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SUMMARY

The main goal of this thesis is to provide a new critical edition of the three ‘new’ chapters (anuvākas) contained in book (kānda) 17 of the Paippalādasaṃhitā (PS) of the Atharvaveda (AV).

The AV is second only to the Ṛgveda (RV) in importance, extent and antiquity among the texts belonging to the literature of Vedic India. While the RV is a collection of praise hymns addressed to various gods, recited during solemn rites, the AV mostly contains charms, spells, prayers, and rituals belonging to the domestic and popular spheres. The AV comprises 20 books and appears in two recensions (saṃhitās), the Śaunaka and the Paippalāda, which in large part overlap. While the Śaunaka recension has survived thanks to both oral and manuscript transmission, and has been widely edited and studied, the PS was known to have survived only in a single Kashmirian Śāradā manuscript (ms.) until a series of new manuscripts (mss.) were discovered in Odisha in 1957–60. Since then, new mss. have emerged and scholars have set out to critically edit the text.

Book 17 of the PS comprises eight anuvākas. These were not collected on a thematic basis, but on the grounds that they are all texts of a considerable length, as opposed to the shorter compositions found in most other books. Of these eight anuvākas, five have a parallel version in the Śaunaka recension, whereas three (anuvākas 3, 5, and 6) lack a parallel and have never been translated before. These three chapters are the focus of this thesis.

The methodology and editorial policy is laid out in the introduction. Besides the Kashmirian ms. written in the Śāradā script (indicated with the siglum K), five mss. written in the Odia script (indicated with the sigla V122, Ji, Pa, V71, JM) and belonging to the Odisha branch of the text’s transmission have been collated in addition to the three used in Dipak Bhattacharya’s 2011 editio princeps (Ma, Ja, Mā). Evidence is put forward for the existence of two separate sub-branches within the Odisha tradition with respect to book 17: a first sub-branch (Oa) comprises mss. Ma, Ja, V122, Ji, and Pa; a second sub-branch (Ob) comprises mss. Mā, V71, and JM. The introduction also includes a study of the spelling variants of the word duṣvápnya.

The main body of the thesis is divided into three parts, each one devoted to one of the three anuvākas. For each metrical stanza or prose paragraph, the edited text is presented and is followed by an English translation (the stanzas are also followed by a metrical analysis). Below the translation, the critical apparatus is provided. The apparatus is implicit in that only the words for which variants are found in the mss. are reported, but every single entry in the apparatus is explicit in that all the variants of all mss. are reported. The apparatus is followed by a philological commentary.

Part I is devoted to anuvāka 3. This text is the longest AV collection of spells aimed at repelling Sadānuvās, a category of female demons who were believed to attack women and children, threatening pregnancy and birth. The edition of the text is preceded by an introduction that describes the nature of these demons and highlights the rhetorical techniques that the Vedic exorcists employed to ensure the efficacy of their verbal exorcisms.

Part II is devoted to anuvāka 5. This text is a composite collection of curses against enemies, spells to exorcise poor sleep (duṣvápnya), and curses to send poor sleep to an enemy. The largest part of the text is composed in yajus-style prose, intermixed with a few metrical verses. The edition is preceded by an introduction that describes the characteristics of the yajus-style prose in which the text is composed.

Part III is devoted to anuvāka 6. This is a single composition in brāhmaṇa-style prose that illustrates a so-called anadudvavrata, ‘the observance of the draft-ox’, which forms the Vedic prototype of the later pāśupatavrata, and requires the initiate to imitate the behaviour of a bull. The texts also introduces an aetiological myth according to which the god Indra was the first to perform
this observance. The edition is preceded by an introduction containing a summary of the myth and an overview of the characteristics of the brāhmaṇa-style prose in which the text is composed.

Two appendices further expand on the topic of Part III.

Appendix I is a study on the ideology and praxis of the above-mentioned anaḍudvrata, the characteristics of which are traced back to the initiatic practices of the Indo-European Männerbund. By highlighting the socio-economic factors that drove the development of the Männerbund from an institution devoted to the education of the youth (Jugendbund) to a warrior and ascetic brotherhood (Gefolgschaft) that provided a means of social mobility to marginalised people, this study aims to uncover the dynamics that led to the re-elaboration of archaic Indo-European cultural practices into Vedic Vrātya culture and later Śaiva asceticism.

Appendix II is devoted to the so-called Anaḍutsūkta, ‘the hymn to the draft-ox’ (ŚS 4.11 ~ PS 3.25), a second Vedic text that deals with the anaḍudvrata. This study aims to provide a new critical edition of the PS version, and present a new interpretation of the hymn based on both the comparison with PS 17 anuvāka 6 and the data from the cultural reconstruction outlined in Appendix I, uncovering the connections between the anaḍudvrata and the celebrations of the solstices: the Gharma ritual at the summer solstice and the celebrations of the twelve vrātyā nights at the winter solstice.