Classical Sāṁkhya on the Authorship of the Vedas

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Abstract The question as to whether the Vedas have an author is the topic of vivid polemics in Indian philosophy. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the classical Sāṁkhya view on the authorship of the Vedas. The research is based chiefly on the commentaries to the Sāṁkhya-kārikā definition of authoritative verbal testimony given by the classical Sāṁkhya writers, for these fragments provide the main evidence (both direct and indirect) for the reconstruction of this view. The textual analysis presented in this paper leads to the following conclusion. According to most classical Sāṁkhya commentaries, the Vedas have no author. Two commentators state directly that the Vedas have no author, and four commentators allude to the authorlessness of the Vedas. Only one commentator seems to hold the opposite view, stating that all the authoritative utterances are based on perception or inference of imperceptible objects by authoritative persons, from which it follows that the Vedas too have an author or authors.

Keywords Classical Sāṁkhya · Authoritative verbal testimony (āpta-vacana) · Authoritative persons (āpta) · The Vedas · Authorless (apauruṣeya)

Introduction: Purpose of this Paper, Its Limitations, and Primary Sources on Which it is Based

Do the Vedas have an author? This may seem a strange question, for it is known from observations that texts arise thanks to the conscious efforts of their authors. But what about a text that never arose? According to Mīmāṁsā, the authorless Vedas have no beginning, they have always been. Or what about a text that only
re-arises at the beginning of a new cycle of the existence of the world? Some philosophers, for example, Śaṅkara and the followers of his Advaita, Dharmakīrti the Grammarian and his followers, and probably Śāmkhyas accepted the conception of a periodic re-manifestation of the authorless Vedas. The question as to whether the Vedas have an author was a subject of vivid discussions in Indian philosophy. The main participants of these discussions were Mīmāṁsā, for which the authorlessness of the Vedas was an argument for their unquestionable authoritativeness, and its rival Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, which held that no text can be without an author and based authoritativeness of the Vedas on the authority of their authors/author. The earlier Naiyāyikas attributed the authorship of the Vedas to the primeval seers endowed with the extraordinary power of direct cognition (perception) of unseen reality (see the Nyāyasūtras I, 1, 7–8; II, 1, 68 together with the Nyāyabhāṣya), and the later Vaiśeṣikas and Naiyāyikas attributed it to God (Īśvara).1

What is the view of Śāmkhya on the authorship of the Vedas? As regards the textual tradition of the classical and postclassical Śāmkhya, the earliest discussion of the issue of the authorship of the Vedas appears in the postclassical Sānkhyasūtras (ca. 1400–1500 CE)2 and Aniruddha’s Sāmkhyasūtravṛttī (ca. 1400–1500 CE), where the Sūtrakāra and Aniruddha argue for the conception of the noneternal and authorless Vedas (see Sānkhyasūtras and Sāmkhyasūtravṛttī V, 45–50). The authors of the classical Śāmkhya do not focus attention on the question of the authorship of the Vedas. Most of them even do not express their standpoint directly. Only two classical Śāmkhya writers, namely, the author of the Yuktidīpikā and Vācaspati Miśra in his Sāmkhyatattvakaumudī, formulate their standpoint explicitly, but neither of them gives any arguments in its favour. According to both of them, the Vedas have no author. Besides this direct evidence, texts of the classical Śāmkhya contain implicit evidence. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the classical Śāmkhya view on the authorship of the Vedas on the basis of both direct and indirect evidence presented in its texts.

