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Author(s)	Yamada, Tomoki
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# Rasā in Vedic Literature:

## A Philological Study on a Mythological River

Tomoki YAMADA

Key words: *rāsā-* / Ṛgveda / Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa / *raṇhā-* / Aśvin and Nāsatya

### 0. Preface

*Rāsā-* is the name of a river in Vedic literature, particularly the well-known river appearing in the Vala myth.<sup>1)</sup> MAYRHOFER *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen* (EWAia) II, 1996, p.441f. notes *rāsā-* to be a feminine noun from *rāsa-* ‘Pflanzensaft, Saft, Flüssigkeit, Seim, Essenz, Mark’ and gives the meaning, ‘ein mythischer Strom am Ende der Welt, ein Nebenfluß des Indus.’ Avestan (Av.) *raṇhā-*, a mythological river or ocean marking the boundary of the world in the west,<sup>2)</sup> shares the same origin.<sup>3)</sup>

In this paper, I conduct a philological investigation of all passages mentioning Rasā in Vedic literature, provide the text, translation, and commentaries, and present primary materials regarding a river that appears in the earliest Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) literature.

### 1. Rasā in the Ṛgveda<sup>4)</sup>

Rasā is referred to nine times in the Ṛgveda (RV). I classify these passages into three broad groups according to their context: 1.1 Rasā as a mythological river, 1.2. Rasā as a toponym, and 1.3. Rasā in other passages.

#### 1.1 Rasā as a Mythological River

##### 1.1.1. The Vala myth [X 108 (934), 1;2;5]

X 108,1 *kīm ichántī sarāmā prédām ānaḍ<sup>1</sup> dūrē hṃ ádhvā jáguriḥ parācāiḥ |*  
*kāsméhitiḥ ká páritakṃyāsīt<sup>1</sup> kathám rasāyā ataraḥ páyāmsi ||*  
 [Words of the Paṇis:] In search for what did Saramā<sup>5)</sup> reach here? Because the path is much in the great distance and exhausting.<sup>6)</sup> What was

the decision concerning us? What was the decisive moment<sup>7)</sup>? How did you cross over the [flows of] milk of Rasā?

- 2 *īndrasya dūtīr iṣitā carāmi* <sup>1</sup> *mahā ichántī paṇayo nidhīn vaḥ |*  
*atiṣkādo bhiyāsā tán na āvat* <sup>1</sup> *táthā rasāyā ataram páyāṃsi ||*  
 [Words of Saramā:] Sent as a messenger of Indra, I move around, o Paṇis, in search for your wealth for the sake of the great one (i.e., Indra). As regards a fear to jump/be jumped over,<sup>8)</sup> this<sup>9)</sup> helped us. In this manner, I crossed over [the flows of] the milk of Rasā.

X 108 is a dialogue between Saramā and the Paṇis, and this episode represents the beginning of the Vala myth. The outline of this hymn is as follows: as a messenger of Indra, the she-dog Saramā crosses over Rasā and finds the cows of the Paṇis hidden within Vala. When she informs them that Indra with his troops will come to plunder their wealth (i.e., cows), the Paṇis prepare to resist. Saramā then threatens them, telling of the dreadful mercilessness of Indra. The Paṇis try to win her over, but she firmly refuses this proposal.

As mentioned in the endnote 1, one subject of the Vala myth is Indra's release of sunlight. According to such symbolism, Rasā could also be interpreted as a cosmological river. Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa (JB) II 440–442 tells a similar story, which is taken up in section 3 below.

### 1.1.2. The Áśvins and Rasā [I 112,12 and IV 43 (339),5;6]

- I 112,12 *yābhī rasām kṣódasodnáḥ pipinváthur* <sup>1</sup> *anaśvám yābhī rátham ávataṃ jiṣé |*  
*yābhis triśóka usríyā udájata* <sup>1</sup> *tābhir ū śú ūtibhir aśvinā gatam ||*  
 With which you both swelled Rasā with the spray of water, with which you both helped the horseless chariot to win, with which Triśoka drove the reddish-brown [cows] out, with these supports, o Áśvins, come here now!

This passage is a part of a hymn comprising twenty-five stanzas and dedicated to the Áśvins. This hymn lists many of the Áśvins' achievements, although the stanzas and even pādas are unrelated to each other. As a result, the majority remain unclear.<sup>10)</sup> Stanza 12a says that Áśvins filled up Rasā with water. However, there are no passages in the RV recounting the background of this episode.

- IV 43,5 *urú vām ráthaḥ pári nakṣati dyām* <sup>1</sup> *ā yát samudrád abhí vártate vām |*  
*mādhvā mādhvā vī mádhu vām pruşāyan* <sup>1</sup> *yát sīm vām pṛkṣo bhurájanta*  
*pakvāḥ ||*

Your chariot reaches wide around heaven, when [the chariot] turns toward you both from the sea (Samudra).<sup>11)</sup> O honey-lovers,<sup>12)</sup> with honey, they drip as your honey when they bring (?) it (hot milk) as cooked nourishments for you both.<sup>13)</sup>

- 6 *síndhur ha vām rasáyā síñcad áśvān<sup>1</sup> ghṛṇā váyo 'ruṣásah pári gman |*  
*tád ū śú vām ajiráṃ ceti yānam<sup>1</sup> yéna páti bhāvathaḥ sūr;yáyāḥ ||*  
 Sindhu pours out Rasā to your horses. Red birds (i.e., flying horses) avoid the heat.<sup>14)</sup> Your swift driving stands out, by which you both become the husbands of Sūryā.

IV 43 is an Áśvin-hymn consisting of seven stanzas. It is supposed that two stanzas cited above refer to the myth about the “transportation of the sun by Áśvin and Nāstyā.” GOTÖ<sup>15)</sup> discusses the background of this myth in full detail. Supporting the view that Áśvin and Nāsatya are the deities of the morning and evening star, respectively, he examines how they traverse the universe and suggests that two kinds of travel can be traced from the fragmentary descriptions of the RV: “moving over the sea through the night by ship led by bird(s),” and “moving through the sky during the day in a chariot drawn by horse(s) or some other animals.” He then concludes that an original form of the myth can be reconstructed as follows: Nāsatya (‘being in charge of the safely return,’ <nas, nasate ‘come home safely’<sup>16)</sup>) delivers the sun setting on the western sea toward the east by ship, and Áśvin (‘characterized by horses’) leads the morning sun by the chariot through the sky.

