

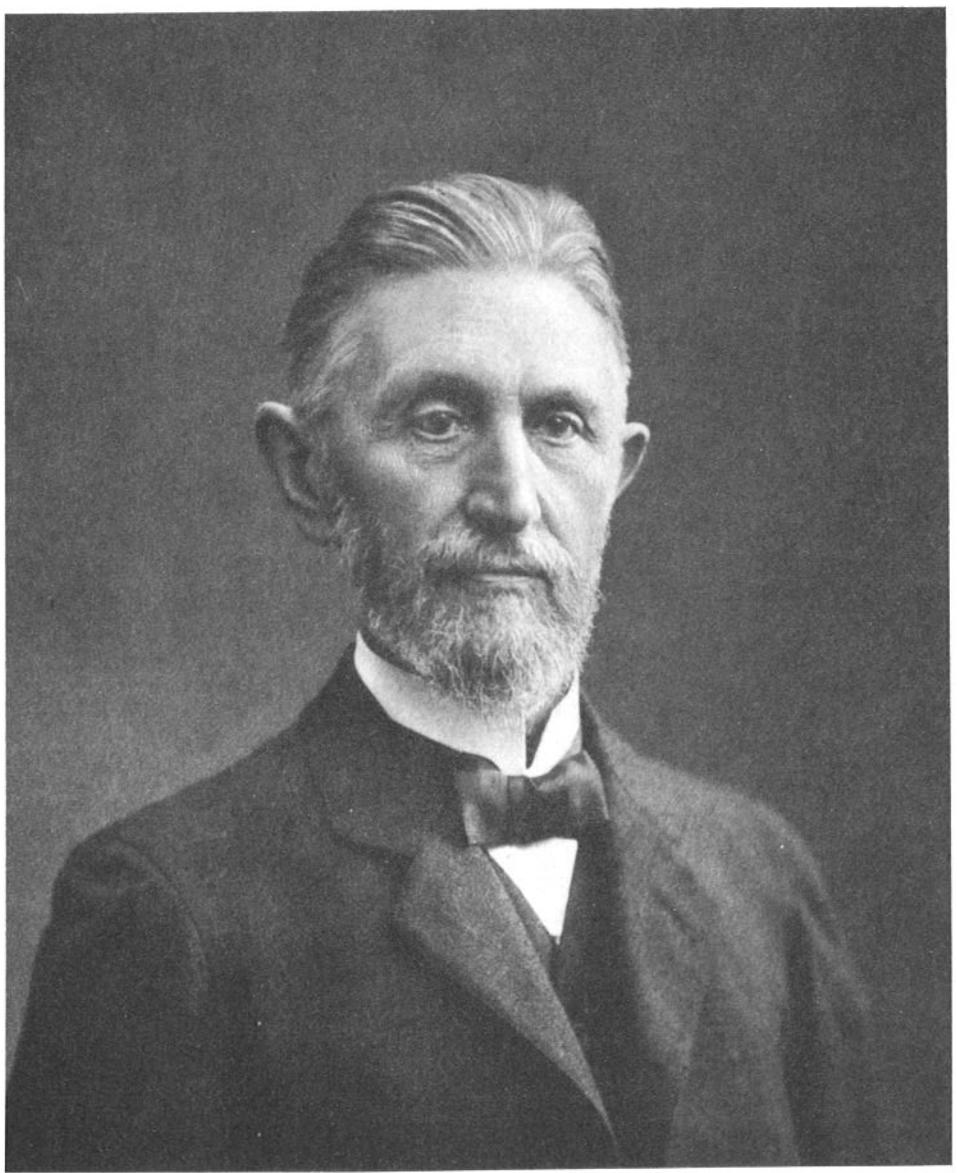
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FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF FINNISH INDOLOGY

Metrical translations from the Rigveda by Otto Donner

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The first bloom of Indology in Europe in the first part of the 19th century was mainly confined to the main academic centres such as Paris, Oxford, Bonn and Berlin, and from the 30s onward in Copenhagen too. In the remoter universities this new line of study started rather slowly (for example in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe) and for a long time was rather amateurish.