1 The conception of Īśvara as an author of the Vedas is not present in earlier Nyāya works, such as the Nyāyasūtras, Vātsyāyana’s (450–500 CE) Nyāyabhāṣya and Uddyotakara’s (550–610 CE) Nyāyavārttika (Nyāyamañjarī. Summary prepared by K.H. Potter, J.V. Bhattacharya, and U. Arya. In: Potter 1977, pp. 371, 377–378). As regards early Vaiśeṣika, this conception is not found in the Vaiśeṣikasūtras. It is stated in the Vaiśeṣikasūtravṛttī of Candrānanda (the eighth or the ninth century CE), which is probably the oldest surviving commentary on the Vaiśeṣikasūtras. According to this commentary, the Vedas has been uttered by Mahēśvara (see Bronkhorst 1996, p. 288). The conception of Īśvara as an author of the Vedas has become an established view of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, presented in many texts, for example, Vyomavātī of Vyomaśiva (900–960 CE) (Vyomavātī. Summary prepared by V. Varadachari. In: Potter 1977, pp. 429, 447), Nyāyavārttikatāparyāśṭikā (see II, 1, 68) of Vācaspati Miśra (900–980 CE), Ātmatattvaviveka (Ātmatattvaviveka. Summary prepared by V. Varadachari. In: Potter 1977, pp. 555–556), Nyāyakusumāṇjali (Nyāyakusumāṇjali. Summary prepared by K.H. Potter and J.V. Bhattacharya. In: Potter 1977, pp. 569, 588) of Udayana (1050–1100 CE), and Tarka-saṅgraha and Tarka-dīpikā (see 62) of Annambhatta (the seventeenth century CE). For the dates of Candrānanda and Annambhatta I consulted Matilal (1977, pp. 74–75, 107). For the dates of all the other writers of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika mentioned in this paper see Potter (1977, pp. 9–12).

2 The dates of all the Śāmkhya and Yoga texts mentioned in this paper are given according to Larson and Bhattacharya (1987, pp. 15–18, 19–22).
It is necessary to point out the limitations of this research. This paper is based chiefly on those fragments of the classical Sāmkhya commentaries where the Sāmkhya writers explain the ‘definition’ of authoritative verbal testimony (āpta-vacana) given in the Sāmkhyakārikā (SK). Sāmkhya accepted three pramāṇas: perception (drṣṭa), inference (anumāna), and authoritative verbal testimony (āpta-vacana, literally, ‘authoritative utterance’)—see kārikās 4–6 where Īśvarakṛṣṇa presents the Sāmkhya teaching on the sources of valid knowledge (pramāṇa). The commentaries to the SK ‘definition’ of āpta-vacana (Īśvarakṛṣṇa ‘defines’ it as āpta-śruti—“authoritative śruti”3; see SK 5) contain the main evidence (both direct and indirect) for reconstruction of the Sāmkhya view on the authorship of the Vedas. All the Sāmkhya writers interpreting this ‘definition’ tried to establish sources of authoritative utterances, i.e. valid sentences being the cause of valid knowledge which is called authoritative verbal testimony. The Vedas were considered to be the main source of authoritative utterances. Besides the commentaries to the definition of authoritative verbal testimony, the direct evidence presented in TK 2 has been considered. Thus all the direct evidence contained in the classical Sāmkhya texts, which is scarce (we find it in the three fragments: YD 5, TK 5, and TK 2), seems to have been taken into account.

The SK provides no evidence for reconstruction of the view on the authorship of the Vedas, so we concentrate on the SK commentaries, particularly on their definitions of authoritative verbal testimony (i.e. their interpretations of the SK definition of āptavacana). I shall cite these definitions or their parts containing the material for our analysis. I shall not provide a comprehensive analysis of these definitions; only those aspects will be considered which are important for clarifying the view on the authorship of the Vedas.

This study is based on all the eight extant commentaries of the classical Sāmkhya. These are the following commentaries on Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s SK (ca. 350–450 CE), listed in chronological order: the commentary surviving in the Chinese translation of Paramārtha4 (P; composed ca. 500 CE; translated into Chinese by Paramārtha between 557 CE and 569 CE), Sāmkhyavṛtti (SVr; ca. 500–600 CE), Sāmkhyasaptativrītti (SSVr; ca. 500–600 CE), Sāmkhyakārikābhayāsa (or Gaudapādabhāṣya; GB; ca. 500–600 CE) by Gaudapāda, Yuktidīpikā (YD; ca. 600–700 CE), Jayamāṅgalā (JM; ca. 700 CE or later), Māṭharavṛtti (MV; ca. 800 CE or later) by Māṭhara, and Sāmkhyatattvakānumudī (TK; ca. 841 CE or ca. 976 CE) by Vācaspati Miśra. By classical Sāmkhya I mean Sāmkhya presented in the SK and the abovementioned eight commentaries. After the TK the long period of stagnation in the development of Sāmkhya begins, which ends in the XIV century with the appearance of the new (postclassical) form of Sāmkhya presented in the Tattvāmsaśāstra (ca. 1300–1400 CE) and its commentary Kramadīpikā (ca. 1300–1400 CE).