As another achievement of Áśvin and Nāsatya, it is known that they rescued a person named *Bhujyú-* from the ocean, and delivered him to his home (*ásta-<nas*) at dawn. Regarding this myth, an episode that appears to go back to the same origin can be observed in the Avesta,<sup>17)</sup> with GOTÖ seeing a similar concept about “the delivering of the sun” in both myths. The Avestan narrative (Yašt 5,61–63) recounts that a navigator (*nauuāza-*, OIA *navājá-*), named Pāuruua (OIA *Paurá-*), is rescued by Ōraētaona (OIA *Tritá- Āpt,yá-*), and so he promises to the goddess Anāhitā to offer libation into the water of Rañhā when he returns safely to his home.<sup>18)</sup> Although the context is not entirely clear, Rañhā in Avesta may have some connection with the myth of the “rescue of the sun.”

Let us return to the above stanzas (IV 43,5 and 6). 5ab provides an example of the myth just quoted. Stanza 6 recounts the episode of the “marriage of Áśvins and Sūryā,”<sup>19)</sup> which should be seen as another example describing the transfer of

the sun by Ásvín and Nāsatya. This stanza depicts the scene in which the Ásvins put Sūryā on their chariot and go up to the sky from the east. On the other hand, it is difficult to interpret the roles of Sindhu<sup>20)</sup> and Rasā in this context. Perhaps, the deified/personified Sindhu pours (the water or flow of?) Rasā to the horses of Ásvins.<sup>21)</sup> There is room for argument on this point, although it is notable that Rasā is mentioned in the myth of the “transportation of the sun” as well as Avestan Rañhā.

As a toponym, Rasā is always referred to with Sindhu, suggesting that these two rivers are located in proximity. On this point, see section 1.2. below.

### 1.1.3. Rasā as a Circular Flow [IX 41 (753),6]

- 6      *pāri ṇaḥ śarmayánt,yā<sup>1</sup> dhārayā soma viśvataḥ |*  
       *sārā raséva viśtāpam ||*  
       O Soma, flow<sup>22)</sup> around us with a stream giving shelter from every direction, as if Rasā [flows around] the vast area (i.e., the earth)/highest part (i.e., the heaven)!

This stanza is a part of a Soma hymn consisting of six stanzas. Rasā is described as a circular flow. The word *viśtāp-* in pāda c is investigated by SCARLATA<sup>23)</sup> in detail. The strict sense of this word seems difficult to define. According to SCARLATA, the following three possibilities are likely: ‘oberster Teil, Höhe,’ ‘(ausgedehnte) Fläche,’ and ‘Meer.’ Although it is uncertain which of these three options applies to this stanza, as WITZEL<sup>24)</sup> acutely pointed out, this passage describes the scene in which Rasā flows, surrounding the end of the world or heaven. The figure of a circular flow reminds us of Ὠκεανός (Oceanus) in Greek mythology, which flows around the disc-shaped earth.

### 1.1.4. Rasā in Creation Myth [X 121 (947),4]

- 4      *yāsyemé himāvanto mahitvā<sup>1</sup> yāsya samudrām rasāyā sahāhūḥ |*  
       *yāsyemāḥ pradiśo yāsya bāhū<sup>1</sup> kāsmāi devāya haviṣā vidhema ||*  
       Which god should we serve with an offering, by whose greatness, these [mountains] covered with snow exist, to whom, as people say, the sea (Samudra) together with Rasā belongs, by whose [greatness], these directions that are his two arms exist?<sup>25)</sup>

This stanza is from a hymn that tells a sort of creation myth. Pādas a-c in each stanza describe the scenes relating to the creation of the world, while in pāda d (the refrain), the poet repeatedly asks a question about which god (as creator)

the poets should serve. In the last stanza, the name of *Prajāpati*- is provided as the answer, although this must be a secondary addition by later hand.<sup>26)</sup>

Pāda b in stanza 4 seems to imply that Rasā flows into the sea (Samudra).<sup>27)</sup> The preceding stanza 3 refers to “who (*ká*-, i.e., the creator)” rules over human beings or animals (*dvipád*-, *cātuṣpad*-) as a lord of the world, and the following stanza 5 suggests that the heaven, earth, and sky (*dív*-, *pṛthivī*-, *antárikṣa*-) are created. These facts would imply that the poet describes Rasā as a representative among the rivers along with the sea (Samudra) in comparison to the high mountains.<sup>28)</sup>

## 1.2. Rasā as a toponym [V 53 (407), 9, X 75 (901), 5; 6]<sup>29)</sup>

**V 53,9**    *mā vo rasā<sub>a</sub> nītabhā kūbhā krúmur<sup>1</sup> mā vaḥ sīndhur ní rīramat |*  
*mā vaḥ pári śthāt saráyuh purīṣiṇ<sub>y</sub><sup>1</sup> asmé ít sumnám astu vaḥ ||*  
 Rasā, Anitabhā, Kubhā (Kabul) and Krumu (Kurram) should not [make] you (Maruts) [stop]. Sindhu (Indus) should not make you stop. Affluent<sup>30)</sup> Sarayu<sup>31)</sup> should not surround you. Be your favor for us!

**X 75,5**    *imám me gaṅge yamune sarasvati<sup>1</sup> śútudri stómaṃ sacatā páruṣṇ<sub>y</sub> á |*  
*asikn<sub>yā</sub> marudvṛdhe vitástay<sub>a</sub>-<sup>1</sup> āṛjīkīye śṛṇuḥ<sub>y</sub> á suśómayā ||*  
 O Gaṅgā (Ganges), Yamunā (Jumna), Sarasvatī (Gagghar-Hakra), Śútudrī (Sutlej), accompany this praise from me, o Paruṣṇī (Ravi)! With Asiknī (Chenab), o Marudvṛdhā, with Vitastā (Jhelum), o Āṛjīkiyā, hear, with Suśomā (Soan)!

