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II. SANSKRIT *BRÁHMAN* AND SEMITIC *BRK*

The Sanskrit concept of *bráhman* is one of the most significant concepts in the Indian tradition. Yet its etymology is uncertain. Fully six different etymologies have been offered for this term. All are elaborate, and none has obtained general support. In the stead of these, this paper proposes a fully transparent connection with Semitic *BRK*. Both forms are used to mean “prayer” and “force”, both are used as the basis of forms which mean “priest”, both have come to be used to express concepts central to each tradition, both refer to the realm of the sacred. The phonology of the two forms is compatible. Such a connection would be part of a shared Indic-Ancient Near Eastern tradition buttressed by trade. Semitic *BRK* shows a wider semantic spread than Sanskrit *bráhman*, and is indicated throughout Afro-Asiatic. Other points of comparison are also suggested. It is argued that these may prove to be a fruitful source of research, if engaged in with care and respect for the separate integrity of the two traditions, which can help us better understand the usages of the concept in each of the traditions. Such research may also throw further light on the origins of monotheism in both India and the Ancient Near East. On account of this paper’s reaching out to two audiences, the writer has relied heavily on authoritative quotations from major scholars in each of the two fields to outline the meaning of the respective concepts in both Indic and Semitic.

1. The Sanskrit concept of *brāhman* has been referred to by Heinrich Zimmer 1951: 74-5 as “the most important single concept of Hindu religion and philosophy”.¹ Arthur Berriedale Keith 1925: 445 matter of factly lauded the Indian creation of the conception of *brāhman* as a cosmic principle as an extremely “fruitful source of philosophy”. In this concept, the 9th c. A.D. Indian philosopher Śāṅkara found a powerful weapon with which to explain the whole of the doctrine of the late Vedic *Upaniṣads* and the universe itself. Much of Indian philosophy in fact can be understood to revolve around explanation and interpretation of the nature of *brāhman*, understood as the basis of the universe.

The *Upaniṣadic* equation which identifies the whole of the universe with the *brāhman* of the universe, and in turn identifies the *brāhman* of the universe with the individual self, perhaps expressed most eloquently by Uddālaka to his son Śvetaketu in *Chāndogyopaniṣad* 6.9-16, has had an important influence in recent Western thought. Uddālaka’s words:

That which is the finest essence – this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Ātman [the individual self]. That art thou, Śvetaketu.

(Translation of W. Norman Brown 1966: 35.)

Schopenhauer, for instance, quoted often the *tat tvam asi* “that art thou” of this passage, which had become the confession of faith for countless Indians. He did not stand alone in finding in the *Upaniṣads* a welcome and refreshing draft from the Judeo-Christian conception of God. We find the influence also in Fichte, Hegel, and Hermann Hesse, for instance, and in the writings of American Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson whose famous poem “Brahma” lauds his understanding of the concept.

1. This paper is based on an observation made when reading something on the meaning of proto-Semitic *BRK* in Dr. Ernest Bender’s office in 1965-6. I would like to thank Todd Thompson of the New York Public Library’s Oriental Division for help with the Semitic material. The writer takes full responsibility for the view expressed in this paper. It is not in any way to be understood to reflect on the opinions of these two scholars. Any mistakes are fully my own. This paper is in series with Stephan Levitt 1986.

In post-*Upaniṣadic* Indian thought striving for reunion with the *bráhmaṇ* or self of the universe, the oversoul as it has been described at times, is the ultimate goal of religious endeavor. The form occurs in Sanskrit as a masculine, *brahmán*, which is used to refer to the creator god and ultimate grandfather of us all in the early Hindu tripartite division of divinity, the *trimūrti*, and as a neuter, *bráhmaṇ*, in which it is the self of the universe, union with which is conceived in post-*Upaniṣadic* thought to be *saccidananda* "reality, pure consciousness, and bliss". While *Brahmán* (most often in English, the god *Brahmā*) is hardly worshipped at all as a deity in India in his masculine form, there being perhaps only two temples devoted to him in all India, and the only textual references to such worship being in early Buddhist texts, he is worshipped through introspection and meditation, from the neuter vantage, by every Hindu ascetic.

The concept of *bráhmaṇ* is one which has been explained by different Hindu philosophers and by different modern interpreters from different vantages and in different ways. In this paper, on account of the wealth of excellent explanations of the concept from its different vantages, I will rely heavily on what has been written previously to outline the concept. The opinions expressed are based on years of reflection and research, and are on this account far more authoritative and eloquent than anything that I might write here.

2. A good Western popular interpretation of *bráhmaṇ* which combines explications of the concept from different sources can be found in John Dowson 1879 (10th ed., 1961): 56.

Brahma, Brahman (neuter). The supreme soul of the universe, self-existent, absolute, and eternal, from which all things emanate, and to which all return. This divine essence is incorporeal, immaterial, invisible, unborn, uncreated, without beginning and without end, illimitable, and inappreciable by the sense until the film of mortal blindness is removed. It is all-pervading and infinite in its manifestations, in all nature, animate and inanimate, in the highest god and the meanest creature...

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore 1957: 506-7 give a good summary of the philosopher Śaṅkara's concept of *bráhman*.

Brahman is the basis and ground of all experience. *Brahman* is different from the space-time-cause world. *Brahman* has nothing similar to it, nothing different from it, and no internal differentiation, for all these are empirical distinctions. *Brahman* is the non-empirical, the non-objective, the wholly other, but it is not non-being. It is the highest being. With Śaṅkara, *Ātman* is the same as *Brahman*; the essence of the subject, the deepest part of our being, is one with the essence of the world.

The empirical world cannot exist by itself. It is wholly dependent on *Brahman*, but the changes of the empirical order do not affect the integrity of *Brahman*. The world depends on *Brahman*, but *Brahman* depends on nothing. Ignorance affects our whole empirical being, is one with the essence of the world.

To remove ignorance is to realize the truth. We reach wisdom when error is dissipated. While absolute truth is *Brahman*, empirical truth is not false. The highest representation of Absolute Being through logical categories is *Īśvara*, the creator and governor of the universe; *Brahman*, cast through the molds of logic, is *Īśvara* or *saguna Brahman* (*Brahman* with qualities), determinate *Brahman*. *Brahman*, as the absolute *nirguna Brahman* (qualityless *Brahman*) is the basis of the phenomenal world, presided over by *Īśvara*...

For our purposes, a clear idea of the concept of *bráhman* can be gained firstly from several brief explications of the concept by major Indic scholars which discuss it at the point of its inception in a central position in the literature as the basis of the universe in late Vedic thought.

Paul Deussen 1906: 39:

The Brahman, the power which presents itself to us materialized in all existing things, which creates, sustains, preserves, and receives back into itself again all worlds, this eternal infinite divine power is identical with the *ātman*, with that which, after strip-

ping off everything external, we discover in ourselves as our real most essential being, our individual self, the soul.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore 1957: 38:

The real which is at the heart of the universe is reflected in the infinite depths of the self. *Brahman* (the ultimate as discovered objectively) is *Ātman* (the ultimate as discovered introspectively). *Tat tvam asi* (That art thou). Truth is within us. "When we realize the universal Self in us, when and what may anybody fear or worship?"

The Supreme in its inner being as the one self-subsistent reality cannot be defined by logical categories or linguistic symbols. It is the incomprehensible *nirguṇa* (qualitiless) *Brahman*, the pure Absolute. It is envisaged as *saguṇa* (with qualities) *Brahman* or *Īśvara*, a personal god, when It is viewed as the constitutive reality of the many or the cause of the world, as the source, ground, and dwelling-place of selves.