3 It is difficult not to agree with Solomon who notes that “āptaśruti can hardly be called a definition” (Notes. In Sāmkhya-Vṛtti (V2), 1973, p. 78).
4 The Sanskrit original of this text has been lost. I do not know Chinese and rely on the French translation of Takakusu (La Sāmkhyakārikā étudiée à la lumière de sa version chinoise, 1904) and the reconstruction into Sanskrit prepared by N. Aiyaswami Sastri (Suvarṇasaptati Śāstra, 1944).
The Commentary Translated into Chinese by Paramārtha

This is the definition of authoritative verbal testimony given in this commentary, together with the version of the SK definition we find here. Translation of P 5 from Takakusu (La Sāṃkhya-kārikā étudiée à la lumière de sa version chinoise, 1904):

A teaching of a saintly person is called sacred authority.\(^5\)
… A teaching of a saintly person etc. For example, the four Vedas uttered by the god Brahmā and the Dharmaśāstra of the king Manu.\(^6\)

Translation of P 5 from the Sanskrit reconstruction of N. Aiyaswami Sastri (Suvarnasaptati Śāstra, 1944):

The word of authority (āpta-śrutir) is called authoritative verbal testimony (āpta-vacanam). The word of authority is called authoritative verbal testimony—for example (yathā),\(^7\) that what is uttered by Brahmā and by Manu, that is, the four Vedas and the Treatise on Dharma (dharma-śāstra).\(^8\)

According to this commentary, authoritative verbal testimony is the word of an authoritative person. So, authoritative statements are the statements uttered by authoritative persons. The sources of authoritative statements include the Vedas uttered by the god Brahmā and the Treatise on Dharma uttered by Manu. Manu is Manu Svayaṁbhūva (‘self-existent’), the first Manu of our kalpa,\(^9\) to whom the Hindu tradition ascribes Manusmṛti (also called Mānavadharmaśāstra or Manu-saṁhitā), the most authoritative of the dharmaśāstras, treatises on dharma. He is the son of Brahmā. By the Treatise on Dharma (dharmaśāstra used in singular number) Manu-smṛti is probably meant. In P all the authoritative statements are associated with certain authoritative persons, but it is not said whether these persons are the authors of these statements. The Vedas too are associated with the certain person, i.e. the god Brahmā who uttered them, but it is not clear if the god Brahmā is the author of the Vedas.

\(^5\) I use italics to distinguish the text of the kārikā.

\(^6\) Takakusu’s French translation:

L’enseignement d’un saint personnage est appelé autorité sacrée.
(…) L’enseignement d’un saint personnage, etc. Par exemple les quatre Védas énoncés par le dieu Brahmā et la Dharmaśāstra du roi Manu.

It is necessary to note that there is an English translation from Takakusu’s rendering, prepared by S.S. Suryanarayanan, who is known also as S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri (The Sāṃkhya Kārikā Studied in the Light of Its Chinese Version, 1932, 1933), and my translation is very similar to it.

\(^7\) Yathā can be also translated as ‘namely’.

\(^8\) āpta-śrutir āpta-vacanam ucyate
\(\|\)...
\(\|\) āpta-śrutir āpta-vacanam ucyate iti \(\|\) yathā brahmaṇaḥ manunā ca uktaś ca tvāro vedā dharmaśāstraḥ ca.