This was particularly true in Finland. The new area of study was noticed rather early,¹ but the first attempts at an independent study were at the end of the 40s, and the first notable Finnish Indological scholar belongs to the end of the 19th century.

The teaching of Sanskrit was initiated at the University of Helsinki by IVAR ULRIK WALLENIUS (1793–1874), the associate professor of Oriental Literature. This learned but inconspicuous man was originally an Arabic scholar. His only publication was the thesis *Corani Sura LVII Arabice et Suethice* (Turku 1816–19). Besides Arabic he dealt in his teaching with Hebrew, Armenian and Persian, and from 1835 onwards with Sanskrit too. Otherwise he remains almost completely in darkness, nothing being known of him.²

After the self-taught Wallenius, Sanskrit was represented at the university by HERMAN KELLGREN (1822–1856). He was originally a pupil of Wallenius, but had later studied under Brockhaus, Burnouf and other well-known scholars. After returning home he published a thesis *Mythus de ovo mundano Indorumque de eodem notio* (Helsinki 1849). Methodically it belonged to the then popular comparative mythology, but also showed his good knowledge of Sanskrit literature. Later he published a Swedish translation of the Nala story of Mahābhārata (*Nala och Damayanti, en indisk dikt ur Mahābhārata*, Helsingfors 1851–52),³ but a project to publish a critical edition of Mānavadharmaśāstra together with all commentaries came to nothing. For the last years of his short life Kellgren was professor of Oriental Literature (Arabic, Persian and Turkish) at Helsinki.⁴

Among Kellgren's few pupils there was no one to take on his special studies. It was not until some years after his death that Indology found a new exponent in Finland. This time it was OTTO DONNER (1835–1909), who after rather amateurish beginnings became the first professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Indo-European Philology at Helsinki in 1875.⁵ But not before his pupil and successor JULIO NATHANAEL REUTER (1863–1937) did Finland get its first Sanskrit scholar of international standard.⁶ Donner's merits lie mainly in the field of Finno-Ugrian studies,⁷ but our present task is to examine his role as an Indologist.

Otto Donner was the son of a wealthy businessman from Kokkola, and therefore always financially independent and able to devote himself to his chosen studies. From 1857 onwards he studied Finnish language at Helsinki, but tried also to learn some Sanskrit from books. Finnish and Finno-Ugrian religion and linguistics had probably become his main field of study even at that time, but as Sanskrit was then considered the foundation of all linguistic studies, Donner took an interest in it.⁸ In the beginning his knowledge of Sanskrit and Indian culture was very superficial, and only after repeated periods of study at German universities (1864–65 at Berlin and 1867–68 at Tübingen) did he acquire the competence required for a chair. After that he could turn his main attention to Finno-Ugrian studies — although he lectured on Sanskrit at the university — and later also to politics. Therefore the list of his Indological publications is short,⁹ and we can easily examine it in detail.

The lecture "Qvinnan i den Indiska dikten" (The woman in Indian poetry, *Litteraturblad för allmän medborgerlig bildning* 1862, pp. 204–214) was an early contribution to a popular subject.¹⁰ It was compiled directly from Indian poetry, but Donner's sources were solely translations. So he mentions some episodes of Mahābhārata (Nala by Kellgren and Savitrī by Bergstedt,¹¹ Indralokāgamana by Bopp¹²), Bhartṛhari (by Meyer¹³), Manu (by Loiseleur Deslongchamps¹⁴) and Kathāsaritsāgara (by Brockhaus¹⁵). With many examples from these sources he discusses such subjects as learning, love and fidelity (Damayantī and Savitrī), marriage, woman's position in the family and widowhood. Without doubt it provided interesting and profitable reading for the wider public for whom it was intended, but in fact Donner's approach was very amateurish.¹⁶