**6**    *tṛṣṭāmāyā prathamām yātave sa<sub>jū</sub>ḥ<sup>1</sup> susárt<sub>u</sub> vā rasāyā śvet<sub>yā</sub> tyā<sup>1</sup> |*  
*t<sub>u</sub> vām sīndho kūbhayā gomatī<sub>m</sub> krúmum<sup>1</sup> mehatn<sub>u</sub> vā sarátham yābhir*  
*īyase||*

First, allied with Tṛṣṭāmā, Susartu, Rasā, and this<sup>32)</sup> Śvetī to go forth, with which (rivers), o Sindhu, you speed on the same chariot with Kubhā toward Gomatī (Gomal) [and] with Mehatnū toward Krumu.

In V 53,9, the name of Rasā is mentioned with Kubhā (Kabul) and Krumu (Kurram), tributaries of Indus that flow in the mountainous regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. X 75,5 and 6 are part of the hymn dedicated to Sindhu with other rivers. The rivers in this hymn are listed from east to west (5), and then north to south (6) in geographical order.<sup>33)</sup> X 75,6 appears to describe the Sindhu flowing from the northern mountainous region toward the southern area and coming together with various rivers. In this stanza, as well as V 53,9, Rasā appears with the Indus, Kubhā, and Krumu, which may imply that Rasā is imagined as



a river from the northwest area of Indian subcontinent. PARPOLA supposes that Rasā may be identified with the source of the Indus originating in the Himalayas [see the figure left].

### 1.3. Rasā in Other Passages [V 41 (395),15, VIII 72 (681),13]

**V 41,15** *padé-pade me jarimā ní dhāyi | várūtrī vā śakrá yá pāyúbhiś ca |*  
*sīśaktu mātā mahī rasā naḥ<sup>34)</sup> | smāt sūrībhīr ṛjuhāsta ṛjuvāniḥ ||*  
 In my every step, age is put down,<sup>35)</sup> [by] the one who is an able defender (f.), and by the protectors.<sup>36)</sup> As a great mother, Rasā having straight arms [and] straight wishes<sup>37)</sup> should accompany us with patrons.

**VIII 72,13** *ā suté siñcata śríyam | ródas.yor abhiśríyam |*  
*rasā dadhīta vṛṣabhām ||*  
 Pour out splendor into the pressed out [Soma juice]! [Pour] perfection<sup>38)</sup> into/of the heaven and earth! Rasā should put the bull (Soma?) on herself.<sup>39)</sup>

V 41,15 is a passage from a hymn to All Gods (Viśve Devāḥ). Hymns V 41–51 are one of the most incomprehensible series in the RV.<sup>40)</sup> Likewise, it is not easy to understand here what this single stanza really means. Rasā may be personified as a motherly<sup>41)</sup> guardian of long life.

VIII 72 contains several allusions from which we can observe the features of later rituals. GELDNER<sup>42)</sup> interprets this stanza as a scene of pouring milk (ab) and water (c) for Soma.

## 2. Rasā in the Other Saṁhitās

In the Saṁhitās other than the RV, Rasā appears in the following seven passages: Atharvaveda Śaunaka-recension (AV) IV 2,5, Atharvaveda Paippalada-recension (AVP) IV 1,5, Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā (MS) II 13,23:168,11–12, Kāṭhaka-Saṁhitā XL 1:135,11–12, Taittirīya-Saṁhitā IV 1,8,4, Vājasaneyi-Saṁhitā Mādhyandina-recension (VS) XXV 12 and XXXIII 21.

With the exception of VS XXXIII 21, which is identical to RV VIII 71,13, these passages are all based on RV X 121,4 mentioned above. Although we can observe partial differences in terms of the word order, case, or contents, it seems difficult to reach any other views that would contribute to a further understanding of Rasā.<sup>43)</sup>



### 3. Rasā in Prose: JB II 440–442

#### JB II 440–442<sup>44)</sup> (abhiplava)

*atha ha vai paṇayo nāmāsūrā devānām gorakṣā āsuḥ | tābhir ahāpātasthuḥ<sup>45)</sup> |  
tā ha rāsāyām nirudhya valenāpidadhuḥ | te devā aliklavam ūcus suparṇemā  
no gā anviccheti | tatheti | sa hānuprapapāta | tā hānvājagāma rasāyām  
antar valenāpihitāḥ | tasmai hānvāgatāya sarpiḥ kṣīram āmikṣām dadhīty  
etad upanidadhuḥ | tasya ha suhita āsa | taṁ hocus suparṇaiṣa eva te balir  
bhaviṣyaty etad annam mā naḥ pravoca iti | sa ha punar āpapāta | taṁ hocus  
suparṇāvīdo gā<sup>46)</sup> iti | kā kīrtiś cid gavām iti hovāca | eṣaiva kīrtir gavām  
iti | tasya hendro galam utpīlayann uvāca goṣv evāha kila<sup>47)</sup> tavoṣuṣo mukham  
iti | sa ha dadhidrapsam vāmikṣām vodāsa | so 'yaṁ babhūva yo 'yaṁ vasantā  
bhūmikapaṭhur jāyate | taṁ ha tac chaśāpāślīlam jālma te jīvanam bhūyād  
yo no gā anuvidya tā na pravoca iti | tasya haitad grāmasya jaghanārdhe yat  
pāpiṣṭhaṁ taj jīvanam ||440||*

