

Additions to the Rg Veda

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The 10 books (mandalas) of the Rg Veda¹ presently contain a total of 1028 hymns. 1000 is a number at which an editor might well aim, and the RV extra 28 suggest later additions to an editorially finished anthology. Can the 28 be located? We might look for either late content or anomalous position. Starting with the latter, how many hymns are there in each of the 10 books? The answer is:

191 43 62 58 87 75 104 103 114 191

The identical size of the first and last (191, a number with very little intrinsic appeal) can only be editorially intentional. In between come the “family books” (RV 2-8), from which RV 8 stands somewhat apart (for one thing, it duplicates poets from the previous books), and the Soma hymns of RV 9. If we take the middle eight books, we see what might be the remains of an earlier arrangement by increasing poem count. The exceptions (the anomalously large books) are here **emphasized**.

43 **62** 58 **87** 75 **104** 103 114 (Tot 646)

If we regularize this by reducing each oversize book just enough to make it smaller than the book that follows it, we would have:

43 **57** 58 **74** 75 **102** 103 114 (Tot 626)

And it turns out that the least possible correction (itself hardly plausible as a system) would require removing a total of 40 hymns; more than we are looking for. Then these middle books too have undergone some sort of expansion after having been edited, and we have not one, but two, problems to engage.

Nor is it given that the symmetrical first and last books are free of late additions: if the same number of late poems were added each, they would remain symmetrical. Book 10 is particular has been considered to contain late material (BJ 29).

Some specific suggestions have been made. A group of eleven “Vālahilya” hymns in Book 8 were identified as extraneous by Müller 0000.² The last poem in Book 7 (a curse rather than a hymn) has been called an “obvious addition” (JB 2/000), and the “Upanishadic” nature of 10:00 has been noted (BJ 3/000). But must these be among our 28 *last* poems? Or might they belong to an earlier stage in the growth of this extremely large corpus? We may be better advised to put aside, for the time being, all thoughts of the final 28, and to look more widely for signs of growth.

¹Most recently translated by Jamison and Brereton 2014 (hereinafter JB), with a 2021 Guide by Brereton and Jamison (BJ). Diacritics (save for long-vowel marks) are here omitted from Sanskrit words, to make the subject less formidable for the general readership.

²BJ 27 :clearly supplements.”