W. Norman Brown 1966: 33-5:

The monistic view of the universe which the Rig Veda bequeathed to the Upanishads is the first of the great teachings in those works, and it is elaborated in text after text. The Real is Brahman, and we may cite an illustrative passage: "This [universe] is that [sole principle], even the Real. He who knows that great wonderful thing as the first-born – namely, that Brahman is the Real? [No!] for indeed Brahman is the Real" (BAU 5.4). The teaching of this passage is that Brahman is not merely the source of all or pervades all, but that Brahman actually is all. Or, in another passage: "Brahman, indeed, is this immortal: in front is Brahman, behind is Brahman, to right and to left, stretched forth below and above. Brahman, indeed, is this whole world, this widest extent" (Muṇḍ 2.2.11). This conception of Brahman as the first and only principle is based on a view of the phenomenal world as real. There is no hint yet of the doctrine that the phenomenal world is illusion.

Another pantheistic or monistic doctrine which appears in the ontology of the Upanishads is that the Real is the *Ātman*, the self

or soul. This is conceived on the cosmic scale, and the cosmic self is understood to be of the same character as the individual's Self or Soul. It is not easy to find the root of such a doctrine in the Rig Veda, for that book says nothing about the Ātman, whether cosmic or individual. It has been suggested that the Upanishadic doctrine may be related to the notion of the sacrifice of Puruṣa (male) as an act of creation. Whatever the truth may be about that Rigvedic hymn, the description of the cosmos in terms of the human body appears several times in the Upanishads and leads eventually to an identification of the cosmic macrocosm with the human microcosm. The teaching therefore follows that by knowing one's own self one comes to know the world all. On this assumption the cosmic epistemological question is again explicitly answered by introspection. "Ātman alone", says a passage (CU 7.25.2) "is this whole world!".

By an application of the principle that things equal to the same thing are equal to one another, it was a logical conclusion that the individual Self as equivalent to the world Self should also be taken as equivalent to the Brahman which is the essence of the phenomenal world. The resulting position was that the Brahman and the individual Ātman were identical. To restate the doctrine: the Real is unitary; it is the universal essence or Self, and it is also the individual Self. The terms Brahman and Ātman are accordingly treated as interchangeable (Muṇḍ 2.2.5). This leads to such statements as *ahaṃ brahmāsmi* "I am Brahman" (BAU 1.4.10), and whoever knows this of himself becomes this all; even the gods cannot prevent him, for he becomes their Self (*ātman*, BAU 1.4.10).

The concept as explained in such descriptions, as is no doubt understood, is the result of an evolution in Indian thought. In origin, the concept is one of prayer in the neuter, pray-er in the masculine, and with this, the force which is associated with prayer. Hermann Grassmann 1873: 916-7 lists the meanings in the *Ṛgveda*.

BRĀHMAN, n. 1) *exhaltation of the heart, pious inspiration ...* hence 2) the uttered *prayer*, be it praise, thanks or request, the *pious flowing of the heart*, hence cf. with *stóma* ['praise, hymn'] ...;

gír ['praise, song'] ..., cf. with the verbs *kl* ['to do, make'], *takṣ* ['to form, make, create'], *arc* ['to praise, sing'], *gā* (to sing), *īr* ['to raise (one's voice)'], cf. with *çru* ['to hear, listen to'], *juṣ* ['to be pleased, satisfied, fond of']; in particular 3) in the combination *bráhmaṇas páti* the lord of prayer = *bráhaspáti*, in 38,13 he is the equivalent of Agni; 4) *power of the inspiration*, with which the gods' magnificent deeds are worked.

BRAHMÁN, m. ... *pray-er*, who said or sang the sacred words during sacrifice; hence mentioned also with *gāyatrín* ['one who sings hymns'] and *arkin* ['praising'] (10.1), with *rṣi* ['a singer of sacred hymns, an inspired poet or sage'] ...; often 2) in the general sense *the one who performed the works of prayer*, as *soma* pressers, utter prayer, which see under itself, or in the olden time standing fixed without any designation; 3) also it indicates the gods becoming as *pray-ers* or *priests*. Or else the seed which afterward is considered special has already isolated itself in RV., in particular if *brahmán*; 4) a higher knowledge, or 5) abstinence is added, or 6) its function is distinguished from that of [various types of priests, such as] the *hótl*, *pótl*, *néṣtl*, *agnídh*, *praçāstl*, or finally 7) already a separation of the position of the priest from the position of the king is apparent.
(Translation mine.)

Franklin Edgerton 1965: 23-4 writes:

Among the varied formulations of the First and Supreme Principle, none recurs more constantly throughout the later Vedic texts than the *bráhmaṇ*. The oldest meaning of this word seems to be "holy knowledge", or (what to primitive man is the same thing) its concrete expression, "hymn" or "incantation". It is applied both to the ritual hymns of the Rig Veda and to the magic charms of the Atharva Veda. Any holy, mystic utterance is *bráhmaṇ*. This is the regular, if not the exclusive, meaning which the word has in the Rig Veda. But from the point of view of those times, this definition implies far more than it would suggest to our minds. The spoken word had a mysterious, supernatural power; it contained within itself the essence of the thing denoted. To "know the *name*" of anything was to control the thing. The

word means wisdom, knowledge; and knowledge, as we have seen, was (magic) power. So *bráhman*, the “holy word”, soon came to mean the mystic power inherent in the holy word². [The feminine word *Vāc* “Holy Utterance”, as we saw ... is virtually synonymous with the neuter *bráhman* in its Rig-Vedic meaning. There are also the masculine personifications, *Vācas-pati*, *Bṛhas-pati*, *Brahmaṇas-pati*, “Lord of Holy Utterance”, etc.].

But to the later Vedic ritualists, this holy word was the direct expression and embodiment of the ritual religion, and as such a cosmic power of the first magnitude. The ritual religion, and hence its verbal expression, the *bráhman*, was omnipotent; it was “all”. All human desires and aspirations were accessible to him who mastered it. All other cosmic forces, even the greatest of natural and supernatural powers, were dependent upon it. The gods themselves, originally the beneficiaries of the cult, became its helpless mechanical agents, or were left out of account altogether as useless middlemen. The cult was the direct controlling force of the universe. And the *bráhman* was the spirit, the expression, of the cult; nay, it *was*, the cult, mystically speaking, because the word and the thing were one; he who knew the word, knew and controlled the thing. Therefore, he who knew the *bráhman* knew and controlled the whole universe. It is no wonder, then, that in the later Vedic texts (not yet in the Rig Veda) we find the

2. My argument for a Semitic origin for Skt. *eka* is mentioned briefly in passing in an article on “The Alternation of *r* and *l* in Dravidian” (Stephan Levitt 1989), in a section of the article in which I discuss the possibility of a relationship between Indo-European and Dravidian words for “one”. I repeat the argument briefly here for the reader’s convenience. There is no attestation elsewhere in Indo-European for a dropping of the syllable containing *-n-* of the Indo-European form for “one”, or for the addition of a suffix **-ko-* to this form. Pokorny 1959 notes the form to be parallel in Sanskrit to Skt. *dvika* “consisting of two”. However, this is not likely since there is in Vedic Sanskrit in hymns such as *RV* 10.59.9 and *AV* 20.132.1 a form *ekaka*, f. *ekikā* which would be the form parallel to *dvika*. In the form’s earliest occurrence in *RV* 10.59.9 it appears in context with Skt. *dvaka*, the Vedic form comparable to the later Sanskrit form *dvika*, and *trika* “consisting of three”. On these accounts, I propose that Skt. *eka* (nom. *ekas*) be linked instead with Heb. *ehad* “one” (in Biblical Hebrew, *-d* = *-d*), Ar. *waḥid* “one” (*ahad*, pron. “one, someone, somebody”), comparable with AKK. *ēdu* “single, alone” (*h* is not expressed in the Akkadian writing system; also note, Akk. *išten* m., f. *ištet* “one”).

bráhmaṇ frequently mentioned as the primal principle and as the ruling and guiding spirit of the universe. It is a thoroughly ritualistic notion, inconceivable except as an outgrowth of the theories of the ritualistic cult, but very simple and as it were self-evident from the point of view of the ritualists. The overwhelming prominence and importance of the *bráhmaṇ* in later Vedic speculation seems, therefore, a striking proof of the fact that this speculation was at least in large part a product of ritualistic, priestly circles.