Then, Asuras named Paṇis were the cowherds of the gods. They left [from the gods] with them (cows). Having enclosed them in [the midst of] Rasā, they confined them by means of Vala. Then, the gods said to Aliklava,<sup>48)</sup> “O you with good wings, seek those our cows!” [He answered,] “Yes (lit. “so be it”).” He flew off to [the cows]. He came to them (cows) confined by means of Vala in the midst of Rasā. When he arrived, they (Paṇis) served [food] such as “sarpis (clarified butter), kṣīra (milk), āmikṣā (curd) or dadhi (whey)” to him. He was filled with this (food). They said to him, “O you with good wings, this, verily, will become the tribute to you, this [your] food. Do not tell about us.” He flew back. [The gods] said to him, “O you with good wings, have you found the cows?” He said, “What is the report on the cows?” “This is the very report on the cows,” said Indra wringing his neck. “Obviously, you have a face (of someone) who has stayed among the cows.” He (Aliklava) vomited out a drop of dadhi, āmikṣā [or something]. It became this bhūmikapaṭhu (a kind of plant) that comes out in spring. Then, he (Indra) cursed him, “O ominous one, your life will become coarse, because you didn’t tell about the cows, even though you had found them.” And thus, the worst life in the hinder part of a village belongs to him [today]. (440)

*te saramām abruvan sarama imā nas tvaṁ gā anviccheti | tatheti sā  
hānuprasasāra | sā ha rasām ājagāma | eṣā ha vai sā rasā yaiṣārvāk samu-  
drasya vāpāyāt | tāṁ hovāca ploṣye tvā gādhā me bhaviṣyasīti | plavasva meti  
hovāca na te gādhā bhaviṣyāmīti | sā hāvācyā karṇau ploṣyamāṇā sasāra |  
sā hekṣām cakre katham nu mā śunī plaveta hantāsyai gādhāsānīti | tāṁ*

*hovāca mā mā ploṣṭhā gādhā te bhaviṣyāmīti | tatheti | tasyai ha gādha āsa |  
 sā ha gādhenātisasāra | tā hānvājagāma rasāyām antar valenāpihūtāḥ | tasyai  
 hānvāgatāyai tathaiva sarpiḥ kṣīram āmikṣāṃ dadhīty etad evopanidadhuḥ |  
 sā hovāca nāham etāvad apriyā devānām | gā avidaṃ yad vo 'śnīyām | ta u  
 vai devānām steyam kṛtvā carathaitāsāṃ vā ahaṃ gavām padavīr asmi | na  
 mā lāpayiṣyadhve nendrasya gā upahariṣyadhva iti | sā hānāśuṣy<sup>49)</sup> uvāsa |  
 sā ha jarāyṃ apāstaṃ viveda | tad dha cakhāda | tāṃ haika upajagau tyaṃ iva  
 vai ghnatī saramā jāru khādatīti | tad idam apy etarhi nivacanam tyaṃ iva vai  
 ghnatī saramā jāru khādatīti | jarāyu ha sā tac cakhāda | sā ha punar āsasāra |  
 tāṃ hocus sarama 'vido gā<sup>50)</sup> iti ||441||*

They (the gods) said to Saramā, “O Saramā, seek those our cows!” [She answered,] “Yes.” She started to run after [the cows]. She came to Rasā. This is Rasā that... of Samudra hither.<sup>51)</sup> She (Saramā) said to her (Rasā), “I will swim across<sup>52)</sup> you, or you will become shallow for me.” “Swim [across] me [if you can]!” said [Rasā], “I will not become shallow for you.” Folding her ears back, she (Saramā) ran in order to swim. She (Rasā) thought, “Now, how does the female dog swim across me?<sup>53)</sup> There! I will be shallow for her.” She said to her, “Don’t swim across me! I will become shallow for you.” “Yes,” [said Saramā]. Then, there was a shoal<sup>54)</sup> for her. She ran across through the shoal. She tracked those [cows] confined by means of Vala in the midst of Rasā. They (the Paṇis), in quite the same way, served [food] such as “sarpiḥ, kṣīra, āmikṣā, or dadhi” to her, when she arrived. She said, “I have just found out the cows not as such a disagreeable woman for the gods<sup>55)</sup> enough to eat [the tribute] from you. On the other hand, you are living a life stealing [what belongs to] the gods. I am the tracer of the footprints of cows. You won’t win over me. You won’t take the cows of Indra for your own.” She spent the night having not eaten. She found an afterbirth (*jarāyu-*)<sup>56)</sup> thrown away. She chewed that. Someone sang to her: “Like a woman killing this one, Saramā chews the afterbirth (*jāru-*)<sup>57)</sup>.” So, even now, we have this proverb, “As the woman killing this one, Saramā chews the afterbirth.” Then, she chewed the afterbirth. She ran back [to the gods]. They said to her, “O Saramā, have you found the cows?” (441)

*avidam iti hovācemā rasāyām antar valenāpihitāḥ | tā yathāmanyadhvam<sup>58)</sup>  
 evam ājihīrṣateti | tāṃ ha tad indra uvācānnādīm are te sarama prajāṃ karomī  
 yā no gā anvavida iti | te haite vidarbheṣu mālālā<sup>59)</sup> sārameyā api ha  
 śārdūlaṃ mārayanti |*

“I have found (them),” she said. “They are confined by means of Vala in the midst of Rasā. Just as you were thinking, try to take them as your own!”

Indra then said to her, “Ah Saramā, I make your descendants eating-food, because you have found our cows.” There are Mācala dogs, the descendants of Saramā in Vidarbha [today]. They even kill tigers.

The passage tells us a variation of the Vala myth with a rich narrative. Not only the dialogue between Saramā and the Paṇis, but also some of the original episodes, such as the secret promise between Aliklava and Paṇis or Saramā fording the Rasā, are mentioned. Since Vala is depicted as a structure in the middle of Rasā (*rasāyām antar*), it may follow that this river had the sandbar or island. On the other hand, it is difficult to determine the meaning of the fourth sentence in II 441 (*eṣā ha vai sā rasā yaiṣārvāk samudrasya vāpāyati*), which would describe the concrete image of Rasā and the sea (Samudra). Rasā’s association with the sea can thus be related to RV X 121,4 or its parallels in other Saṁhitās.

