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AMERICAN PHILOLOGICAL  
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XVI**

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I. — *The Roots of the Sanskrit Language.*

BY W. D. WHITNEY,  
PROFESSOR IN YALE COLLEGE.

THE word *root* as used in this paper is taken in its ordinary and well-understood sense, the many questions and controversies that attach themselves to it being passed without notice. And the object of the paper is to set forth what, in this sense, the roots of Sanskrit really are: really, that is to say, as opposed especially to the fictitious and false roots with which they have been mixed up by the native grammarians of India. It is now pretty generally known that the list of roots of their language as given by those authorities is wholly untrustworthy, and cannot be used in etymologic investigations. In fact, considerably more than half of those they include in the list have no right to be there, presenting neither verb-forms nor derivatives throughout the whole long history of the language; a great many of them, too, are of such form and ascribed meaning as show their artificiality. How the grammarians came to set up such a list, and where they got their false roots from, it is no part of our present object to inquire; the matter is one of extreme obscurity, and concerns the student of the Hindu science of grammar, and him alone; the facts of the case are too patent to be misunderstood or questioned. If there were a limited and moderate number of roots unauthenticated by traceable use, and if they were all homogeneous with the au-



thenticated roots, and to some extent supported by kindred words discovered in the other languages of the family, we should, as a matter of course, regard them as at least for the most part genuine, and only by accident unquotable. But, as things are, such an assumption is simply and utterly impossible; the mass and the character of the fictitious is overwhelming; and any root or roots in it can be regarded as genuine only when there is convincing positive evidence to that effect. In other words, the fact that a root of a certain form is given by the Hindu grammarians is of no value whatever; unless some other testimony to its authenticity can be brought forward, it must be discarded by the etymologist as a figment.

But not the false roots of the grammarians alone are excluded from use in Indo-European etymology; not a few of the real ones are equally unfitted for its purposes — those, namely, the time or manner (or both) of whose appearance in the records of the language shows them to be more or less probably of secondary origin, or to have taken on the semblance of roots in the course of the separate history of development of the Sanskrit itself. A root, for example, which makes its first appearance in the later language, is, unless in exceptional cases, no proper subject of comparison outside of India.

As intimated above, these truths with regard to Sanskrit roots have for some time past been coming to be realized, both theoretically and practically. And students of the history of Indo-European language have in good part learned that there is a trustworthy authority to which they may go in order to know whether an alleged root is genuine or not — namely, the great Petersburg Lexicon of Böhtlingk and Roth. In that work are to be found the results of a sifting of the whole recorded language, ancient and modern, with quotations and references to show the range and frequency of use; by its testimony one can judge the character of anything that is claimed to be Sanskrit. So nearly everything — and especially, so nearly everything that is ancient — has been gathered into its pages, that it must be deemed little short of complete and final, so far as the question of roots is

concerned. But it is not accessible to all, nor conveniently so to any but a practised Sanskrit scholar; and even by the latter its evidence is often not to be brought to bear without much expenditure of time and labor upon a particular case. During some years past, I have been preparing, partly from the Lexicon and partly from my own collections, a conspectus of all the verbal forms and primary derivatives that cluster about the quotable roots of the language, each item with designation of its chronological period, and it is now (July, 1885) just leaving the press at Leipzig.<sup>1</sup> I have thought, then, that it would be a convenient and useful work to draw off from that volume a chronologically classified list of the quotable Sanskrit roots, with such brief statements regarding their use and the occurrence of their derivatives as should either satisfy the inquirer respecting them in any given case, or should prepare him to consult with more profit the fuller sources of information indicated above.

By way of introduction, it may be briefly pointed out here that the history of the Sanskrit language falls into two principal divisions, the earlier and the later. That the later period is mainly represented by the common or classical Sanskrit, the language of the great mass of the Sanskrit literature, having its usages defined and determined by the native science of grammar—while, however, the two great epics (Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa) are in a measure free from the domination of the grammarians' rules. That the earlier period is represented by the Vedic literature, taking the term Vedic in its widest sense, and falls—roughly, and not without some overlapping and mixture—into the three subdivisions of Veda, Brāhmaṇa, and Sūtra, or metrical text, prose exposition, and ceremonial prescription.

The designation of historical periods, then, to be made in the following lists and statements, is fivefold, and will be made by means of the letters V. for Veda (including, as here used,

<sup>1</sup> The Roots, Verb-Forms, and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language: a Supplement to his Sanskrit Grammar, by W. D. Whitney. Leipzig, Breitkopf and Härtel; Boston, Ginn & Co. 8vo. Pp. xiv., 350. Also in a German translation, by H. Zimmer.

only the Rig-Veda, Sāma-Veda, and Atharva-Veda : RV., SV., AV.), B. for Brāhmaṇa, S. for Sūtra, E. for epos, and C. for common or classical Sanskrit.

The classification of the roots, and their order as classified, will be as follows (putting first all the roots that are found in the earliest or Vedic period of the language, since these are most likely to be of Indo-European value) : —

- A. Roots found to occur at all periods, Vedic to classical (or V. +) : 420.
- B. Roots found throughout the older language, or in Veda, Brāhmaṇa, and Sūtra (V. B. S.) : 38.
- C. Roots found only in Veda and Brāhmaṇa (V. B.) : 58.
- D. Roots found only in the Veda (V.) : 62.
- E. Roots found from the Brāhmaṇa onward (B. +) : 59.
- F. Roots found only in Brāhmaṇa and Sūtra (B. S.) : 8.
- G. Roots found only in the Brāhmaṇa (B.) : 24.
- H. Roots found from the Sūtra onward (S. +) : 17.
- I. Roots found only in the Sūtra (S.) : 3.
- J. Roots found only in the later language, epic and classical (E. +) : 55.
- K. Roots found only in the epics (E.) : 4.
- L. Roots found only in the classical language (C.) : 72.
- M. Roots inferred only from derivatives : 25.

In all, 845 roots, but including not a few that are palpably variants of other roots, or evidently of secondary origin — or, in the latest period, artificial: that is to say, taken and made use of because they are given in the grammarians' root-lists. The last class, M., might of course have been considerably increased; only the most conspicuous cases have been included in it.