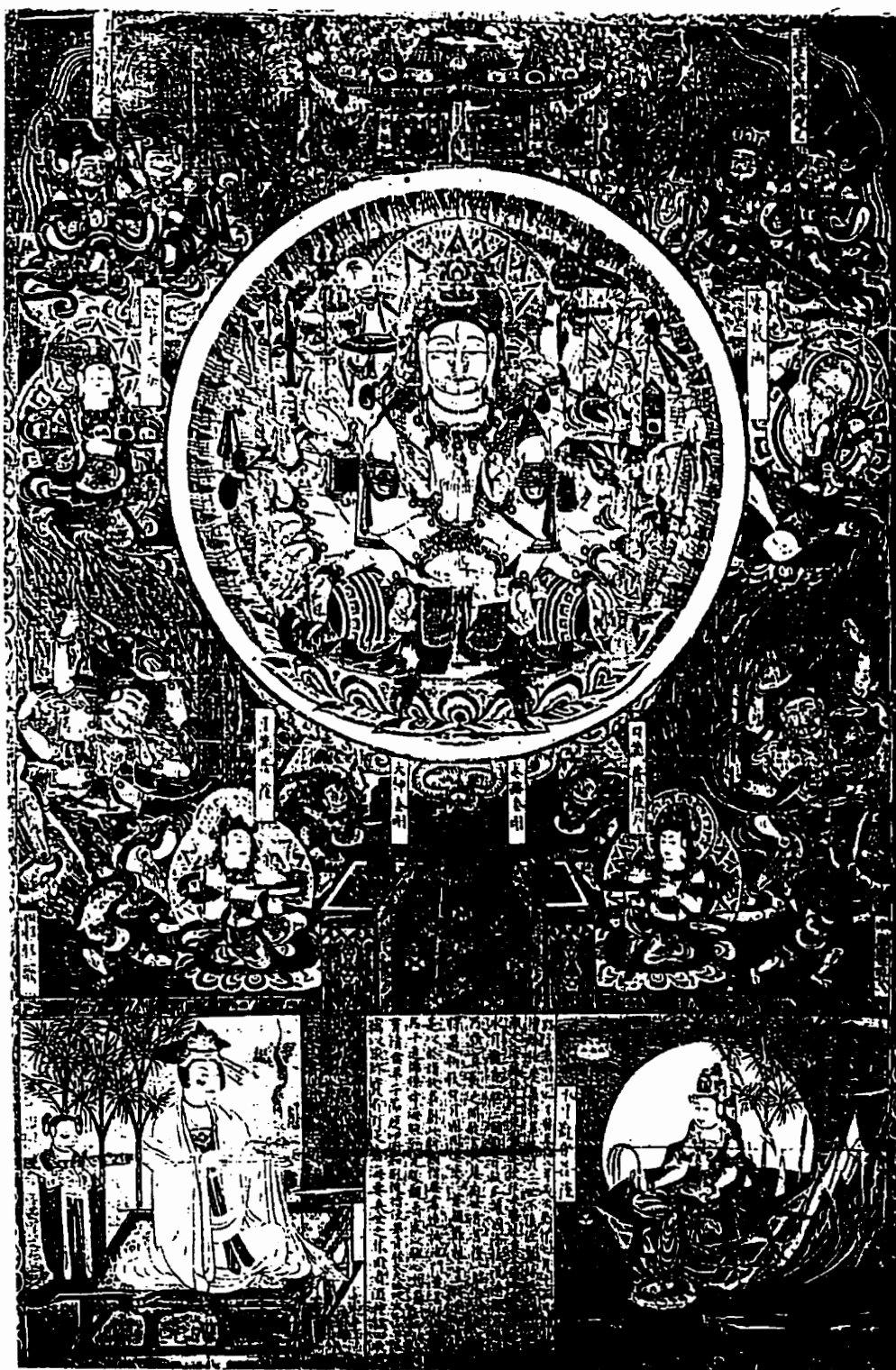


Fig.39 Thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Avalokitesvara (Guanyin) surrounded by fourteen figures, including Sarasvati (Da Biancai tiannü), from Dunhuang (Pelliot Collection, Musée Guimet). 943. Colour on silk. 123.5 x 84.2 cm.