It should be noted that Rasā made herself shallow for Saramā after their exchange of words, although this followed her initial refusal. This reminds us of RV III 33, the hymn of the dialogue between Viśvāmitra and the rivers (Vipās and Śutudrī).

#### 4. Conclusion

In the RV, Rasā is mentioned nine times. Numerically, this number is the third among the rivers after Sindhu and Sarasvatī. However, the RV verses give only fragmentary information or images about Rasā.

From the RV passages, we can abstract the following mythological aspects about this river. Rasā flows surrounding the end of the world or heaven (1.1.3.). The Paṇis dwell on the other side or sandbar/island of this river, where they confine cows, which may be identified with sunlight, in the Vala (rocky cave or defense wall)(1.1.1.). When the Aśvins transport Sūryā (daughter of the sun) on their chariot, their draft horses are poured out (the water/flow of?) Rasā by Sindhu (1.1.2.). In these myths, we may observe the idea of “the movement of the sun.”

As a toponym, Rasā appears with the northwest rivers of the Indian sub-continent, such as Sindhu (Indus), Kubhā (Kabul), Gomati (Gomal), or Krumu (Kurram), which encourages us to assume that Rasā would be located in proximity to these rivers. Taking into account the “list” of rivers in X 75, this river may be identified with one of the sources of the Indus in the northern mountainous region, although it is difficult to determine its accurate geological location (1.2.).

The boundary between the myth and the actual river is not always definite. However, from these passages on Rasā, we may say that the people at that time imagined her to be a river flowing in a mountainous area immeasurably far away from their sphere of life.

The Post-Ṛgvedic Samhitās contain some references to Rasā, although they all repeat a quotation or give a slight variation of the RV material without any new context. On the other hand, JB II 440–442 refer to Rasā in a wider context concerning the Vala myth than RV; this is the sole example of Rasā in prose. However, the very sentence that should give the concrete image of this river is poorly transmitted and does not permit us an interpretation.

[notes]

- 1) The outline of this myth is as follows: the rich and non-Aryan Paṇi tribe hides many cows in a rock cave or defense wall called Vala located near the Rasā. Indra sends out a she-dog Saramā as a scout, which discovers the cows confined in the Vala. The Aṅgiras' led by Bṛhaspati destroy the rocky wall of Vala by means of their poetic words, and in the end, Indra releases the captive cows. It is supposed that the cows are identified with the sunlight in this mythology, and the release of the sunlight by Indra is one of the main subjects featuring in this episode. Cf. GOTŌ, *Rig-Veda. Das heilige Wissen. Erster und zweiter Liederkreis*, 2007 (WITZEL-GOTŌ RV), p.840 and 851. On the relationship between this myth and the Japanese myth *Amano-iwato*, see WITZEL, "Vala and Iwato. The Myth of the Hidden Sun in India, Japan, and beyond," *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 12-1(2005), ("Vala and Iwato").
- 2) Cf. GOTŌ, *op. cit.*
- 3) On Rasā and Raṇhā, see LOMMEL, "Rasā," *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik* IV (1926), pp.194–206 (= *Kleine Schriften* pp.89–101); HUMBACH, "Die Awestische Länderliste," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens und Archiv für indische Philosophie* IV (1960), pp.36–46 (esp. pp.42–44); WITZEL, "Sur le chemin du ciel," *Bulletin d'études indiennes* II (1984), p.225f., notes, p.256ff.; WITZEL, "Vala and Iwato," p.16f.; YARSHATER, ed., *Encycloaedia Iranica* Vol.II, Fasc.3, pp.262f. (s.v. ARANG). GOTŌ points out that a cosmic legend (i.e., the release of the sunlight by Indra) and earthly affair (i.e., plundering of a hostile rich tribe along the river) are overlapped on the Vala myth, and concludes that Rasā is a river rather than an ocean. Cf. GOTŌ, "Aśvín- and Násatyā- in the Rgveda and their prehistoric background," in *Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable*, ed. OSADA, 2006 ("Aśvín- and Násatyā-"), p.207.
- 4) AUFRECHT (ed.) *Die Hymn des Rigveda*. 2 Bde. 2. Auflage, 1877.
- 5) The origin of the word *sarāmā-* is unknown. EWAia II, p.707 gives a possible meaning 'quick one'(<*sar* 'to run'). Yama's two dogs that guard the path of the departed are mentioned as descendants of Saramā (*sārameyā-*). X 14,10ab *āti drava sārameyāu ś<sub>v</sub>vānau* <sup>1</sup> *caturakṣāu śabālau sādhnā pathā*. 'Run over the two dogs, the four-eyed and spotted

descendants of Saramā, through the right path!’

