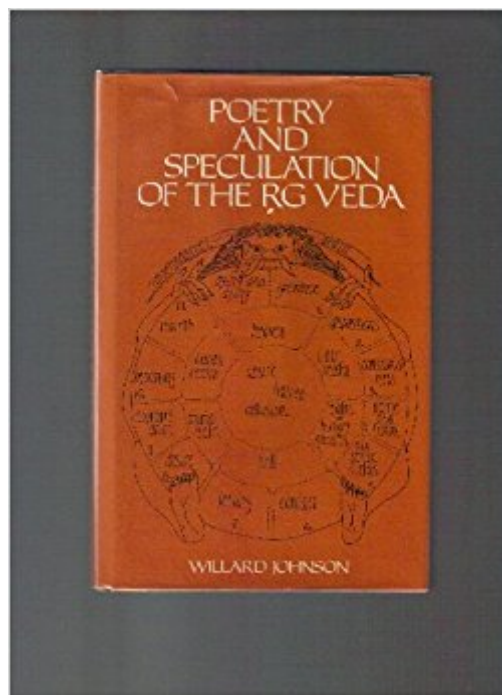




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Synopsis

FIRST EDITION, hardcover in dust jacket, University of California Press. xxviii, 192pp, bibliography, index. Publisher's statement: "For centuries translators of the Rg Veda (ca. 1500 B.C.) have been perplexed by the presence of passages whose meanings seem hopelessly obscure, their associations buried in the remote past. In this innovative study, the author deals with the Rg Veda as a work of literature rather than as a philological puzzle, making these passage intelligible and establishing their importance in the development of the classical Indian world view. Using methodology of recent literary criticism, Willard Johnson focuses on the need to understand these difficult passages in terms of their form and the context in which this form originated. Their form is that of riddle and response, their context that of the Rg Vedic speculative symposium. In the speculative symposium, the Vedic counterpart of the Greek symposium, priest-contestants prepared themselves for the performance of sacrificial rites by formulating responses to 'enigmatizing images' put to them by their fellows. The sacred, enigmatic nature of the image deterred those unworthy of initiation but had the power to reveal the unknowable to him who perservered in its contemplation. Against this background the author illuminates three key Rg Vedic images: the two birds in the fig tree, the sun, and the wheel. His exploration sheds light on the relationship of poetry to speculative thought and on the common sources of literary and religious consciousness."

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