

Indo-European Workshop

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Thursday, January 26th, at 5pm in Boylston 335

Using Deixis to Navigate Levels of Narration in the Rigveda

One of the challenges of interpreting the Rigveda is it clearly has deep ritual commitments, not the least of which are evident in the primacy given to Agni, the sacrificial fire, and Soma, the sacred drink. Ritual manuals post date the Rigveda by centuries, thus we have no real contemporaneous account of the context in which the Rigveda was performed. This talk borrows ideas from speech act theory and narratology to reconsider Rigveda narrative as existing in two diegetic layers. One, the performed narrative, contains cosmological accounts, while the other, a performance narrative, constitutes the information the text tacitly assumes about the social occasion at which the song is sung, its performer, and its audience. This layer of the Rigveda is characterized by speaker-centered deixis. The relationship of this performance-level narration to the mythological narratives gives us new insights into ancient oral texts which may be more broadly applicable to other early Indo-European texts.