- 6) I interpret *jágurī-* as a reduplicated *i*-stem of *glā*, *glāyati* ‘to exhaust.’ Cf. MAYRHOFFER, Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen III, 1976, p.699 (s.v. *glāyati*) and TICHY, Die Nomina agentis auf *-tar-* im Vedischen, 1995, p.237f. (this word is not dealt with in the latter).
- 7) *páritakmya-* ‘a turning post for the chariot race’ < \**pari-takman-* (*tak* ‘to rush’ with *-man-*). Cf. WENNERBERG, Die altindischen Nominalsuffixe *-man-* und *-iman-* in historisch-komparativer Beleuchtung, 1981, p.110f.
- 8) Cf. GELDNER, Der Rig-Veda, 1951 (GELDNER RV) III, p.329: “Aus Furcht vor dem Überspringen half sie (Rasā) uns dabei...” and SCARLATA, p.630: “in der Furcht vor dem Hinüberspringen half uns dies...” GOTÖ follows GELDNER. Cf. GOTÖ, Die „I.Präsensklasse“ im Vedischen. Untersuchung der vollstufigen thematischen Wurzelpräsentia, 1987 (I. Präs.), p.211f.
- 9) Namely, the fact that she has been sent by Indra; she replies to the question of the Paṇis (1c). So it follows that this was the turning point (*páritakmyā-*) for her. Cf. OLDENBERG, Noten II, p.331.
- 10) Cf. GELDNER RV I, p.144; GOTÖ, WITZEL-GOTÖ RV, p.654.
- 11) There is room for a further investigation of *samudrá-* in the RV. KLAUS defines it as a wide river formed by the confluence of several rivers and assumes it to denote the Indus river in most cases. See KLAUS, “Samudrá im Veda,” Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft Suppl. VII, 1989, p.364ff. and Die Wasserfahrzeuge im vedischen Indien, 1989, p.26. WITZEL interprets the meaning as “›Zusammen (*sam*)-Fließen der Wasser (*udan/r*)‹, ›großer See‹, d.h. der Zusammenfluß der Panjab-Ströme, ein See (besonders am Ende von Flüssen in der Wüste),” and furthermore as “mythologisch auch der ›Strom‹ bzw. ›Ozean‹ am Ende der Welt, Ur-Ozean, Weltozean am ende der Welt, im Himmel und unter der Erde.” See, WITZEL-GOTÖ RV, p.497.
- 12) Cf. WACKENAGEL and DEBRUNNER, Altindische Grammatik (AiG) II-2, p.394; “unklar v. *mādhvī* (Vok. Du.) als Anrede an die Aśvins.”
- 13) Cf. GOTÖ, “Grammatical Irregularities in the Rigveda, Book IV,” Indic across the Millennia: from the Rigveda to Modern Indo-Aryan (2012), p.26. Both the meaning and form of *bhurá-janta* are extremely unclear. He thus suggests its possible associations with *bhur-á-ti* ‘move to and fro (>*bhuranā*, an epithet for Aśvins),’ *aj* ‘to urge on,’ or *bhiṣáj-* ‘doctor (Aśvins are the doctors among the gods).’ It seems that V 73,8 is a similar example: RV V 73 (427), 8 *mādhva ū śú madhūyuvā<sup>1</sup> rūdrā śśakti pipyūṣī | yāt samudrāti pārṣathaḥ<sup>1</sup> pakvāḥ pṛkṣo bharanta vām ||* ‘O two honey seeking Rudras, a [woman] swollen with honey (f.sg. GELDNER II, p.78 interprets as *kaśā* “a whip”) follows you. When you take [people] over the sea (Samudra), they bring the cooked nourishments to you both.’ Cf. EWAia II, p.226 (sv. *bhurá-janta*); GOTÖ, I. Präs. p.226<sup>483</sup>, “*Aśvín-* and *Násatyā-*,” p.258; HOFFMANN, Der Imperativ im Veda, 1967, p.129.
- 14) GELDNER assumes that the heat is caused by the daughter of the sun (Sūryā) or chariot race, with the chariot of the Aśvins being so rapid that they are able to avoid the heat radiated by Sūryā (cf. GELDNER RV I, p.476 and II p.78). On the Aśvins and Sūryā, see endnote 19 below.
- 15) Cf. “*Aśvín-* and *Násatyā-*,” pp.253-283.
- 16) Cf. GOTÖ, *op. cit.* p.263.

- 17) On this topic, I referred to the following three studies: OETTINGER, “Zu den Mythen von Bhujyu- und von Pāuruua-,” *Indo Iranian Journal* 31 (1988), p.299f.; GOTÖ, “Vasiṣṭha und Varuṇa in RV VII 88,” *Indoarisch, Iranisch und die Indogermanistik, Erlanger Tagung 1997* (2000), p.152f.; GOTÖ, “*Aśvin-* and *Nāsaty-*,” p.264f.
- 18) In Pursiṣnīhā 32, Pāuruua also appears together with Raṇhā in an obscure context. Cf. GOTÖ, *op. cit.*
- 19) This myth is mentioned in I 116,17, I 117,13, I 119,3; 5, I 184,3, IV 43,2; 6, IV 44,1, V 73,5, VI 63,5; 6, VII 68,3, VII 69,3; 4, VIII 8,10, VIII 22,1 and VIII 29,8 (cf. GELDNER Index of RV). The outline may be summarized as follows: the Aśvins win the chariot race over Sūryā, who then chooses them as her husbands and rides their chariot drawn by red birds (i.e., flying horse. Cf. GELDNER I, p.160). I 116,17ab *ā vāṃ ráthaṃ duhitā sūr̥yasya* | *kār̥ṣmevātiṣṭhad árvatā jáyanti* | ‘The daughter of the sun who wins with the runner, ride on your chariot, as if she [set foot] on a goal.’ IV 43,2cd *ráthaṃ kām āhur dravádaśvam āśúm* | *yám sūr̥yasya duhitāvṛṇūta* || ‘Which chariot (i.e., the Aśvin’s chariot) do people call the fast one with a sprinting horse that Sūryā choses?’ For further details on this myth, see OLDENBERG, *Die Religion des Veda*, 1917, p.212ff.
- 20) The word *síndhu-* signifies ‘the Indus river’ as proper noun or ‘river(s)’ as an appellative, and corresponds to Av. *haṇdu-*, Iranian *hindu-*. WITZEL assumes that Sindhu and Heṇḍu can denote a river at the end of the world. Cf. WITZEL-GOTÖ RV, p.846; WITZEL “Aryan and Non-Aryan Names in Vedic India. Data for the linguistic situation, c.1900–500B.C.,” *Aryan and non-Aryan in South Asia*, ed. BRONKHORST and DESHPANDE (1999), p.372.
- 21) On this passage, BÖHTLINGK AND ROTH, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch VI*, sp.292 give the meaning ‘Naß.’ HOFFMANN, *Der Injunktiv im Veda*, p.138 follows this: “Der Sindhu besprungen mit seinem Naß eure Rosse.” On the other hand, EWAia II p.441f. supposes that Rasā is a proper noun, not an appellative.
- 22) Aorist subjunctive of *sar*. Cf. CARDONA, *The Indo-European Thematic Aorists*, 1960 (dissertation), p.33f.
- 23) Cf. SCARLATA, *Die Wurzelkomposita im Rg-Veda*, 1999, p.632ff.
- 24) Cf. WITZEL-GOTÖ RV, p.566f. He also suggests that this could denote the Milky Way. For further discussions on the celestial rivers, see WITZEL, “Sur le chemin du ciel.”
- 25) Cf. GELDNER, RV II, p.348; HOFFMANN, *Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik I*, 1975, p.239.
- 26) Cf. GELDNER, RV III, p.347.
- 27) Some passages appear to describe the sea (Samudra) as a place where rivers join: III 33, 3 *áchā síndhum māt̥ṣṭamām ayāsaṃ* | *vípāśam urvīṇi subhágām aḡanma* | *valsám iva māt̥ārā saṃṛihāñé* | *saṃānām yónim ānu saṃcáranti* || ‘Toward the big river, the foremost mother (Sūtudrī or Sindhu), I have just gone. I have just come to the wide Vipāś having a good distribution: toward both rivers wandering to the same womb (i.e., Samudra), just as two mothers [cows] licking their calf’; VII 95,2ab *ékā \*cetat sárasvatī nadínām* | *súcir yatí girībhyā á samudrāt* | ‘Sarasvatī stands out as the one and only among the rivers, being shiny, going from mountains till the sea (Samudra):’ Cf. GOTÖ I.Präs., p.138.”
- 28) See endnote 4.
- 29) On the identification of the RV rivers with the present names, see WITZEL, “Aryan and Non-Aryan Names in Vedic India,” p.268ff.
- 30) *purīṣin-* < *pūrīṣa-*. Cf. EWAia II, p.148.
- 31) The etymology of *Saráyū-* is unclear. Is it derived from *sar* ‘to run’ or *sáras-* ‘pond, lake’?