Donner's doctoral dissertation *Indernas föreställningar om verldsskapelsen jemförd med Finnarnes* (Indian and Finnish cosmogonical ideas compared, Helsingfors 1863) belonged to the field of comparative mythology and — like most such studies — contained very little of permanent value. The Indian ideas are

presented in the first part (pp. 6-21), mostly from secondary sources and not always from the best available. For Vedic literature (pp. 7-13) his main sources were Lassen's *Indische Alterthumskunde* and Stevenson's translation of *Sāmaveda*, but very often he refers to A. Wuttke's *Geschichte des Heidenthums* (II, Breslau 1853). His own Sanskrit studies are nowhere discernible. By his own account the main trend of that part of his studies was to follow the consciousness of the absolute unity ("medvetandet om den absoluta enheten" p. 18) and its Indo-logical yield was of little value. The much longer second part (pp. 22-77) is devoted to Finnish religion and does not interest us here. Even a contemporary critic found it partly unsatisfactory.

After studying Sanskrit for some time at Berlin Donner published his second thesis *Sītāharanam, episod ur Rāmāyana. Text, öfversättning och förklaringar* (Helsingfors 1865). The time in Berlin was evidently too short, and Donner's German teacher, the famous Albrecht Weber is not to blame for its faults. After a short introduction Donner gave the lithographed Sanskrit text and a Swedish metrical translation of the Sītāharana episode of the Rāmāyana (Āranya-kānda 48-55). The text gave nothing new and the translation was very free and not without faults. When asked to give his opinion of it as a thesis Böhtlingk stated that it was "eine höchst mangelhafte Schrift".¹⁷

At the suggestion of Böhtlingk and Weber, Donner now went to Tübingen where he studied under Rudolf Roth, the much honoured authority of his times in Vedic studies. This time he found, under competent guidance, a fruitful line of study, and in 1870 appeared his most important (in fact his only important) Indological publication, the *Pīndapitṛyajna, das manenopfer mit klössen bei den Indern. Abhandlung aus dem Vedischen ritual* (Berlin 1870). The main part, after an introduction dealing with ancestor rituals among other Indo-European peoples (pp. 5-10) and Vedic Indo-Aryans (pp. 10-14),¹⁸ was a description and discussion of the *pīndapitṛyajña*, the ancestor ritual with rice balls (*pīṇḍa*), a preliminary of the new moon sacrifice. The detailed account of the ritual is given on pages 14-28 according to the Kātyāyana- and Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtras, their commentaries and some later texts (Samskārakaustubha and Prayogaratna). Then follows on pages 28-30 a summary of the main parts of the ritual and some additions and modifications,¹⁹ the last part (pp. 30-36) containing the Sanskrit text and German translation of the relevant part of the Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra (4: 3-5). Unlike Donner's other Indological publications the *Pīndapitṛyajna* has retained some of its usefulness even now, more than a century after its publication.²⁰

As a professor, Donner lectured on various Indological subjects (such as Rig-veda, Atharvaveda, Buddhism and of course elementary Sanskrit). His single Indological publication of that period is the lecture "Om Indernas dramatiska poesi" (*Öfversigt af Finska Vetenskaps-Societetens Förfhandlingar* 28, 1885-86, pp. 142-154). It is a popular introduction to the classical Sanskrit drama (pp. 142-146 origins, 147-150 general features, 150-154 some famous dramas). Its few references show that he was still following rather closely the development of Indology. Among his sources he mentioned e.g. the then very recent study of Windisch, "Ueber das Drama Mṛcchakatika und die Kṛṣṇalegende", (*Verhandlungen der Sächs. Ges. der Wissenschaften* 1886, pp. 439-479).

To complete our list, we must still mention two presidential addresses at the annual meetings of the Finno-Ugrian Society in 1898 and 1899, the first dealing with the society's Central Asian Expedition, the second with Buddhism (published in *JSFOu* 27 and 28).

* * *

To the short list of Otto Donner's Indological publications I now have the opportunity of adding some translations from the Rigveda. Donner's acquaintance with the oldest of Indian literary monuments originated mainly from his days in Tübingen, where he had the chance of hearing Roth's lectures on it.²¹ Rudolf Roth (1821-1895) was then one of the most famous interpreters of the Rigveda, although his methods later became obsolete. Now his work has only historical interest.