W. Norman Brown 1966: 25-7 approaches this aspect of the development of the concept from the vantage of its masculine personifications late in the *Ṛgveda*. He writes:

Though Prajāpati ["Lord of Creatures"] and Viśvakarman ["Maker of All"] are conceived as superdeities responsible for the existence of gods and men and the organization of the material substance of the universe, and though the epistemological question has been raised in one of the Viśvakarman hymns, the hymns addressed to those two figures do not deal with the origin itself of the insentient material of which the universe is composed. That point, however, is considered in connection with the god Brahmanaspati. This god, who is also known as Bṛhaspati, in another late hieratic invention, and his name, like the names Prajāpati and Viśvakarman, is more an epithet or title than a genuine proper name. Brahmanaspati means, "lord of the holy or mystic power called *brahmaṇ*", which the Vedas represent as permeating the universe, and Bṛhaspati means "lord of the holy prayer or utterance or devotion (*bṛh*)" that evokes the *brahmaṇ* and sets it in operation. Through the concept of Brahmanaspati or Bṛhaspati a displacement of Indra takes place, which is less direct than that through Prajāpati or Viśvakarman. Brahmanaspati and Indra are represented in several hymns as cooperating to perform some of the greatest of the deeds elsewhere usually ascribed to Indra alone: winning the light for the universe, spreading out the earth, and others. The hieratic point of view leading to the creation of Brahmanaspati seems to be that the great deeds which Indra was said to have performed could not have been performed

through mere physical might, but were really made possible metaphysically through the mystic power in the universe which was put into application through the sacrifice. Hence the two deities are viewed as cooperating (RV 2.24, 10.67). The next step was to ascribe the action to Brahmanaspati alone with Indra ignored (RV 10.68). Then comes the ascription of all creation to Brahmanaspati, and in terms that transcend the Indra-Viṣtra range of achievement (RV 10.72).

Brahmanaspati, we are told (RV 10.72), “blew up” the material of the universe, like a smith at his forge. First, says the hymn, he generated the Sat from the Asat. The Asat, unordered chaos, is here also called Uttānapad, “she with legs outspread [in parturition]”. Thus we have the old notion that the ordered universe was born out of the unordered chaos. From the Sat, in turn, were produced the directions. Parallel to the origin of the material substance of the universe was the origin of animate, sentient beings. These came from Dakṣa – the name means essentially male potentiality – and Aditi, who is female productive or creative power.

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The significance of the concept of Brahmanaspati or Bṛhaspati is possibly that late in the Rigvedic period the power of the ritual had come to be considered greater than that of the gods whom the priests invoked with the aid of ritual. It was greater even than the power of Indra. Hence Indra’s great feat could exist only through the use of the sacrifice and its mystical or magic power, which was, then deified as Brahmanaspati or Bṛhaspati.

And Arthur Berriedale Kate 1925: 445-6 and 443-4, in his now standard *opus* on Vedic religion writes:

[In the Rigveda] at any rate the word [Brahman] naturally and normally means prayer, but there are further developments: it can mean spell, for the prayer may be a spell, and not real prayer, and it often means holy speech and the holy writ, the three-fold Veda. It is not necessary to trace to the original sense of Brahman the fact that the Vedic poet regards himself often as inspired: we cannot really think it probable, and certainly no argument has yet

been adduced to show, that the prayer was felt to be the voice of God speaking in the prayer. But in many passages it seems as if Brahman must be taken rather as holy power than as prayer or holy rite: the gods are said to discuss the Brahman and, when the greatness of the Brahman is celebrated, it is clear that more than the mere word may be intended. But the growth of the idea of Brahman as a suitable expression for the absolute must have been greatly furthered by the extraordinary value attached to the prayer and to the spell. The prayer rapidly passes over to the lower rank: in one late hymn of the Rigveda a prayer is offered that Agni should in union with the Brahman drive away disease. The spell appears repeatedly by itself in the Atharvaveda as a power to destroy evil of all kinds, and the Brahman is actually set over against the three Vedas as a power of equal force. It is a very easy step from the conception of the Brahman as the prayer, which brings into operation the activity of the gods; or as the spell which is the cause of results aimed at by men, and from the conception of the whole body of such spells and prayers, to develop the use of the term to cover the idea of holy power generally, and this rendering is applicable in many passages of the Brāhmaṇas, where the idea of holy writ is too vague and the idea of the absolute is too elaborate.

.....

It is, however, clear that in Prajāpati the Brāhmaṇas do not find complete satisfaction for their view of the construction of the universe. The Atharvaveda, which in these matters must be ranked with the Brāhmaṇas, in its version of the great hymn of the Rigveda, which, as later expanded, mentions him as all-creator, leaves out the last line giving his name and the Brāhmaṇa of that Veda, which is certainly late, replaces him by the Brahman and Atharvan. In the Brāhmaṇas, therefore, we find efforts made to arise to a principle above and beyond him: in the Rigveda he produced from himself – the idea of world creation is always in the Vedic literature regarded in the light of the sending out of something already there rather than of mere bringing into being – the waters, and then entered them in the form of Hiraṇyagarbha, the golden germ. In the Taittirīya Saṁhitā, we find in the spirit of the hymn of creation the waters treated in two places as the *prius*,

and Prajāpati as arising as wind on them, and the Ṣatapatha Brāhmaṇa goes one step farther in attributing to the waters an Prajāpati's predecessors as first in order the act of fervour, which is primarily his activity in creation. A farther step is taken in the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, in which the waters came first, then Prajāpati, in whose mind desire arises and who practices fervour; then his body he throws off: from the sap is born the tortoise, who is Puruṣa, who, however, asserts his priority to Prajāpati himself, and from the fleah the seer Aruṇaketu, to whom further creative activity is assigned. Yet another step is reached in the Ṣatapatha Brāhmaṇa, where the first thing is stated to be not-being, then arises Prajāpati, who is the same as Puruṣa, and then the Brahman, the holy science, the threefold Veda, with which he enters the waters as a creative principle. Thus sprang up the world egg, whence came forth first the Brahman itself, and then Prajāpati in the form of Agni. But in another account the priority of the Brahman over Prajāpati is made absolute, not merely empirical: the first entity is not-being, then springs into life mind, i.e. the Brahman, and then Prajāpati. Later still the Brahman produces Prajāpati, but without face or sight; then it enters him, as breath, and makes him mortal, to arise as a generator of beings.

It is worthwhile here to see the Sanskrit term *brāhman* in its early context in translation. Provided here is an example of each usage in the *Rgveda* as noted by Hermann Grassmann 1873: 916-7, quoted in translation above, in several translations, and also examples of usages in the *Altharvaveda* which Franklin Edgerton 1965: 24² has judged to indicate the power inherent in incantation on the one hand, and most probably to refer already to *brāhman* as the supreme cosmic principle on the other hand. For the sake of clarity, the translation of the term *brāhman* in its usage in question has been placed in italics in all instances. Other italicizations which might appear in an individual translation have been deleted.

Rgveda

1. Grassmann: "exaltation of the heart, pious inspiration"
RV 1.24.11.

Horace Hayman Wilson 1850-88:

Praising thee with (*devout*) *prayer* I implore thee for that (life) which the institutor of the sacrifice solicits with oblations. Varuṇa, undisdainful, bestow a thought upon us: much-lauded, take not away our existence.

RV 9.113.5.

Horace Hayman Wilson 1850-88:

The united streams of thee who art vast and truly formidable flow united; the juices of thee the juicy one meet together; green-tinted (*soma*), purified by *holy prayer*, Indu, flow for Indra.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty 1981:

The floods of the high one, the truly awesome one, flow together. The juices of him so full of juice mingle together as you, the tawny one, purify yourself with *prayer*. O drop of *soma*, flow for Indra.

2. Grassmann: "the uttered prayer, the pious flowing of the heart".

RV 7.103.8.