This word is literally identified with Sarju, an eastern tributary of Ganges (*Gāṅgā*). The Old Persian place name, Haraiva, present Herat, goes back to the same origin (cf. EWAia II, p.708). Sarayu is referred to three times in the RV always together with Sindhu. In view of these circumstances, we should seek Sarayu in the RV near the Sindhu where the Ṛgvedic Aryans used to wander, and it should thus not be identified with present Sarju, a tributary of Ganges.

- 32) *tyā́* is probably a haplology form of \**tyā́yā* (f. instr. sg. of *syā́*-, *tyā́*-). Cf. AiG II-2, 1954, p.504, STRUNK, “Vedisch *etā* RV X 95,2a,” Anusantatyai. Festschrift für Johanna Narten zum 70. Geburtstag herausgegeben von Almut Hinze und Eva Tichy (2000)(Fs. NARTEN), p.256.
- 33) Cf. WITZEL, “Aryan and Non-Aryan Names in Vedic India,” p.370f.
- 34) Unterzählig. Cf. OLDENBERG, Prolegomena, p.73.
- 35) Namely, “I would like to live long till I become an old man.” *jarimán*- ‘old age’ is not always interpreted in a negative sense: X 59,4 *mó śú ṇaḥ soma mṛtyáve párá dāḥ | pásyema nú sū́ryam uccárantam | dyúbhir hitó jarimá sú no astu | parātarāṇi sū nū́rtir jihūtām ||* ‘O Soma, don’t entrust us to death. We would like to see the rising sun now. Be the old age that is put down by the days for us! Nirṛti (the goddess of downfall) should go far away.’
- 36) Cf. KLEIN, Toward a Discourse Grammar of the Rigveda, Vol.I part 2, 1985, p.174f.
- 37) SCARLATA, *op. cit.* p.467f., presents two possible interpretations: “die Rasā streckt die Hand aus und erwartet, begehrt eine angemessene Gabe” or “sie streckt die Hand aus (um eine Richtung anzuzeigen) und wünscht, geradeaus zu gehen.”
- 38) Cf. SCARLATA, *op. cit.*, p.547f.
- 39) This pāda may remind us of some examples of Apām Napāt or Sarasvant. Cf. YAMADA, “Sarasvant in the Ṛgveda” Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies 61-3 (2013), p.1061f.
- 40) Cf. GELDNER, RV II, p.39.
- 41) Some other rivers have a motherly aspect as well. For instance, Sarasvatī in II 41,16 or Śutudrī (or Sindhu) in III 33,3 (see endnote 27). This image may be based on the characteristic of rivers that bring affluence with water.
- 42) Cf. GELDNER, RV II, p. 399.
- 43) For example, AV IV 2,5ab *yāsya víśve himávanto mahitvā́ | samudré yāsya rasām íd āhúḥ |* ‘By [his] greatness, every [mountain] covered with snow belongs to whom, [and to whom], as people say, Rasā belongs in the sea (Samudra).’ WHITNEY, Atharva-veda-samhitā; translated into English with critical and exegetical commentary by William Dwight Whitney; revised and edited by Charles Rockwell Lanman, Vol.I, 1962, p.147: “The ‘ocean’ is of course the atmospheric one; and Rasā, the heavenly river, can hardly help having been originally the Milky Way; but the comm. takes it here as simply a river, representative of rivers in general.”
- 44) RAGHU VIRALOKESH CHANDRA (ed.), Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṇa of the Samaveda (R-L), 1954, p.350f. for the original text. For the translation, emendation and commentary, see ORTEL “Contributions from the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa to the history of the Brāhmaṇa literature,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 19 (1898), p.97ff. = Kl.Schr. 62ff., HOFFMANN, “Textkritisches zum Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṇa,” Indo-Iranian Journal 8 (1956), p.15 = Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik I, p.99, RAU, “Fünfzehn Indra-Geschichten,” Asiatische Studien 20 (1966), pp.81–83; “Twenty Indra Legend,” German Scholars on India I (1973), p.210f. EHLERS, Emendationen zum Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṇa, 1988, p.115f., and MURAKAWA, Das Gavāmayana-Kapitel im Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṇa (Dissertation, Berlin 2007), pp.115–119.