Fig.40 Eleven-headed, ten-armed Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) surrounded by fourteen figures, including one identified as either Sarasvatī (Biancaitian) or Śrī (Gongdetian), from Dunhuang (Pelliot Collection, Musée Guimet), 10th century. Colour on hemp. 142.5 x 98.8 cm.

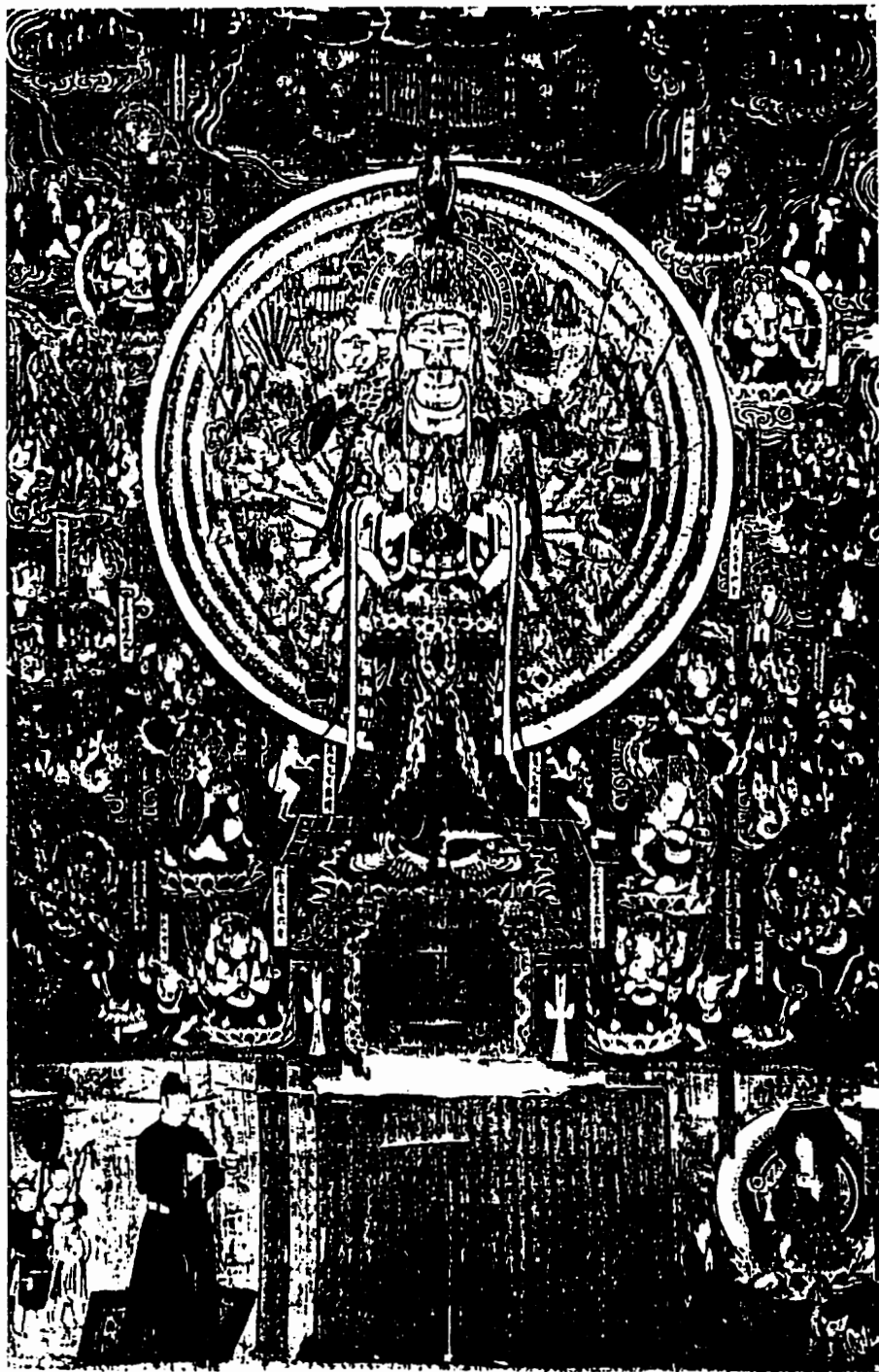


Fig.41A Thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) surrounded by thirty-two figures, including Śrī (Gongdetian), from Dunhuang (Pelliot Collection, Musée Guimet). 981. Colour on silk. 189.4 x 124 cm.