\(^9\) Kalpa is the day of Brahmā in Hindu cosmology. After it the night of Brahmā comes, i.e. the dissolution (pralaya) of the created world, after which the next day of Brahmā begins. Every kalpa consists of 14 manvantaras, and every manvantara (‘the age of a Manu’) has its own Manu, its own seven great seers, its own Indra and other gods.
The Śāṅkhyāvyṛtti and the Sāṅkhyasaptatīvyṛtti

The definitions of authoritative verbal testimony given in these commentaries are very similar. The definition of the SV (5) is as follows:

This is the definition (lakṣaṇa) of authoritative verbal testimony (āpta-vacana). It is said here [i.e. in the SK]: “The revelation of authorities (āpta-śrutī) and the word of authorities (āpta-vacana) [constitute āpta-vacana—authoritative verbal testimony]”. Here the name ‘āpta’ [is applied to] the teachers (ācārya): Hari, Hara, Hiranyagarbha, etc. The ‘revelation’ (śrutī) of these authorities is the Vedas. That is the meaning [of āptaśrutī being the first part of the definition of authoritative verbal testimony]. The ‘authorities’ (āpta) which are the authors (kāra) of the treatises on dharma (dharma-śāstra) are Manu, etc., [and] ‘the word of authorities’ (āpta-vacana) is ‘the word’ (vacana) of these authorities—that [is the meaning of āptavacana being the second part of the definition of authoritative verbal testimony].

The definition we find in the SSV (5) is practically the same:

“What is the definition (lakṣaṇa) of authoritative verbal testimony?” On this account it is said [in the SK]: “The revelation of authorities (āpta-śrutī) [and] the word of authorities (āpta-vacana) [constitute āpta-vacana—authoritative verbal testimony]”. There the name ‘āpta’ [is applied to] Hari, Hara, Hiranyagarbha, etc. ‘The revelation of authorities’ (āpta-śrutī) is the ‘revelation’ (śrutī) of these ‘authorities’ (āpta). The ‘revelation of authorities’ (āpta-śrutī) is the Vedas. That is the meaning [of āptaśrutī being the first part of the definition of authoritative verbal testimony]. ‘Authorities’ (āpta) are the authors (kātra) of the treatises on dharma (dharma-śāstra): Manu, etc., [and] ‘the word of authorities’ (āpta-vacana) is ‘the word’ (vacana) of these authorities—that [is the meaning of āptavacana being the second part of the definition of authoritative verbal testimony].

In the SV (and SSV) āptaśrutī and āptavacana are interpreted as the two parts of the definition of āptavacana. This reading seems to contradict the intention of the author of the SK. It is clear from kārīkā 4 that Īśvaraṅkṣa treats āptavacana as the defined notion (definiendum), and not as the defining expression (definiens). In kārīkā 4 Īśvaraṅkṣa introduces the sources of valid knowledge to be defined in kārīkā 5, and one of them is āptavacana.

According to the SV (and SSV), authoritative verbal testimony is “the revelation of authorities (āpta-śrutī) and the word of authorities (āpta-vacana)”. The revelation

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10 āpta-vacanasya lakṣaṇam iti | atrōcyate āpta-śrutī āpta-vacanaṁ ca | atra āpta nāmācāryāḥ hari-hara-hiranyagarbhadayaḥ teṣāṁ āptāṁ śrutīḥ veda ity arthaḥ | manv-ādayo dharma-śāstra-kārāḥ āptāḥ teṣāṁ āptāṁ vacanam āpta-vacanam iti |
The Sanskrit text of the SV (and SSV) is given by me together with the editor’s corrections and insertions of E. Solomon and without marking these emendations.