Horace Hayman Wilson 1850-88:

They utter a loud cry, like Brahmans when bearing the *soma* libation, and reciting the perennial *prayer*: like ministrant priests with the *gharma* offering, they hid (in the hot weather) perspiring (in their holes), but now some of them appear.

W. Norman Brown 1939 (in Rosane Rocher 1978):

[Like] Brāhmaṇas with the *soma* they have recited, performing their annual *pious exercise*. [Like] Adhvaryus with the heated pots, sweating, they are in evidence; none are hidden.

RV 2.12.14.

Franklin Edgerton 1965:

Who helps by his aid him that presses (*soma*) and cooks (sacrificial food), that chants (hymns) and is busily occupied (with sacrifice); of whom *holy utterance* is a strengthening, and the *soma* and this gift (to officiating priests), he, O folk, is Indra.

W. Norman Brown 1965 (in Rosane Rocher 1978):

He who favors with help the *soma*-presser, the *soma*-brewer, his praiser, his devotee, he whose *pious spell* gives increase, whose is the *soma*, whose is the gift – he, O folk, is Indra.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty 1981:

He who helps with his favour the one who presses and the one who cooks, the praiser and the preparer, he for whom *prayer* is nourishment, for whom *soma* is the special gift, he, my people, is Indra.

3. Grassmann: "in the combination *bráhmaṇas páti* 'the lord of prayer'".

RV 10.72.2.

Franklin Edgerton 1965:

Brahmanaspati (the Lord of the Holy Word) smelted them together, as a smith. In the primal age of the gods the Existent was born from the Non-existent.

W. Norman Brown 1965 (in Rosane Rocher 1978):

These (creations, worlds) *Brahmanaspati* fanned up like a smith. In the first age of the gods the Sat was generated from the Asat.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty 1981:

The lord of sacred speech, like a smith, fanned them together. In the earliest age of the gods, existence was born from non-existence.

4. Grassmann: "the power of inspiration, with which the gods' deeds are worked".

RV 2.2.7.

Horace Hayman Wilson 1850-88:

Bestow upon us, Agni, infinite possessions: grant us thousands (of cattle and dependants): open to us, for thy reputation, the doors of abundance: make heaven and earth, propitiated by *sacred prayer*, favourable to us, and may the mornings light thee up like the sun.

Hermann Oldenberg 1897:

Give us, Agni, mighty, give us thousandfold (gifts). Open strength for us like a door for the sake of glory. Make Heaven and Earth inclined towards us through (our) *spell*. Make the Dawns shine like the brilliant Sun. RV 10.162.1-2.

Horace Hayman Wilson 1850-88:

May Agni, the destroyer of the Rakshasas, consenting to our

prayēr, drive hence (the evil spirit) who (in the form of) sickness assails thine embryo, who, as the disease durnáman, assails thy womb.

May Agni, concurring in our *prayer*, destroy the cannibal who, as sickness, assails thine embryo, who, as the disease durnáman, assails thy womb.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty 1981:

Let Agni the killer of demons unite with this *prayer* and expel from here the one whose name is evil, who lies with disease upon your embryo, your womb.

The one whose name is evil, who lies with disease upon your embryo, your womb, the flesh-eater – Agni has driven him away with *prayer*.

Atharvaveda

4. Edgerton: “the power inherent in incantation”. AV 2.10.1.

Maurice Bloomfield 1897:

From kshetriya (inherited disease), from *Nirriti* (the goddess of destruction), from the curse of the kinswoman, from Druh (the demon of guile), from the fetter of Varuna do I release thee. Guiltless do I render thee through my *charm*; may heaven and earth both be propitious to thee!

William Dwight Whitney 1905:

From kṣetriyá, from perdition, from imprecation of sisters (jāmí-), from hatred (drúh) do I release thee, from Varuṇa's fetter; free from guilt (-āgas) I make thee [my] *incantation*; be heaven-and-earth both propitious to thee.

AV 1.14.4.

Maurice Bloomfield 1897:

With the *incantation* of Asita, of Kasyapa, and of Gaya do I cover up thy fortune, as women cover (something) within a chest.

William Dwight Whitney 1905:

With the *incantation* (*brāhman*) of Asita, of Kaçyapa, and of Gaya, I shut up (*api-nah*) thy portion (vulva?), as sisters do what is within a box (-kóçā).

Edgerton: “the supreme cosmic principle”.

AV 11.8.32.

William Dwight Whitney 1905:

Therefore, indeed, one who knows man [*púruṣa*] thinks “this is *bráhman*”; for all deities are seated in him, as cows in a cow-stall.

Franklin Edgerton 1965:

Therefore one who knows Man (*puruṣa*; or the spirit) thinks, “This is *brahman*”. For all “deities” (potencies, *devatā*) are seated in him, as cattle in a cow-stall. AV 13.1.33.

Maurice Bloomfield 1897:

The calf of Virāg, the bull of prayers, carrying the bright (soma) upon his back, has ascended the atmosphere. A song accompanied by ghee they sing to the calf; himself *brahma* (*spiritual exaltation*) they swell him with their *brahma* (prayer).

William Dwight Whitney 1905:

The young (vatsá) of the virāj, the bull of prayers (matī) mounted, bright-backed, the atmosphere; with ghee they sing (arc) the song (arká) unto the young; him, being *bráhman*, they increase with *bráhman*.

Franklin Edgerton 1965:

The calf of the Shining One, the bull of prayers, bright-backed, has mounted the atmosphere. They sing a ritual song, along with (sacrificial) ghee, to the calf; him who is *bráhman* (*neuter*) they magnify by *bráhman*.

While such scholars of Sanskrit as cited above see the original meaning of the word to be “prayer”, and the idea of “power” or “force” as secondary, other scholars such as M. Haug 1868, E. Washburn Hopkins 1924, followed more recently by Jan Gonda 1950 and Paul Thieme 1952 see “power” or “force” as the basic meaning. And Roy L. Turner 1928-30: 122 suggests that the Afghan term *bram* “power” may be related to Skt. *bráhman*. E. Washburn Hopkins 1924: 85: “for such [a neuter Power] was always the real meaning of *brahma*, underlying the later meanings of spell and spirit”.

Related terms within Sanskrit, aside from the names Bṛhaspati and Brahmanaspati mentioned in the quotes above, include *Brāhmaṇá* “relating to *brahman*”, the name used for the priestly class, our

English word “brahman”, and the term *brāhmana*, which refers either to knowledge of *brāhman* or to something belonging to the priesthood and which is used for the bulky expository liturgical texts which are attached to and follow in time our four collections of Vedic hymns.

3. The etymology of Skt. *brāhman* is uncertain. It is as uncertain today as it was when it was judged to constitute a problem by Moriz Winternitz 1905: 211 and Arthur Berriedale Keith 1925: 445. Six completely different etymologies have been proposed, five by modern Western linguists. All are elaborate. These have been amply discussed by Gonda 1950, Mayrhofer 1953-80: 2.452-6, 447-8, and Keith 1925: 445-50.

A. i and ii. Jan Gonda 1950 favors an etymology from Skt. $\sqrt{2}$. *brh* “to grow, expand”, and discusses fully material within Sanskrit literature which supports such an etymology. The etymology was first proposed in the West by T. Benfey in 1848 and R. Roth in 1868. Independently in 1868, it was built on by M. Haug who connected the form with Av. *barəsmān* “the bundle of sacred twigs used at the religious ceremonies of the Zoroastrians” and Vedic Skt. *barhis* “sacrificial grass”. Both terms represent “thriving” and “growth”, and mean “plant, sprout”, which entails thriving and growth. The etymology connecting *brāhman* with $\sqrt{2}$ *brh* was early on accepted widely by such Sanskritists as, for instance, Max Müller, Monier-Williams, and J. Charpentier.