Fig.41B Detail of fig.41A. Śrī (Gongdetian).

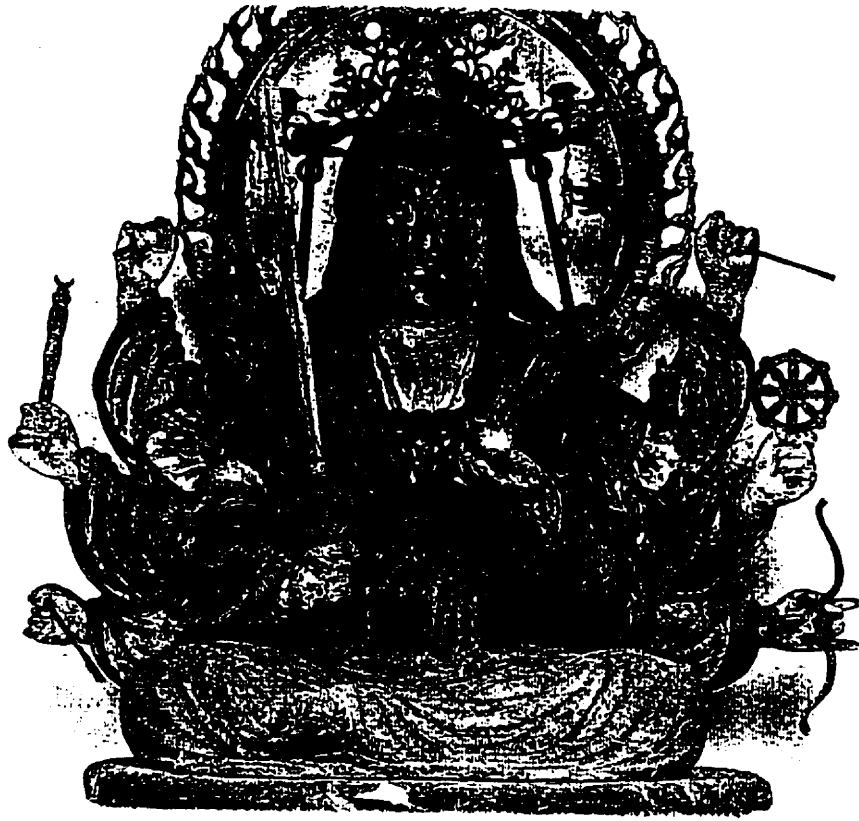


Fig.42 Uga-Benzaiten from Enoshima Jinja near Kamakura.  
Mid-Kamakura Period. Wood. Ht. 59.3 cm.



Fig.43 Uga-Benzaiten from a private collection (Tokyo National Museum).  
Second half of the Kamakura Period. Ht. 31.3 cm.





Fig.44 Benzaiten Jūgodōji from Kotohiragū, Kagawa Prefecture.  
Late Kamakura Period. Colour on silk. 129.1 x 52.4 cm.



Fig.45 Benzaiten Jūgodōji from Hōgonji on Chikubushima on Lake Biwa.  
Nanbokuchō Period. Colour on silk. 80 x 42.1 cm.