11 āpta-vacanasya kīṁ lakṣaṇam ity atrōcyate āpta-śrutī āpta-vacanam | tatra āpta nāma hari-hara-hiranyagarbhadhayaḥ teṣāṁ āptāṁ śrutīḥ āpta-śrutīḥ | āpta-śrutī veda ity arthaḥ | manv-ādayo dharma-śāstraṅkāṁ kartārā āptās teṣāṁ āptāṁ vacanam āpta-vacanam iti |
of authorities is the Vedas, which is the revelation of such authorities as Hari, Hara, and Hiranyagarbha. The word of authorities is dharmasastra, composed by Manu and other authorities. In the SVr and SSVr, as in P, all the authoritative statements are associated with certain authoritative persons. Hari, Hara, and Hiranyagarbha (‘a golden embryo’) are the epithets respectively of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā, the main Hindu gods, which were often understood as the three aspects of one divine being from which the universe and the Vedas originate. Did these gods (1) compose (create) the Vedas (being their authors), (2) discover them, (3) remember them from the previous cycle of the existence of the world, or (4) give them out spontaneously? In the SVr and SSVr we do not find a direct answer to this question. None of these possibilities can be excluded.

As regards the last possibility, in the SVr and SSVr the Vedas could be comprehended as issuing spontaneously from the mouths of Hari, Hara, and Hiranyagarbha or from one divine being of which these gods are the forms. Such a view on the origin of the Vedas could also be peculiar to the P: we cannot exclude that in the P the Vedas were understood as issuing spontaneously from the mouth of Brahmā. According to the Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad (see II, 4, 10), the Vedas go out of “the great being” (mahad bhūtāṃ) together with its breath. It is said here that the Vedas are breathed out (niḥśvasita) by this being. Later this idea was developed by the famous Advaita Vedāntin Śaṅkara (flourished at the beginning of the eighth century CE). Śaṅkara says that the Vedas arise from Brahmā spontaneously—like a breath which issues from a man spontaneously, without any special, conscious effort. In his commentary to the Brahmasūtra, Śaṅkara calls Brahmā, being the source (yoni) of the Vedas, omniscient and omnipotent, from which it is clear that it is Ṡvara, the subtlest manifest form of Brahmā, by whom the Vedas are “breathed out” (see Śaṅkara’s Brahmāsūtrabhāṣya I, 1, 3 and Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya II, 4, 10). Unlike Advaita Vedānta, the classical Śāṅkhya accepts neither the existence of God (Īśvara), nor the theory that from the “highest standpoint” (pāramārtha) Brahmā is the true essence of everything and the only real existent. I suppose that in Śāṅkhya the view that the Vedas spontaneously go out of Brahmā or other divine beings could have the following shape: the Vedas arise from prākṛti (primordial creative matter) spontaneously, but prākṛti “creates” them by the agency of the creator god Brahmā or other divinities which appear at the beginning of a new cycle of the existence of the world. It is worth noticing that according to the postclassical Śāṅkhyaśūtras and Śāṅkhyaśāstra, which like the classical Śāṅkhya deny the existence of God, the authorless Vedas evolve from prākṛti spontaneously, though there is no mention of the role of Brahmā or like beings in these texts (see Śāṅkhyaśūtras and Śāṅkhyaśāstra V, 46–50).

In the SVr and SSVr definitions of authoritative verbal testimony cited above, we find the allusion that Hari, Hara, and Hiranyagarbha are not the authors of the Vedas.

12 For the third possibility see below the analysis of the view on the authorship of the Vedas presented in the TK.
13 For the dates of Śaṅkara see Potter (1981, p. 15).
14 In my article titled “Atheism in the Śāṅkhyaśūtras and the Śāṅkhyaśāstra” (Łucyszyna 2011) I show that the Śāṅkhyaśūtras and Śāṅkhyaśāstra were clearly atheistic (i.e. refuting the existence of God) in their character.
This indirect evidence consists of the following: distinguishing the authorities which uttered the Vedas from the authorities to which we owe dharmaśāstras, both commentators call the authors (kāra, kartṛ; in the SVr the commentator uses the word kāra, and in the SSVr—the word kartṛ) only those latter authorities.