Monier-Williams 1919: 86: “The very name “Brahman” (neut. from \sqrt{brih} , “to grow”) given to the Eternal Essence, is expressive of this *growth*, this *expansion*, this universal *development* and *diffusion*”. Not all Sanskritists who accept a connection with $\sqrt{2}$. *brh* have accepted waug’s proposed Avestan cognate for Skt. *brāhman*. And others simply do not see it as a fruitful point of departure. We have here, thus, a connection with Skt. $\sqrt{2}$. *brh*, and as a subcategory under this a proposed cognate form in Av. *barəsmān*.

B. Closely connected to the modern Western connection with Skt. $\sqrt{2}$. *brh* is the etymology found in early Sanskrit works which treat etymology themselves, such as the *Nirukta*. This explains Skt. *brāhman* by the term *parivr̥dha* “firm, strong”, generally understood as being

related to $\sqrt{2}$. *br̥h*. Gonda 1950 places this material side by side with references in the *Purānas* and in *Vedānta* material to such forms as *br̥mhāna* ($\sqrt{2}$. *br̥h*); *barhati* (both $\sqrt{1}$. *br̥h*, *v̥rh* and $\sqrt{2}$. *br̥h*), and *br̥hant* ($\sqrt{2}$ *br̥h*), and sees all this material as providing evidence in Sanskrit for a connection between Skt. *brāhman* and Skt. $\sqrt{2}$ *br̥h*. Keith 1925: 445, on the other hand, appears to understand the reference to *barhati* in the *Vedānta* material, and to *parivṛdha* and, in the *Śaṅkaravijaya*, to *parivṛdhatama* to refer to Skt. $\sqrt{1}$ *br̥h*, *v̥rh*. While Jan Gonda sees the native Sanskrit connection to be reasonable Arthur Berriedale Keith, viewing it from this different vantage emphasizes that such an etymology is absurd.

C. Manfred Mayrhofer 1953-80, following in the main Paul Thieme 1952, favors an etymology which connects Skt. *brāhman* with MĪr *brahm* "fashion, dress, costume" and "demeanor, propriety, ceremony" < **brazman*, OP *brzmn̥iy* "in the proper ceremonial style, in correct fashion", and with MĪrsh *bricht* "spell, incantation" or "magic, magic formula", and OIcel. *bragr* "poetic art". The etymology was first proposed by W. Ostoff in 1899. While not giving it full support, it was considered to be the most probable by Moriz Winternitz 1927: 247³. It was further addressed and greatly strengthened by W. B. Henning in 1944. Paul Thieme 1952 even further elaborates on it and suggests an additional connection with Gk. *morfi*, "form, figure", with regard to which point Mayrhofer parts company with him. Of interest here is that the Iranian forms imply adherence to group custom and ceremony. They appear to reflect an interpretation of *brāhman* as *dharma*. We can suggest that they may ultimately rest on such Indic passages as *Bhagavadgītā* 9.31 which equates *Śasvacchānti* "eternal peace" with *dharmātman* "(one) possessing duty as (his) self" and *Amarakośa* 1.5.3 ff. which defines *dharma* as the precepts enjoined by the *Vedas*, understood as *om̐kara* and the essence of the universe, much as Iranian material on *Verethragna* may be related to material developed for the first time in the Indic tradition in the *Brāhmaṇas*. I am thinking here of the Pahlavi gloss for Av. *vərəθra* as "victory", which gloss seems to fit the attestations, in the context of material in *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 5, 2, 3, 7.

D. Julius Pokorny 1959-69 favors an etymology which connects Skt. *brāhman* with Lat. *flāmen* "priest of a special deity". This con-

nection was originally proposed by L. Meyer in 1865. On it rest a number of Italo-Indic socio-religious comparisons. It has been accepted by such Indo-Europeanists as, for instance, M. Leumann, A. Meillet, H. Pedersen, and more recently G. Dumézil. We have here, however, a set of two members only in Indo-European, Sanskrit and Latin. Also observe that Pokorny believed himself obliged to explain and justify this entry in his dictionary.

E. The fifth etymology, that of J. Hertel first offered in 1925 which connects Skt. *bráhmaṇ* with Lat. *flagro* "fire" is universally unaccepted and has been criticized roundly. See, in this regard, Arthur Berriedale Keith 1925: 447-9, Moriz Winternitz 1927: 248 n., and Jan Gonda 1950: 4-5

F. Louis Renou 1949 offers a sixth etymology. Renou approaches the problem from the vantage of the *brahmodya*, or "riddle" hymns of the *Rgveda*. He understands *bráhmaṇ* to mean in basis "enigma", and suggests an etymology from a hypothetical $\sqrt{\text{brah}/\text{barh}}$ "to talk by enigmas" which would have constituted a couplet with Skt. $\sqrt{\text{valh}}$ "to speak". Jan Gonda 1950: 58 notes that his views and Renou's are the same on the subject, but takes objection to Renou's etymological connection. Paul Thieme 1952: 100 takes exception to Gonda's statement that his views and Renou's are the same, and takes exception to both Renou's etymology and Gonda's very different connection with Skt. $\sqrt{2. \text{brh}}$.

Observe that with Renou's proposed etymology, all conceivable connections within Indo-European having been exhausted, we have emerged into the realm of a connection with a hypothetical form for which there is no concrete evidence.

It is to be emphasized here that though many proposals have been made, and though many Sanskritists have accepted either one or the other, many Sanskritists such as Moriz Winternitz, Arthur Berriedale Keith, and more recently W. Norman Brown and Ernest Bender have simply viewed the term's etymology to be uncertain. On the one hand, Manfred Mayrhofer's opinion involves a reconstructed Indo-European form **bhr/lgh/men*. Paul Thieme, taking into account the alternation of *b* and *m* in Indo-Iranian, suggests instead **mnreg^umen*.

Jan Gonda, of course, does not treat this aspect of the topic, but his connection of the form with Skt. \sqrt{brh} would connect the form with reconstructed Indo-European forms **bheregh-*, **bherghos*, **bhrghu-s*, and **bhergho*, as given by Julius Pokorny 1959-69. The view that Av. *barasman* is the proper Iranian cognate for Skt. *bráhmaṇ*, to be connected with Skt. *barhis*, on the other hand, would involve connection with a reconstructed Indo-European form **bhelgh* by Pokorny 1959-69. Keith's understanding of a native Indic connection with $\sqrt{1}$. *brh/vrh* would connect the form with words which suggest an Indo-European form **bhre(n)gh*. Julius Pokorny himself accepts a reconstructed Indo-European form **bhlagh-men*, with the Latin side of the equation having come out of **bhlād-(s)men*. J. Wertel's suggestion would connect the form with words which otherwise suggest an Indo-European form **bhleg-*. And Louis Renou's suggestion would connect the form with a root which itself constitutes a problem with regard to its Indo-European connections, if any, and with regard to the etymology of which Manfred Mayrhofer comments, "nicht klar". Such reconstructed forms as these, it must be emphasized, are very hypothetical at all times and can be best understood as summaries in brief of forms which for different reasons and from the vantage of our present knowledge of language are grouped together. They are worth mentioning here side by side so as to underscore emphatically the wide difference of opinion with regard to where this Sanskrit word *bráhmaṇ*, and related forms such as *brh-* in *bṛhaspáti* and *bráhmaṇa* are coming from. Simply, we do not know with what to connect these forms both within Sanskrit and outside of Sanskrit. Within Sanskrit it simply is not clear that we can connect the forms with \sqrt{brh} , which would be a standardly acceptable connection from the viewpoint of Paṇinian grammar, and which would appear to be the connection made in Sanskrit literature. Such a situation is not the one generally considered as standard in our well-constructed Sanskrit, this language "more perfect than the Greek".