- 45) MURAKAWA, *op. cit.*, p.115, *hāpātasthuḥ*.
- 46) Cf. MURAKAWA, *op. cit.*, Ed. R-L *gā*.
- 47) Cf. EHRERS, *op. cit.*, p.115. Ed. R-L *goṣv evāhaṃ kila*.
- 48) *alīklava-* ‘A sort of bird that eats carrion.’ It is also given as *arīklava-* (AVP) or *arīklavi-* (Kāṭha-Brāhmaṇa). MAYRHOFER considers the etymology of this word in relation to *kraviṣ-* ‘flesh’ or *\*ari-krū-* ‘damaging enemies’ (cf. EWAia I, p.127 and p.414f., s.v. *krūrā-*).
- 49) Cf. HOFFMANN, “Textkritisches zum Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṇa,” Ed. R-L *hānāśiṣy*.
- 50) Cf. MURAKAWA, *op. cit.*, p.118.
- 51) Difficult to translate. MURAKAWA (*op. cit.*, p.116) presents three possible emendations: 1. *vāpayantī* ‘making [the swimmer] fade [into the flow]’ (caus., pres. part. of *vā*, *vāyati* ‘to fade’); 2. *pāpayantī* ‘doing something bad [to the swimmer]’ (denom., pres. part. of *pāpā-* ‘bad, evil’); 3. *pāvayantī* ‘purifying [the swimmer with water]’ (caus., pres. part. of *pav*, *pavate* ‘to become pure’). According to MURAKAWA’s investigation, *va* and *pa* are sometimes mixed up in Grantha and Malayalam manuscripts, and the graphical difference between *ta* and *nta* is slight. However, in any emendation, we need to consider the meaning of the whole sentence. On the other hand, WITZEL, “Chemin du ciel,” p.226, emendates *\*vār āyati* or *vār \*avāyati* (cf. RV VIII 91,1ab *kan,yā vār avāyati | sōmam āpi srutāvidat |* ‘The girl, going down to water, found Soma as well, in the course of river’). With his emendation, we are able to translate the sentence as follows: ‘This is Rasā [that is] going down to the water of Samudra hither.’ However, it is debatable as to whether *p* and *r* can be substituted.
- 52) Cf. GOTŌ, I.Präs., p.211–213: “...*plu/plav*, ‘schwimmen’ und zwar wird es als ‚durchschwimmen‘ (facient. mit affiziertem Objekt) gebraucht...” He explains that *pru* ‘to jump’ (used with the preverb and accusative of direction) and *plu* ‘to swim’ should be definitely separated. He then suggests that *plu* in this passage originally denoted ‘to jump’ with the reference to X 108,2 *atiṣkādo bhiṣyāsā tāt na āvat* as a clue (see section 1.1.1 above) and points out that these passage use *plu* ‘to swim’ because there was a need to explain the origin of the ritual named ‘abhiplava (the swimming toward).’
- 53) That is, ‘Is it possible that the female dog could swim across me? [It would be possible.]’
- 54) *\*gādham?* Or, nom.sg. of exceptional m. *gādha-* ‘shoal.’
- 55) Considering the references in the beginning of II 440, it can be also translated ‘as unallied one with gods’ (cf. *apa-sthā* ‘to leave’) or ‘as not a pleasant one, the cows of the gods’ (cf. *devānām gorakṣā* ‘the cowherds of the gods’ and *ta u vai devānām* ‘these [the cows] of the gods’). On *priyā-* ‘friend, a member of a tribe,’ see GOTŌ “Purūravas und Urvaśī” aus dem neuentdeckten Vādhūla-Anvākhyāna (Ed. Ikari),” in Fs. NARTEN, p.88 (n.32) and SCHELLER, Vedisch *priyā-* und die Wortsippe frei, freien, Freund, 1959.
- 56) Cf. NISHIMURA, “*ūlba-* and *jarāyū-*: Foetal appendage in Veda” (forthcoming).
- 57) Cf. EWAia I, p.576 (s.v. *jarāyū-*).
- 58) MURAKAWA, *op. cit.*, p.118: *yathā manyadhvam*.
- 59) MURAKAWA, *op. cit.*, p.118: *\*macalās*.

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## ABSTRACT

Rasā in Vedic Literature:  
A Philological Study on a Mythological River

Tomoki YAMADA

*Rāsā-* is the name of a river in Vedic literature, particularly the well-known river appearing in the Vala myth. Avestan (Av.) *rayhā-*, a mythological river or ocean marking the boundary of the world in the west, shares the same origin. In this paper, I conduct a philological investigation of all passages mentioning Rasā in Vedic literature, provide the text, translation, and commentaries, and present primary materials regarding a river that appears in the earliest Old Indo-Aryan literature.

In the RV, Rasā is mentioned nine times. Numerically, this number is the third among the rivers after Sindhu and Sarasvatī. However, the RV verses give only fragmentary information or images about this river. From the RV passages, we can abstract the following mythological aspects about this river. Rasā flows surrounding the end of the world or heaven. The Paṇis dwell on the other side or sandbar/island of this river, where they confine cows, which may be identified with sunlight, in the Vala (rocky cave or defense wall). When the Aśvins transport Sūryā (daughter of the sun) on their chariot, their draft horses are poured out (the water/flow of?) Rasā by Sindhu. In these myths, we may observe the idea of “the movement of the sun.”

As a toponym, Rasā appears with the northwest rivers of the Indian sub-continent, such as Sindhu (Indus), Kubhā (Kabul), Gomatī (Gomal), or Krumu (Kurram), which encourages us to assume that Rasā would be located in proximity to these rivers. Taking into account the “list” of rivers in X 75, this river may be identified with one of the sources of the Indus in the northern mountainous region, although it is difficult to determine its accurate geological location.

The Post-Ṛgvedic Samhitās contain some references to Rasā, although they all repeat a quotation or give a slight variation of the RV material without any new context. On the other hand, JB II 440–442 refer to Rasā in a wider context concerning the Vala myth than RV; this is the sole example of Rasā in prose. However, the very sentence that should give the concrete image of this river is poorly transmitted and does not permit us an interpretation.