The same must of course be admitted with regard to Donner's translations, which rather than his scholarly ambitions, reflect his taste for poetry (in 1863 he had even published one volume of poetry, *Dikter*). But just for that reason these old metrical translations in Swedish are still worthy of publication, when every scholarly interpretation of the Rigveda of the same age is hopelessly outdated.

The main document of Roth's style of Vedic interpretation is the well-known anthology *Siebenzig Lieder des Rigveda* (Tübingen 1875) by Roth himself and his pupils Karl Geldner (1852-1929, later one of those scholars who made Roth obsolete) and Adolf Kaegi (1849-1923, a Swiss scholar best known for his Greek school grammar). It is this translation Donner was following in his own version more than the original Old Indian text, so that it reflects the purely Rothian interpretation. But at that time it was by no means obsolete, and even now it is an interesting document from the early days of Finnish Indology.

It is not known whether Donner made his translations as a student in Tübingen in 1867–68 or later as a professor of Sanskrit in Helsinki. Whatever the case, he put the manuscript — ten loose leaves of the then common letter size — between the pages of his copy of the *Siebenzig Lieder*. There it lay forgotten for at least 75 years when nobody was interested enough in the history of Rig-vedic studies to consult that obsolete translation. After the death of Donner himself his books were inherited by his son Kai Donner (1888–1935), known from his expeditions among and studies of the Samoyeds.²² He was interested enough in Sanskrit to keep his father's Indological books, and only after his untimely death in 1935 did the Helsinki University Library receive the books.²³ Then the *Siebenzig Lieder* was hopelessly obsolete, and nobody knew of the manuscript translations it concealed. So it was not until March 1984, when I happened to be leafing through it, that I found the manuscript I am now publishing.

NOTES

- 1 In 1822 there was a short review of *Indische Bibliothek I:1* and *Annals of Oriental Literature* 1820 in *Mnemosyne* (Åbo) p. 58ff. Probably the first satisfactory (by the standards of that time) treatment of Indian culture in Finnish was in the well-known history by Elias Lönnrot, *Muistelmia Ihmisten Elosta Kaikkina Aikoina*, Oulu 1836, pp. 15–20.
- 2 Pentti Aalto, *Oriental Studies in Finland 1828–1918*, Helsinki 1971, pp. 13, 35 and 70.
- 3 It also includes thirteen poems translated from Amaru.
- 4 For Kellgren's Indian studies cf. Aalto, *op. cit.* p. 70ff.
- 5 Aalto, *op. cit.* pp. 72–76.
- 6 Aalto, *op. cit.* pp. 76–79.
- 7 E. N. Setälä, "Otto Donner in memoriam", *JSFOu* 27, 1911–12, pp. 1–14 (in Finnish) and 15–28 (in French).
- 8 Setälä, *op. cit.* p. 3.
- 9 K. R. Donner & T. Kaukoranta, "Otto Donners literarische tätigkeit. Ein verzeichnis seiner veröffentlichten Veröffentlichungen", *JSFOu* 28:4, 1912.
- 10 In my own bibliographical files there are approximately 60 items on "Women in ancient Indian culture", but most of them are of later date. The Belgian orientalist Félix Nève had published a book entitled *Des portraits de femmes dans la poésie épique de l'Inde* (Paris 1844, then Brussels 1858), but it seems not to have been among Donner's sources. Mademoiselle Clarisse Bader's well-known *La femme dans l'Inde antique* was published only in 1864.
- 11 *Sāvitri*, en episod ur den Indiska Epopéen Mahā-bhārata (1844), Swedish translation by the Swedish classical scholar and politician Carl Fredrik Bergstedt (1817–1903), who also published some other translations from Sanskrit.
- 12 *Indralokāgamanam. Ardschuna's Reise zu Indras Himmel nebst andern Episoden des Mahabharata; in der Ursprache zum erstenmal herausgegeben, metrisch übersetzt und mit kritischen Anmerkungen versehen von Franz Bopp*, Berlin 1824.