4. Since there is no consensus and no strong argument for an etymology for Skt. *bráhmaṇ* within Indo-European, perhaps there can be interjected here what may well be a completely transparent connec-

tion with the Semitic root *BRK*, which root is the basis for words meaning “bless” and “blessing”, “prayer”, with an underlying meaning of “force” and “power” and indicating “growth” and “augmentation”, and which root contains within itself a concept which became major and central in Semitic traditions. Such a word borrowing in Sanskrit would not imply that the concept of *bráhmaṇ* was borrowed any more than a Sanskrit origin for the Burmese term *nat* implies that the Burmese belief was borrowed from India. (See Stephan Levitt 1984.) It may well have been part of the shared Ancient Near Eastern-Indic tradition which was otherwise expressed in comparable deifications of nature and comparable ways of applying such deifications to natural phenomena, in comparable fable literatures, and in a common proverbial literature, to state here just three aspects of an extensive shared cultural tradition buttressed by trade and other continued contacts. The modern expression of this culture area which joins the area where Vedic literature was first composed and the Ancient Near East, it has been suggested, can be seen in the creation of Pakistan in 1947 which today joins this area to the Arab world to its southwest. In different words, if we understand the Semitic root *BRK* as the basis of Skt. *bráhmaṇ*, the Indic concept of *bráhmaṇ* need not be understood as a strictly Semitic concept borrowed by India, but rather as a shared concept expressed in India with a Semitic loan form Sanskritized. Indeed, it is unlikely that we would have here simply a graft in the Vedic material. The concept is too basic to the understood force of the Vedic texts, their command over the gods, from the very beginning of the Vedic material. If there is a uniquely Semitic genius to the concept, this origin would lie far back in pre-history.

What we would appear to have in Indic, I would suggest as a possibility, is merger of the Semitic root with the Sanskrit \sqrt{brh} which form was then used as the basis for such Sanskrit forms as *brh-* in *brhaspáti*, *bráhmaṇ*, *brahmán*, *bráhmana*, and *bráhmana*. I have argued elsewhere for a comparable merger between a Sanskrit root of Indo-European origin and Dravidian forms in the Sanskrit $\sqrt{mand/mad}$ (Stephan Levitt 1980). Alternately, we can view the form as a loan pure and simple which was in Sanskrit treated as a Sanskrit root of Indo-European origin, that is to say, which was Sanskritized in India. Comparable forms in which we have Dravidian etyma Sanskritized with Sanskrit endings can be seen in Skt. *tundikā* “the gourd

Momordica monadelpha" and DED 2880 Ta. *tonṭai*, Skt. *pañjī*, *pañjikā* "cotton" and DED 3173 Ta. *pañci*, *pañcu*, Skt. *ulupin* "porpoise" and DED 597 Ta. *uṛuvai*, BHS *madgura*, *madgula*, *maṅgula* "sallow, unhealthy in appearance" and DED 3890 Ta. *maṛuku* (*maṛuki-*), Skt. *rāgā*, *rāgī*, "*Elusine coracana*" (lex.) and DED 695 Koḍ. *eri*, and showing a word which on account of usage had the force of no more than a suffix, Skt. *pusta* "working clay, modelling", *pustakarman* "plastering, painting" and DED 3569 Ta. *pūcu* (*pūci-*), for instance (DED = T. Burrow and Murray B. Emeneau 1961).

The Semitic form is well attested in Afro-Asiatic languages, and its semantic spread is wider in these than the semantic spread we find in Sanskrit. These points are basic in any consideration of a form in Sanskrit as a borrowing.

Phonologically, Hebrew and Aramaic spirantize / *k* / in post-vocalic position. In addition, in classical Arabic / *g* / is an affricate, and similarly in Ethiopian there are many cases of the spirantization and palatalization of velar plosives. There is thus evidence of the spirantization of / *k* / in Semitic, which is to say there is evidence of its having been uttered in some Semitic languages at least with friction of the breath against some part of the oral passage. Evidence with regard to the pronunciation of Akkadian is insufficient (See Sabatino Moscati 1964: 57-8, 37-8.) Comparably, / *h* / in Sanskrit is a voiced glottal or pulmonic fricative, a spirant. See W. Sidney Allen 1953: 20, 48-51 for the pronunciation of *h* and *-h* in Sanskrit. The difference between a velar plosive spirantized and a glottal or pulmonic spirant may well not have been very great, and it is not difficult to understand how one might be heard as the other across language boundaries.

Comparable loans in Sanskrit from Semitic can be suggested. One, Skt. *éka* "one" has been discussed in brief in Stephan Levitt 1989².

Another is very probably SKt. *śivá* "welldisposed" "indicating wellbeing", which comes to be used as the name of one of the major Indian deities in the Hindu *trimūrti*, from the Semitic word for "seven". This form can be seen elsewhere in such names as the place name Beersheba and the Biblical personal names Bathsheba and Elisheba. I also add that in the other direction, the present writer thinks he can build a good case that the Hebrew name for God, *yhvh*, the etymology of which is a problem in Hebrew, may well be related

to the confused situation in Vedic Sanskrit between Skt. *jihvā* (nom. *jihvā*, *jihvāḥ*) “tongue”, used in reference to the god Agni and hence a “tongue of flame”, Skt. *hū/hve* “to call, invoke” (redup. *juhu-* / *juhv*, *jihvā=juhū* – by popular etymology according to Grassmann 1873: 490), and Skt. *yahvá* (nom. *yahvāḥ*) “restless, swift, active”, of Agni, Indra, and Soma in the *R̥gveda*, said to be probably from a lost **yah* and appearing in the *padapāṭha* (word-by-word) text of the *Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā* (one of the recensions of the black *Yajurveda*) where the *samhitā* text has *jihvā*. The god Agni, earthly fire, the sacrificial fire, in a sense develops historically into the concepts of *Bṛhaspati* and *Brahmaṇaspati*, which in turn lead into the concept of *Brahmán*. In, for instance, the late Vedic *Nairukta* reduction of the Vedic pantheon to three gods, Agni, Vayu or Indra, and *Sūrya*, the predecessor of the later *trimūrti* of *Brahmán*, *Śiva*, and *Viṣṇu* (usually stated *Brahmán*, *Viṣṇu*, and *Śiva*), the place of Agni is taken by *Brahmán* in the later *trimūrti*, that of *Sūrya* being taken by *Viṣṇu*, and that of *Indra* being taken by *Śiva*. There appears to be a rule at work, even with regard to the chief god of the early *R̥gveda*, *Indra*, that the name of a high god is etymologically obtuse to the everyday eye. It is a mystery, on account of and indicating the sanctity of the deity and, since word and thing are one, his name. If one does not *know* the name, one cannot control the deity. Lack of ability to do this indicate the deity’s greatness. In the early Indian tradition, of course, control is the prevailing attitude toward deity, much like our modern Western attitude toward nature. The Hebrew tradition, however, emphasizes respect and placing one’s self under the deity’s authority, and so one is not supposed to pronounce or write the deity’s name.

The Semitic forms for *BRK* are listed by David Cohen 1970-6: 2.84-5:

BRK, 1. **birk-* “knee”: AK. *birk-*, *burk-*, OUG. *brk*, CAN. h. *berek*, ARAM. pehl. *brk*, jp. *birkā*, syr. *burkā*, aysor *birkʿā*, SAR. soq. **berk*, mh. *bark*, ETH. g. te. *bærk*, tna. *bærḫi*, selti *bærk*. – Can. h. **bārak* (pass. *wa-yyibrak*), ARAM. syr. *bʿrak* “to kneel down”; nsyr. *barik* “to be at the knee”; AR. *baraka* “to squat down, to lodge in huts (camels)”; SAR. soq. *'ebrek* “to make one-self kneel down”; ETH. g. *baraka*, amh. *bärräkä* “to lodge in

