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Review

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## BOOK NOTE

*Atharvaveda-Parīṣiṣṭa, Chapters 21–29: Introduction, Translation and Notes.*  
By LOURENS PETER VAN DEN BOSCH. Groningen: VRB–Drukkerijen, 1978.  
Pp. 129.

L. P. Van den Bosch, a pupil of J. Gonda, has attempted, in this masterpiece of philological scholarship, a rearrangement of the most difficult chapters of the Atharvaveda Parīṣiṣṭa (AP) and a subtle translation and introduction to it. Since the whole AP abounds in *termini technici*, one can easily guess the huge problems with which the translator of this text is confronted. In these chapters, in particular, references are made to odd sacrificial tools and to plants and animals whose equivalent in Western classifications is often hard to establish.

However, it is not because of the apparent finesse displayed by the scholar in his translation that I undertook a review of this book. Chapters 21–29 of the AP are extremely important insofar as they describe practices of *abhicāra* or black magic and meteorological omens which, so far as I know, are never pursued in such detail in other writings of the same kind.

The admitted date of composition of the archetype of the different manuscripts of the AP is the fourteenth century. However, the author was able to track different traditions down to the ninth to tenth centuries (omens given by flames), to the seventh to tenth centuries (*abhicāra*), and even to the first to second centuries.

References to *abhicāra* practices occur very often in the AP. In chapter 21 (3.1–2, p. 9), treating of the composition of the small sacrificial spoon, it is said that “in (the case of) a ceremony for malevolent purposes (*abhicāra*) one should make a small (sacrificial) spoon consisting of iron. If one wants to ruin an adversary (*uccāṭana*) it should be made of bell-metal (*kāṃsya*); if one wishes to get the will of another person under control (*vaśyakarman*) it

should be made of *asvattha* wood; but especially in (the case of) a ritual practice for exciting enmity (*vidveṣa*), the small (sacrificial) spoon is traditionally said to be made of *nimba* wood (*Azadirachta indica* A. Juss.).”

The form of the fire pit also determines the goal of the sacrificial action (chap. 25,1.9–11): “The triangular one (should be used) in a ceremony for malevolent purposes (*abhicāra*), and the one having the form of the half-moon, in a ceremony which aims to get under control the will of another person (*vaśya*), etc.; the hexagonal (fire-pit should be used) in a (magical) ceremony having for its object the destruction (of an enemy) (*māraṇa*), etc., and the octangular one in a ritual practice for exciting enmity (*vidveṣa*)” (AP 25,1.11, p. 88).

The choice of the kindling stick equally determines whether a sacrificial ceremony is used for a beneficent or a malevolent purpose (AP 26,3.3 ff.): a kindling stick

which is nine *āṅgulas* long and anointed with sesamum-oil, should be employed in a ceremony for malevolent purposes (*abhicārika*). . . . Only (that kindling-stick) (which is employed) in combination with honey (which is made) of a small shoot which is seven *āṅgulas* (long) is considered to be good in a ceremony aiming to ruin an adversary; . . . In a ritual practice for exciting enmity (one should employ a kindling-stick) which is anointed with sharp sesamum-oil, which is split in two and six *āṅgulas* (long); . . . In a ceremony which aims at sowing discord (*kalahakarman*) one should sacrifice wet (pieces of fire-wood) together with dry ones. . . . One will cause enmity by means of trees which are pungent (*kaṭuka*); there will be death (*māraṇa*) by means of trees with thorns. One should know that the *kakubha* (*Terminalia arjuna* Bedd.), the *kaṭabha*, the *kauvirāla*, and also the *kauhaka* tree, (further) the bamboo-cane (*vamśa*), the *vibhītaka* (*Terminalia bellerica* Roxb.), and the *śigru* (*Moringa pterygosperma* Gaertn.) tree, are suitable (in a ceremony) for ruining an adversary. In a ceremony which aims to paralyse (*stambhana*) the whole army one should designate the *jaya* plant for the sake of victory (*vijaya*). . . .” [AP 26,3.5; 4.1.2.6; 5.2.3.4, pp. 93–94]

The position of the hands when performing the oblation is equally important: “With three fingers one should offer food, no sesamum-seeds or grains of rice, when one has something in view (*prayojayet*) which is connected with ceremonies for malevolent purposes (*abhicārika*) at that time. One who performs a ceremony for malevolent purposes (should do it) always with the left hand and with the three normal fingers; the spear (*śūla*) is indicated by (the number) three; by means of this one will destroy the enemy” (AP 28,2.2.3, pp. 105–6).

Some of the practices of black magic are already described by the *Kauśikāsūtra*. In the AP, they occur side by side with rituals used for different purposes (appeasement, wealth, etc.), in a context where much attention is paid to omens concerning either the preparatory phases of the ritual (e.g., knots in the kindling stick, etc.) or the ritual performance itself (the characteristic of the flames of the sacrificial fire, etc.). In particular, omissions and imperfections in performing the sacrifice are said to produce contrary effects either upon the performer itself or upon the person(s) on behalf of whom the sacrifice has been set up.

The distinctive features of Indian black magic in comparison with Western black magic are easy to establish. On the one hand, black magic has not, in the AP and kindred writings, a repulsive character. It is mentioned along with any other purpose the fire oblation is meant to obtain. On the other hand, *abhicāra* seems always to be the result of a sacrificial practice and evil effects are obtained by using specific tools and materials before and during the fire oblation. This is different not only from the Western magic recipes, but also from the power of imagination which plays such an important role in Renaissance magic. In *abhicāra* practices one faces a typical Hindu product, connected with ancient Vedic sacrifice.

L. P. Van den Bosch, a consummate scholar in Indology, has once again called the attention of historians of religions to the almost forgotten AP; in fact, since the imperfect edition of Bolling and Von Negelein in 1909, no attempt has been made to render these difficult pieces into English. [IOAN PETRU CULIANU, *University of Groningen*]