- 13 *Indisches Liederbuch* (according to Donner himself), perhaps the same as *Die klassischen Dichtungen der Inder*, Stuttgart 1847 (quoted many times by M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur* I and III). The translator was Ernst Meier (1813–1866), a pupil of Ewald and a Biblical scholar at Tübingen.
- 14 *Manava-Dharma-Sastra. Lois de Manou comprenant les Institutions religieuses et civiles des Indiens traduites du Sanscrit et accompagnées de notes explicatives* (Paris 1833) by the short-lived French Sanskrit scholar Auguste Loiseleur Deslongchamps (1805–1840).
- 15 *Katha Sarit Sagara. Die Märchensammlung des Sri Somadeva Bhatta aus Kaschmir. Erstes bis fünftes Buch. Sanskrit und Deutsch* (Leipzig 1839) or other translations by Hermann Brockhaus (see J. Gildemeister, *Bibliothecae Sanskriticae ... specimen*, Bonnae ad Rhenum 1847, p. 104).
- 16 There are even such misspellings as "Omaru" (Amaru) and "gandhama" (gandharva).
- 17 Aalto, *op. cit.* p. 73.
- 18 His main sources for Veda were Rigveda, Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra and the studies of Roth and Max Müller.
- 19 The rite for securing a male offspring, the modification of this śrauta ceremony for anāhitāgni.
- 20 It is still quoted by J. Gonda in his *Vedic Ritual* (Leiden-Köln 1980), p. 444.
- 21 Aalto, *op. cit.* p. 73.
- 22 Aalto, *op. cit.* p. 112.
- 23 Among them there are also some books which originally belonged to Wallenius, and thus we can get a small glimpse of the interests of this silent man. I noticed this by mere chance, the owner's name being written only inside the back cover of his books. Among them there is for example the *Essai sur le Pali* of Burnouf and Lassen (Paris 1826).

Vediska hymner, öfvers. af Otto DonnerTill skogsjungfrun

Du skogens jungfru, hör mitt ord,
 Jag säger du förirrar dig.
 Hvarför frågar du ej byn?
 Har frukten aldrig fattat dig?

När göken stämmer upp sin sång
 Och tschitschifågeln svarar gladt¹
 Och dansar som till cymbelslag,
 Då fröjdar skogens jungfru sig.

Der tyckas hjordar beta då,
 Der skyntar fram en landlig gård,
 Och liksom vagnars gnissel hörs
 Vid skymningsstund ur skogens djup.

Man tyckes locka sina kor,
 Man fäller träd, och klagorop
 Man tror sig tydligt höra der
 Från skogen, sedan dunkel blir.

Skogsjungfrun ingen gör för när,
 Om man ej henne retar blott.
 Af söta frukter njuter hon
 Och hvilar ut, när själf hon vill.

Af saft och kryddor doftar hon,
 På föda rik, fast utan plog:
 Vildmarkens moder, skogens mö,
 Hon Aranjâni hör min sång!

RV. 10,146

Till Varuna

Âdityas verlden är, den vise kungens,
 han råde, herrske mäktig öfver alla.
 Att värdigt prisa Varuna jag sträfvar,
 den store, som är skönsta mål för bönen.

O låt oss lyckligt i din tjenst få lefva
 och tacksmålt dig, o Varuna, lofsjunga
 Med hvarje morgonrodnads ljus som kommer,
 när dagligen vår offerläga flammar.

Låt oss i ditt beskydd få säkert blifva,
 du länderherrskare, på män så rike!
 I söner utaf Aditi, i faste,
 tillåten oss förbund med eder sluta.

Verldsordnaren lät alla floder rinna,
de löpa så som Varuṇa bestämde,
De blifva aldrig borta, tröttas aldrig,
de draga fram som fåglar öfver landet.

Som från ett band mig lös från mina synder:
det fromma sinnets källa vill jag öppna;
Ej må den brista tråden af min andakt,
ej må arbetarns staf för tidigt brytas.

Bevara mig, o Varuṇa, för skrämsel,
i nåde se mig till, rättvise konung,
Lös mig från nöd, som kalfven ifrån bandet;
i din hand står hvor blinkning af mitt öga.