huts”; te. *bärkä*, tna. *boräha* “to kneel down”; amh. *tämbäräkkäkä* “to tremble, the knees shaking”, *ambaräkkäk* “kneeling”, *bəräkrək alä* “to submit oneself”; AK. **birk-* “lap”; AR. *bark-* “chest”; SAR. soq. *bərak* “chest”; ETH. *burke* “shoulder, humerus”; ?AR. *burk-* “teal, duck”. -2. OUG. CAN. ph. pun. *brk*. h. *bərak*, *bərek*, ARAM, epig. *brk*, jp. *b^rak*, *bārək*, mand. *brak*, nsyr. *bārih*, AR. *baraka*, tham. *brk*, SAR. sab. *brk*, soq. *bórik*, ETH. g. *bāraka*, amh. *barräkä* “to bless”; AR. *burkat-* “abundant milling; pay of a miller; price of blood”. -3. OUG. *brk*, CAN. h. epig. *brkh*, bibl. *b^rekā*, AR. *birkat-*, SAR. sab. *brkt*, *brk* “pool, tank”. -4. ARAM. *birkä*, *burkä* “small branch, bough”. -5. ARAM. syr. *bärktä* “Artemisia”; ?AR. *birkän-*: plant (of the Nejd). -6. AR. *birak-*: fish (of the sea). -7. *birkat-*: type of wrap of Yemen. -8. ETH. te. *bärakit* “root of the language”. ... -1. ... h. *’abrək* (Gn. 41, 43) comes perhaps from this root and means “bow down”, but it seems more likely a loan from ég. (*’b-r.k* “attention!”); ... - ak. *bi/urk-*, a euphemistic form for “penis”? ... “breast, lap”? ... compare ar. *bark* “chest”: a part of the body which touches the ground when a camel kneels down, ... - (In a pun. inscription (Tas Silg à Malte) a word *brk* which seems to designate an architectural element very possibly is connected to the word for “knee”. ...) Different languages have for “knee” forms in **RKB**: ar. *rukbat-* < sar. šh. (*e*)*rkebet*, aram. *’arkubā*. - On the connections of the semantic derivation “knee” – “to bless” (= **BRK** 2), see ... - The root is cham. - sémi., ... -2. ... - Forms with metathesis (see **KRB**) in ak. *karābu* and in sar. *krb* “to bless, to pray, to render homage; to dedicate, to consecrate”, *mkrb* “priest”; compare g. *mək^rərab* “temple of the idols”. The sar. forms without metathesis may possibly be a borrowing in north sémi., ... For amh. *bāräkä* “2nd or 3rd cup of coffee” < *baraka*, [see] ... éth. knows a root augmented by *t* (without doubt denominative: te. *bärkätä* “to bring wealth, blessings”; tna. *bärkätä* “to be rich”). See also **BWRK**, **BRKE**. ...

(Translation mine. Language abbreviations and the method of language abbreviation has been left as in the original.)

Marcel Cohen 1928 also notes related forms in Cushitic and Berber. He emphasizes that the idea which appears to pervade these forms, and the forms in eastern Africa in general, is "force". Thus, in Amharic there is a form *g"ūlbat* "force, take by force", in Quara *gerb* (*girb*) "force, energy", in Qemant *girbī* "power". In Hadiya there is a form *gurubbō* for which the meaning "knee" alone is known, but there is a synonym from another root, *malay*, which is glossed "knee, force, power". In Berber he notes, the word for "knee", *afūd*, also means "the angle made by a branch with the trunk of a tree [see mng 4 in David Cohen 1970-6 above], an elevation in terrain, battle, important combat".

I give here in brief the meanings recorded in *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago*, vol. 8: 1971 for the Akkadian metathesized form in *KRB* for "prayer, blessing ..." so as to provide an idea of usage in a language the literature of which reflects a religion comparable to that of Vedic India.

karābu s.; 1. prayer, 2. blessing; ...

1. prayer – a) in gen. ... b) in names of gods ... c) in personal names ... 2. blessing.

karābu v.; 1. to pronounce formulas of blessing (said of gods and divine powers and manifestations), 2. to pronounce formulas of praise, adoration, homage and greeting, 3. to invoke blessings upon other persons (for a specific purpose) before the images of the gods, to pray to the gods, 4. to make the gesture of adoration or greeting, 5. to dedicate an offering by pronouncing the relevant formulas ...

1. to pronounce formulas of blessing (said of gods and divine powers and manifestations) – a) in gen. ... b) in the blessing formulas of ... letters ... c) in personal names ...

2. to pronounce formulas of praise, adoration, homage and greeting – a) directed to gods – 1' in gen. ... 2' in personal names ... b) directed to kings ... c) to greet (referring to private persons) ...

3. to invoke blessings upon other persons (for a specific purpose) before ... the images of the gods, to pray to the gods – a) to invoke blessings – 1' accompanied by cultic acts ... 2' other occs.

- (mostly in private letters) ... b) to pray to the gods ...
4. to make the gesture of adoration or greeting – a) in descriptions of figural representations ... b) other occs. ...
 5. to dedicate an offering by pronouncing the relevant formulas – a) in gen. ... b) in ext. ...
 6. *kurrubu* (same mng. as mng. 2 but pl.) ...
 7. IV (passive to mng. 1) ...

The connection here with Sem. *BRK*, though accepted by David Cohen 1970-6, may not be secure as noted for example by P. Fronzarelli 1965: 254. Fronzarelli notes a division of opinion in which on the one hand the Hebrew word for “to bless” represents a derivative form of -*BRUK*- “to get down on the knees” in agreement with the Akkadian form *karābu* “prayer, benediction”, and on the other hand it means “to bless”, a derivative coming directly from -*BIRK*- “knee”, and it refers to the transmission of the paternal force, communicated to the son seated on the knee in a rite of adoption. This latter, as noted by Marcel Cohen 1928, was a point of view very popular in the 1920s, and is in part supported by Cohen’s 1928 article. The two opinions, it must be emphasized, need not necessarily be seen to be in opposition to one another. As will be seen immediately below, the concept of force is shared by both the concept of “blessing” “prayer” and “knee”.

For a summary of early material on Sem. *BRK* see Thomas Plassmann 1913 and Marcel Cohen 1928.

Plassmann introduces his study:

From the remotest antiquity down to the present day, ... [b^crākā^h] has been the one word used by the Semite to express his highest conception of prosperity, well-being and happiness, of the choicest goods both in the natural and supernatural order, in fact, of every boon proceeding from the Deity. We are accustomed to render the generic term by the word “blessing”, which rendering, though probably the nearest and concisest that may be attempted, gives us at best but a glimpse of the thought, sentiment, and intimate life-story the Semite has hoarded up in the word ... [b^crākā^h].

Marcel Cohen 1928, as noted, in discussing the basic meaning of

the root in Afro-Asiatic languages emphasizes that the most frequent meaning attested in the terms from eastern Africa express the idea of "force, power" (208).

On the meaning "knee" carried by the root he sums up that in the eastern Semitic languages and in Ethiopia the idea of the "knee" is connected above all to the idea of force, and that nearby there is a more or less firm connection between the knee and the constitution of the family or the tribe. He proposes that at one time a common word for "knee" was shared by all Afro-Asiatic.

P. Paul Dhormle 1923: 205 concludes that in Akkadian usage above all the knee is the seat of the muscular force which allows man or animal to hold himself on his limbs. And G. R. Driver 1953: 260¹ notes that in Hebrew the knee is «the organ whence the water flows and is therefore an euphemism for the *membrum virile*, as the Acc. *birku* "knee" is in such phrases as *tarbît birkiya* "the offspring of my loins" ...» Note the listing for Akk. *bi/urk* as "penis?" in David Cohen 1970-6 in this regard.

In Hebrew tradition, of course, prayer involves a continuous and repeated bending of one's knees, and in Arabic tradition it involves touching the knees to the ground. Prayer involves one's knees.

Underlying the idea of prayer and blessing, therefore, there is an idea that prayer involves force and power.

In a study of the usage of *b^rrākā^h* in the Old Testament, A. Murtonen 1959 sees in the concept of "blessing", the idea of "fertilization" fostering material and physical well-being, including progeny, and prosperity and happiness in general. In rare usage a form is used as a euphemism for "curse". God is the giver or primary source of blessing, and is the embodiment of the blessing power.