Fig.46 Ugajin from Chōkenji near Kyoto.  
Edo Period. Wood. Ht. ca. 50 cm.

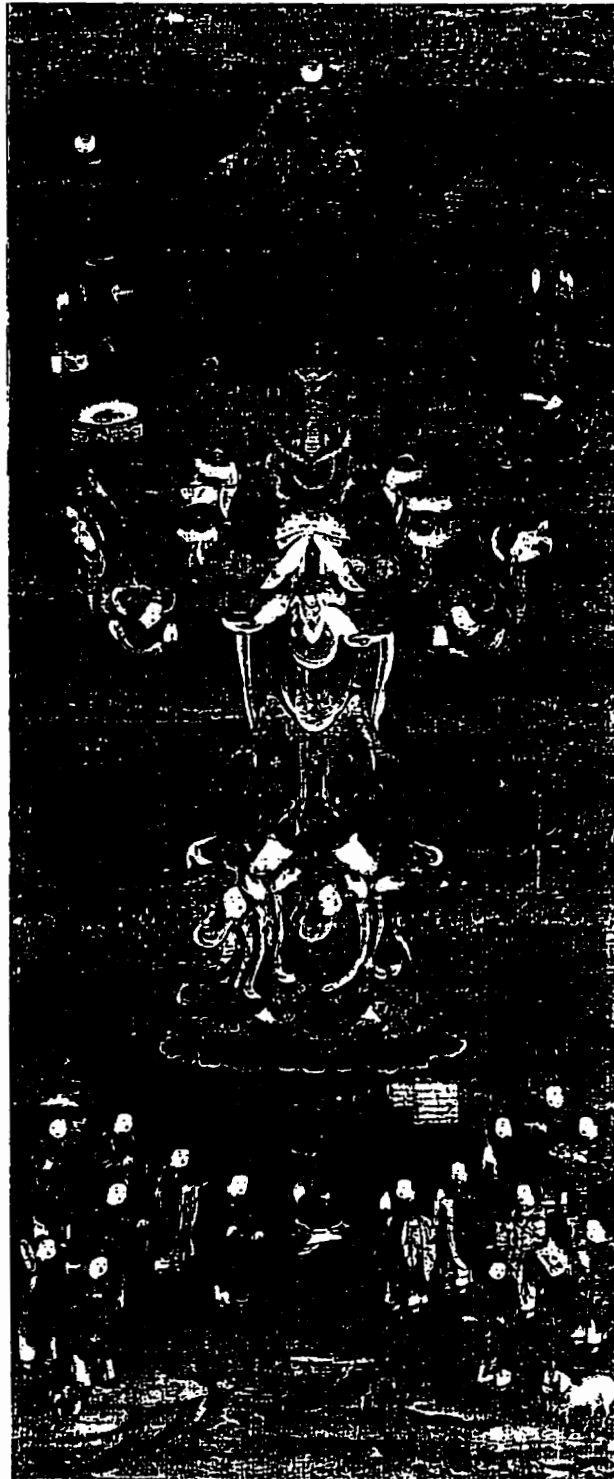


Fig.47 Tenkawa Benzaiten mandala image from Ishiyamadera, Shiga Prefecture.  
Muromachi Period. Colour on silk. 105 x 38.4 cm.



Fig.48 Naked Benten from Enoshima Jinja near Kamakura.  
Nanbokuchō Period. Wood. Ht. 26.3 cm.  
Photograph taken before the restoration of 1927.



Fig.49 Benzaiten from the Seikadō Bunko Museum, Tokyo.  
Nanbokuchō Period. Colour on silk. 156.1 x 59.7 cm.



Fig.50 Shichifukujin Takarabune (Treasure ship of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune) by Hiroshige (1797-1858) from a private collection. Woodblock print.

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Fig.51 Fuji Film advertising of 1999 for New Year's cards with photographs.