Ej må oss träffa dina budskaps vapen,
som straffa rättvist hvarje skuldbelastad;
Än ville jag ej afsked ta från ljuset,
förgör min fiende, men låt mig lefva.

Sen många år vi troget dig ha prisat,
ännu vi göra det, all tid, du starke;
På dig, orygglige, som på en klippa
för evig tid all ordnings lagar hvila.

Tag mina egna missdåd bort ifrån mig
och låt mig ej för andras skuld bli straffad.
Gif Varuṇa att jag än mången morgon,
som solig uppgår, får med lifvet skåda.

Vill någon vän, en anförvandt, i drömmen
mitt rädda hjärta med sitt hot förskräcka,
Och vill en tjuf, en varg mig ondt tillfoga,
så hör mig, Varuṇa, och mig beskydda.

(En stråf saknas.)

RV. 2,28

Till Varuṇa

Hans verk de vittna om hans höga vishet:
han satte stöden för de vida verldar,
Han lät det höga himlahvalvet röras,
och bredde stjärnorna och jorden ut för evigt.

Kan jag till honom själf förtroligt tala?
hur skall jag tränga till Varuṇas närhet?
Skall han väl fröjdas då han hör min stämma?
när skall mitt hjärta af hans nåd bli tröstadt?

Begärligt söker jag min synd utforska
och till de vise går jag för att fråga,
Ett enda svar blott siarene gifva:
"förvisso Varuṇa är, som på dig vredgas."

Hvad var dock, Varuṇa, det värsta missdåd,
 för hvilket du vill sångarvännen straffa?
 Säg salige, ofelbare, jag ville
 väl böjd, men skuldfri träda för ditt öga.

Förlåt oss våra fäders forna missdåd,²
 förlåt hvad vi med egna brott ha felat;³
 O konung, släpp Vasishtha lös som tjufven,
 som efter boskap fikar, som en kalf ur bandet.

Det var vår vilja ej, men vi förleddes
 af vin, af tärningsspel, af vrede, därskap;
 Den svage syndarn dukar under för den starke,
 och äfven drömmen för oss bort till orätt.

Dig vill jag följa, dig den stränga guden,
 som slafven trofast följer gode herren.
 Den ifriga upplyser gud hans enfald,
 den kloke hjälper vises råd till lycka.

O kunde sångens ord dig riktigt himna,
 Varuṇa salige, till hjärtat tränga! —
 Må vårt förvärf och vår besittning lyckas,
 I gudar, hugnen oss med ständig välgång!

RV. 7,86

Tingens början

Det fanns ej vara och ej icke-vara,
 och ingen luftkrets, ingen himmel ofvan.
 Och intet rördes, ingenstädes, ingen ledning.
 Fanns det väl vatten och den djupa afgrund?

Ej död och ej odödlighet då funnos,
 och dagen var ej skild från nattens mörker.
 Blott ett som andas utan andras tillhjälp
 utur sig själf, ej annat utom detta.

Och dunklet var i dunkelhet försjunket
 i början, allting flöt tillsamman.
 Men äfven toma rummet låg blott öde,
 dock ett blef väckt till lif igenom wärme.

Då rörde sig i honom första gången
 en drift, ett första frö till anda.
 Och djupt beundrande de vise funno
 en väg från icke-vara hän till vara.

- - -

Tvärs genom begge två en gräns är dragen,
 hvad var väl under eller hvad var ofvan?
 Stamfädren voro här, där höga makter,
 här nere hemmet och dit uppåt sträfvan.

H vem vet det rätt, hvem kan för oss förkunna,
 hvor skapelsen blef till, och hur hon uppstod,
 Om gudarna först efter henne blifvit?
 hvem känner det, från hvilken ort de kommit?

Från hvilken ort det skapade har kommit,
 om det är skapadt eller icke skapadt,
 Det vet blott han, som med sitt öga skådar
 från himlens höjder — eller vet knapt han det?

RV. 10,129

Brahmanernas ständiga böñ,
 riktad till Savitar = alstraren

Tat savitur vareniam bhargo devasja dhîmahi,
 dhijo jo naḥ praśodajât!