The root in Arabic has come to be used to signify the particularly important Arabic concept *baraka*, which has been counted together with *mana* as one of the concepts which embody the mysterious force of the sacred. J. Chelhod 1955: 68 writes that the concept, which is commonly expressed by the idea of benediction, has a meaning more extended and complex than this, but less rich and more restricted than the sacred itself. He writes (80) that it is on one hand prosperity and faith, on the other hand the benediction extended as the transfer of the vital force and fecundity of a father to his progeny. When a thing aug-

ments continuously in number or in volume despite the usage that one makes of it, one says that it contains *baraka*. It is the miracle of multiplication. Further, the force which plays behind it is also as mysterious as the force of fecundity and prosperity itself, and in this sense it is almost comparable to fortune. This force is understood differently in different segments of the Arabic-speaking community. He sums up (87):

Philology permits us to begin with to hazzard a first definition. *Baraka* would be the fertility force of the father which he communicates to his children in blessings, that is to say in placing them on his knees or in his lap, grateful for the very achievement of his paternity and according his protection.

For pre-Islamic and more generally nomadic thought, it would be a mysterious and invisible quality, if not its effects, of an extra-terrestrial origin, which superadds itself to beings and to things and bringing to them, with it, abundance and success. It admits of transmission, just as it admits of loss. A beneficent principle, all contact with the principle of evil influence occasions its diminution, in truth its destruction.

Religious Islamic thought preserves for *baraka* all its marvellous prerogatives. But, in making God the sole source of the sacred, it reduces it to being only a manifestation of his mercy. On this account, it tends to depend on the holy and the pure and becomes sensible to the chthonic and to the impure.

(Translation mine.)

5. We have here an abundance of comparable points which might be examined, though with extreme care and caution and with regard for the separate integrity of the two traditions, Indic and Semitic, and consideration of the Dravidian tradition in India. There are, of course, the basic comparable points – the main basis of the proposed connection here between Skt. *bráhma*n and Sem. *BRK*. Both mean “prayer”, both mean “force”, both refer to the realm of the sacred, and the respective concepts have found central positions within both of the traditions. And the phonology is compatible.

Further, Skt. *bráhma*n within the Indian tradition is connected to

Skt. $\sqrt{2}$. *bṛh*, a root with perfectly good Indo-European connections, which means “to grow great or strong, increase”, while Sem. *BRK* carries with it the idea of increase and multiplication. Such an aspect to the Semitic term might well have facilitated merger within Sanskrit. In such a situation, of course, we must also be aware, as well as careful about, the possibility of feedback between the two traditions as they developed historically. There is also the possibility here of Skt. $\sqrt{2}$. *bṛh* and Sem. *BRK* being in relationship with one another by means of a Nostrada theory, but such a connection would be far too hypothetical and far too remote for serious consideration here. For usages of $\sqrt{2}$. *bṛh* comparable to this aspect of the force carried by Sem. *BRK*, see Jan Gonda 1953: 20 ff.

Within Indic tradition, the Sanskrit deification Prajāpati “lord of creatures” or “lord of progeny”, is closely connected with the concept of Brahmán. Again, Sem. *BRK* carries with it in usage the concept of fertilization and fertility, which in strict terms approximates the constructed force of Skt. *prajā*, “born forth” or “what is born forth”, if such a locution can be used in English. The Semitic concept also carries with it, in usage, a connection with progeny. While in the Hebrew tradition, as in the Islamic Arabic tradition, God is the giver or primary source of blessing, he is also in the Hebrew tradition the embodiment of the blessing power. If we think of God in the Hebrew material as comparable to Prajāpati or Brahmán in the Vedic Sanskrit *Brāhmaṇas*, the Hebrew concept is not incongruent from this vantage, though certainly we cannot view God in the Sanskrit tradition as the source of blessing. The Hebrew concept, though, is compatible with the deifications which record India’s development toward monotheism, and from this vantage may throw light on the development of monotheism in the Hebrew tradition in the Ancient Near East. Compare in this regard the beginning of the first creation story in *Genesis* and the comparable creation stories referred to in the *Brāhmaṇa* passages cited by Arthur Berriedale Keith 1925: 443-4 given above. I will sidestep the important point of chronology here since this is a wholly separate topic which will be treated separately in a paper in preparation.

The Semitic concept, while used to refer to the “knee”, appears to very possibly be used to refer to the loins and penis in Akkadian. In

the Indic tradition, the concept of Prajāpati is also to be connected closely with that aspect of the later Hindu *trimūrti*, “three aspects (of the godhead)”, referred to as Śiva.

Śiva, of course, is represented in Indic tradition by an erect penis. We must here, though, be careful to take into account the influence of Dravidian thought in India, since traditionally in our Western academic tradition this aspect of Śiva’s nature, and this form for representing Śiva, has been associated with the Dravidian culture of India.

Note also that both terms, Skt. *brāman* and Sem. *BRK*, serve as the basis for forms for “priest”. See David Cohen 1970-6 for Akk. *mkrb* “priest” here. Does this form in Akkadian, when in comparison with the Sanskrit form, suggest that in Akkadian *BRK* appears metathesized on account of its having been written that way, perhaps only a first, due to its extreme sanctity?

Also note the connection in both traditions of *brāhman* and *BRK* with water. See David Cohen 1970-6, mngs. 3 and 6, and see the creation stories in Keith cited immediately above.

In the Indic tradition, there is a duck called the Brahmany duck, and the classical god Brahman is characterized as a *hamsa*, a goose. Compare in this regard David Cohen 1970-6, mng. 1, AR. *burk-* “teal, duck”. Again, there is here a connection with water.

There is further possible interest which might devolve from the Berber term *afūd* referring not only to “knee” and meanings which display an underlying meaning of “force”, but also to “an elevation in the terrain”. This latter may be significant in the context of the *Upaniṣadic* concept that *brāhman*, the imperishable, is the universal “ground” on which reality rests (*Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 3.8.3-9). See also in this regard the meaning “bough” held also by *afūd* and in ARAN. *birkä, burkā* as recorded in David Cohen 1970-6, mng. 4.

The more one looks here, the more possibilities of comparison one sees.

What is particularly significant here are two points. The first is that while the Semitic concept is of importance in the Semitic tradition, the Indian genius elaborated on the concept from its end, and found in it what then became explicitly stated explanations of the universe far more extensive and far more central to the Indian tradition than the concept was or was to become in the Semitic tradition. The

second is that from an examination of the shared and unique ways in which the concept is used in the Semitic tradition on one hand, and in the Sanskrit tradition on the other, we can better understand the concept in each of the traditions.

From the vantage of the Sanskrit tradition, we can see in the development of the Sanskrit concept not an extension of meaning, but rather a change of focus on the original meaning of the term which adapted the concept to new cultural circumstances. It is, for instance, not that the importance of the priesthood in

Vedic India led to the development of the concept in a new and different direction, but that the importance of the priesthood focused attention on the concept and later on certain special aspects of the concept at a time when there was a lessened importance of the priesthood evidenced, for instance, by Uddálaka's questioning of Śvetaketu in *Chandogyopaniṣad* 6.1.1-3 and Gārgya's approaching Ajātaśatru for instruction in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 2.1.1-16. A corollary to the belief that all men equally have a claim to immediate contact and identification with *bráhmaṇ*, the monism of the *Upaniṣads* is that the priests (*bráhmaṇás*) who can be connected with *bráhmaṇ* through descent from the mouth of the cosmic man (*Rgveda* 10.90) are no longer the exclusive purveyors of *bráhmaṇ*. In this fashion, and through a restatement of its pantheon from the vantage of its experiment with monotheism, Indian religion survived with vitality its second crisis in faith which grew out of the deterioration of Brahmanism to over-ritualized mumbo-jumbo, while in the Ancient Near East there was never a recovery from the comparable second crisis in faith.

The etymology proposed here, in short, can help us see unique cultural usages of the concept in both the Indic tradition and the Semitic tradition, while at the same time the usage of the concept in each of the traditions can help us better understand the concept in the other, albeit with due care for the integrity of the different traditions. It may also help us understand better the origin of monotheism in both the Semitic and Indic traditions.

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