The Gauḍapādabhāṣya and the Māṭharavṛti

According to both these commentaries, authoritative verbal testimony (āptavacana) embraces “authorities (āpta) [and] revelation (śruti)”. GB 5:

[This is the definition of authoritative verbal testimony presented in the SK:]

“And (ca) authoritative verbal testimony (āptavacana) is authorities (āpta) [and] revelation (śruti)”. Authorities are the teachers (ācārya): Brahmā, etc. Revelation is the Vedas. Āpta-śruti [embraces] both authorities (āpta) and revelation (śruti). Thus has been explained the authoritative verbal testimony. 15

MV 5:

[This is the definition of authoritative verbal testimony presented in the SK:]

“And (tu) authoritative verbal testimony (āptavacana) is authorities (āpta) [and] revelation (śruti)”. This is the third source of valid knowledge. Authorities are the teachers (ācārya): Brahmā, etc., [and] revelation is the Vedas—these are the two kinds of authoritative verbal testimony…. Thus has been explained the authoritative verbal testimony. 16

Gaudapāda and Māṭhara interpret āpta-śrutih as authorities (āptāh) and revelation (śrutih). They apparently treat āpta-śrutih as a dvandva compound—notwithstanding the fact that in the SK this word is in the feminine singular, i.e. the form in which dvandva compounds do not occur (in our case if āpta-śrutih were a dvandva compound, it would have the plural form āpta-śrutayah). Authorities include Brahmā and other teachers, and revelation is the Vedas. Unlike in the P, SVr, and SSVr, where all the authoritative utterances are associated with certain authoritative persons, in the GB and MV authorities and revelation represent two separate sources of authoritative utterances. In that way Gaudapāda and Māṭhara probably wanted to say that the revelation (śruti), i.e. the Vedas, was not composed (created) by authoritative persons, that is, it does not have an author.

The Yuktidīpikā and the Sāṁkhyaatattvakaumudī

Both these commentaries, though very different, state directly that the Vedas have no author, treating the authorlessness of the Vedas as the argument for their

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15 āpta-śrutir āpta-vacanam ca | āptā ācāryā brahmādayaḥ | śrutir vedah | āptāḥ ca śrutis ca āpta-śrutih tad uktam āpta-vacanam iti

16 āpta-śrutir āpta-vacanam tu | trīyam pramāṇam | āptā brahmādaya ācāryāḥ śrutir vedas tad etad ubhayam āpta-vacanam | ... tad uktam āpta-vacanam |
unquestionable authoritiveness. Below I shall cite those fragments of the YD’s and the TK’s commentaries to the definition of authoritative verbal testimony which are relevant to the issue of the authorship of the Vedas. YD 5:

[It is said in the SK:] “Authoritative verbal testimony (āpta-vacana) is authoritative revelation (āpta-śruti) [and the word of authorities (āpta-śruti)] only (tu)”. … Śruti is the revelation (śravana). Authoritative revelation (āpta-śruti) is that revelation (śrutīḥ) which is authoritative (āptā). Or thus [is the meaning of the compound āpta-śruti]. … Āpta-śruti is the word (śruti) [that comes] from authorities (āpta). Āpta-śruti is both the authoritative revelation (āpta-śruti) and the word of authorities (āpta-śruti). [According to the grammatical rule which sounds:] “out of [two or more words] having the same form…”, [out of two similar words āpta-śruti and āpta-śruti] one [only] remains (eka-śeṣa). 17

There through mentioning the first āpta-śruti the following is maintained: the Vedas (āṃnāya) not created by the intellect of [some] puruṣa 18 (a-puruṣa-buddhi-pīrvaka), which are independent (svatantra) and inducing to the highest aim of a human, are the source of valid knowledge that cannot be doubted. Through the second āpta-śruti it is established that the word (vacas) of the smṛti 19 composed by Manu, etc., of the Vedāṅgas, treatises on logic (tarka), Itihāsas, Purāṇas, and of the learned persons versed in various arts, which are not faulty-minded, is the source of valid knowledge. 20