Vi öfverväga i vårt sinne den gudomliga Savitars
 (alstrarens) herrliga glans,
 Må han befordra vår insight!

RV. 3,62, 10. Sama Veda II.6.4.10.

Till natten

Gudinnan, natten, drager fram,
 Ur hundra ögon blickar hon,
 Rikt smyckad i sin fulla skrud.

Den eviga, hon fyller upp
 Hvar dal och höjd allt vidt omkring,
 Fördrifver mörkret med sin glans.

Ja, dunklet i sin ljusa prakt,
 Det stjärnebeströdda svarta rår:
 Du aftonrodnad täfla fritt!

Gudinnan kom och dref sin kos
 Sin blyga syster, kvällens glöd,
 Med henne flydde skymningen.

Du kom till oss, nu söka vi
 Vårt lägers tysta hvilobädd,
 Som fågeln skyndar till sitt bo.

Till hvila går vår hela by,
 Till hvila allt i mark och skog,
 Till hvila själf den lystne örн.

Håll varg, varginna från oss bort,
 Håll tjufven fjärran, dystra natt,
 Och skydda oss till morgonväkt.

För dig jag drifver hjorden in,
 Som bytet föres segrarn till:
 Så skydde honom, himlabarn!

RV. 10,127

Till solen

Der kommer han, en fläckig tjur,
 Och stannar framför mor och far (jorden - himmelen)
 Uppå sin väg mot höga skyn.

Han träder in bland stjärnors här —
 De blekna för hans andedrägt,
 Och dagen klarnar för hans makt.

Åt tidens skiften ger han ljus;
 Man helsar gladt med sång hans flykt
 Vid tidig morgon, dag för dag.

RV. 10,189

Till Vâta (Vinden)

Den resande Vâtas storhet vill jag prisa;
 förstörande går han, åskan lik han dånar. 4
 Han når mot himlen, bringande den att rodna,
 och stoft upphvirflande går han öfver jorden.

Och tätt i spåren samlas alla vindar
 till honom, såsom kvinnor gå till festen.
 Med dem förenad skyndar guden framåt,
 Han verldsbeherrskaren, i samma anlopp.

Och då han ilar nu på luftig bana,
 Han aldrig, ingenstädes håller stilla.
 Förstfödde vennen af de strida floder,
 Hvar blef han född, och hvadan kom den höge?

De höge gudars lifsluft, verldars ättling
 Själf gud han rör sig dit det honom lyster.
 Hans brus man hör, — hur han ser ut, vet ingen;
 Låt oss med offer hedra guden Vâta!

RV. 10,168

1 Och siskan derpå svarar gladt

2 Förlåt hvad våra fäder fordom syndat,

3 förlåt hvad vi med egen hand ha felat;

4 Mot himlen når han, bringande den att rodna,

Till skogens jungfrun.

Du skogens jungfa, här mitt ord,
 jag säger du förrar dig.
 Hurfar fråga du ej syn?
 Har ~~Lötag~~ ^{Lötag} fruktan aldrig fattit dig?

Här goden stämmer upp sin sång
 Och ~~tschi-tschifäpta~~ ^{tschi-tschifäpta} varar gladt.
 Och dansar som till egnahelstug,
 Då fröjdar skogens jungfru sig.

Der tyckas hörda bota da,
 Der styrmer fram en landtlig gärd,
 Och hösom vagnars grissel hörs
 Vid ekymningsstunt ur skogens djup.

Man tyckes locka sina hor,
 Man faller träd, och platorop
 Man gör sig tydligt höra den
 Från slagen, sedan ^{lunket} ekymning blir.

Skogensjungfrun ingen gör för näi,
 Om man ej hennes retar blott.
 Af sene fruktter upptur hon
 Och hörta ut, näi själf hon rö.

Af sene al. kryddor doftar hon,
 På foda ritt, fast utan plog:
 Vildmarkens moker, skogens mo,
 Hon drarjäai här min sång!

RV. 10, 146.

A specimen of Otto Donner's handwriting (RV. 10,146)