According to the YD, authoritative verbal testimony (āpta-vacana) embraces authoritative revelation (āpta-śruti) and the word of authorities (āpta-śruti). In order to ground his interpretation of the SK definition of authoritative verbal testimony, the author of the YD employs the linguistic trick, treating āptaśrutīḥ as eka-śeṣa (literally, ‘one [only] remaining [of two or more stems]’, see footnote 17) which stands for the two words: āptāśrutīḥ and āptaśrutīḥ, i.e. ‘authoritative revelation’

17 The author of the YD refers to the grammatical rule formulated in sūtra I, 2, 64 of the Asādhyāyī of Pāṇini. The sūtra is the following: “Out of [two or more words] having the same form one [only] remains (eka-śeṣa), if they have the same inflexion” (sarūpāṇāṃ eka-śeṣa eka-vibhaktau | The Asādhyāyī of Pāṇini 2000: 133–134). According to this rule, if two or more similar words which have the same ending (these are the words that can be joined by the copulative conjunction ‘and’) occur, only one of these words remains. The word that remains has its own meaning and the meaning of the omitted word (or words). The grammatical form of the remaining word will be dual or plural (depending on that how many things it stands for).

18 By puruṣa the author means a being which is animated by puruṣa (ātman) that makes this being conscious.

19 In this context the word smṛti, which occurs here in the plural form (smṛṭiṁḥ), means dharmaśāstras.

20 āpta-śruti āpta-vacanaṁ tu || … śravaṇaṁ śrutii | āptā cāsau śrutiḥ ca āpta-śrutiḥ | athāvā ... | āptebhyah śrutir āpta-śrutir | āpta-śrutīś cāptā-śrutiḥ cāptā-śrutiḥ | sarūpāṇāṁ ity eka-śeṣaḥ | tatra pūrvanāpta-śruti-grahaneṇāṁ pratipādayati | apuruṣa-buddhi-pīrvaka āṃnāyaḥ sva-tantraḥ puruṣa-nīṣṛyeṣārthaṁ pravartanāmo nihśaṃśayaṁ prāmaṇam iti | dvitīyena manv-ādi-nibandhāṇiṁ ca smṛṭiṁḥ vedāṅga-tarkēthāṣa-puruṣāṇiṁ śiṣṭāṇiṁ nāṇā-stīlpāḥbhikṣaṇāṇi cādūṣa-manasāṁ yad vacas tat prāmaṇaḥ ity etat siddhiḥ bhavati | (Yuktidīpikā 1998, p. 87, v. 1–12.) The YD gives more extensive explanations of most of the kārikās than other commentaries of the classical Sāṅkhya, that is why in my references to the YD, besides the number of the kārikā, I indicate the page and the verse number of the edition of the YD.
and ‘the word of authorities’. Āpta-śrutiḥ occurring in the SK cannot be interpreted as eka-śeṣa—for the reason that it is used in the singular form. If it were eka-śeṣa meaning ‘āpta-śruti and āpta-śruti’, it would have the dual form āpta-śrutī. However, the interpretation of āpta-śrutiḥ as both authoritative revelation and the word of authorities is not impossible, for we cannot exclude that in the SK the word āpta-śruti is used in a double sense.

It is easy to notice the following similarity between the YD and the two commentaries we analyzed above. In the YD, like in the GB and MV, authoritative utterances originate from authorities and from the revelation (i.e. the Vedas) which is not associated with any authorities. Treating authoritative revelation and the word of authoritative persons as two separate sources of authoritative utterances, the author of the YD distinguishes in that way the utterances composed by certain authors from the utterances of the authorless Vedas. Moreover, the YD presents the direct evidence in the question of the authorship of the Vedas: the Vedas are said to be “not created by the intellect of [some] puruṣa” (a-puruṣa-buddhi-pūrvaka), i.e. by the intellect of some conscious being. It means that the Vedas have no author.

So, in the YD it is asserted directly that the Vedas have no author. It is very likely that in the YD, like in Mīmāṃsā, the authorlessness of the Vedas represents the argument for their unquestionable authoritativeness. In the same sentence of the YD where the Vedas are said to be without an author we find also other characteristics applied to the Vedas by the Mīmāṃsakas, namely, their being independent (svatantra), their being “inducing to the highest aim of a human” (puruṣa-niḥśreyasārtham pravartamānahaḥ), and their possessing the validity that even cannot be doubted. By the independence of the Vedas both in Mīmāṃsā and Sāmkhya there can be understood, first, their independence from any author, second, independence of their scope, or functional sphere, that also means their independence from other sources of valid knowledge. These two independences—Independence from any author and independence of the scope—represent in Mīmāṃsā two main arguments for the unquestionable authoritativeness of the Vedas. Calling the Vedas “the source of valid knowledge that cannot be doubted” (niḥsāṁśayaṁ pramāṇam), the author of the YD asserts this unquestionable authoritativeness of the Vedas. According to Mīmāṃsā, validity of the Vedic utterances can never be doubted for the following reasons: first, they have no author that can speak untruth, second, they can never be refuted because of the independence of their scope (in other words, they are unfalsifiable by other pramāṇas, for imperceptible things which constitute the domain of authoritative verbal testimony are incognizable by other pramāṇas)—see Šabara’s (350–400 CE)21 Śabarabhāṣya I, 1, 2; I, 1, 5. Taking into account the fact that the context of the fragment of the YD where the Vedas are said to be without an author is influenced by Mīmāṃsā, and the fact that the authorlessness of the Vedas is connected with their undoubtable reliability, we can conclude that it is very likely that in the YD, like in Mīmāṃsā, the authorlessness of the Vedas is regarded as an argument for their unquestionable authoritativeness.

The commentary to the definition of authoritative verbal testimony given in TK 5 is also influenced by Mīmāṃsā. I shall now cite the relevant passage of this commentary:

21 The dates of Śabara are given according to Verpoorten (1987, pp. 8–9).
... And that [cognition through authoritative verbal testimony] is intrinsically valid (svatah-pramāṇa). It is true (yuktā), because it is entirely free from suspicion of [any] defectiveness inasmuch as it is born by sentences of the authorless (apauruṣeya) Vedas. Thus the cognition born by sentences of the smṛtis,22 Itihāsas, and Purāṇas, which are rooted in the Vedas (veda-mūla), is also true (yuktā). And the primeval sage Kapila at the beginning of the kalpa remembers śruti studied [by him] during the [previous] kalpa(s)…23

Vācaspati Miśra states directly that the Vedas have no author—by calling them apauruṣeya, which means literally ‘not coming from puruṣa’. The authorlessness of the Vedas is used here, like in Mīmāṁsā, as the argument for their unquestionable authoritativeness. No doubt is possible about knowledge generated by sentences of the Vedas—for they have no author whose reliability can be doubted. A doubt about the validity of Vedic sentences cannot arise—for there is no reason for it. It is obvious that Vācaspati’s commentary is influenced by Mīmāṁsā. In the small fragment cited above we find the following ideas which were systematically developed in Mīmāṁsā: the idea of intrinsic validity of cognition through authoritative verbal testimony; the idea of the authorlessness of the Vedas regarded as the argument for their unquestionable authoritativeness; the idea that authoritativeness of those texts which have an author lies in their being based on the Vedas.

In the TK there is one more instance of direct evidence in the question of the authorship of the Vedas. In TK 2 Vācaspati says that the Vedas are only transmitted from teacher to pupil, “but they are not created by anybody” (na tu kenacit kriyate). Vācaspati states here directly that the Vedas have no author. In that fragment also we see the influence of Mīmāṁsā which claims that the Vedas were not created by some author, human or divine, but came to us through unbroken tradition of the Vedic recitation.

But how is it possible to fit this Mīmāṁsā view on the Vedas in the doctrine of Śāṅkhya which, unlike Mīmāṁsā, accepts the conception of periodic dissolutions (pralaya) of the world? How is it possible to introduce the idea of the unbroken tradition of the Vedic recitation into the Śāṅkhya cosmological framework? According to Mīmāṁsā, both the Vedas and the world have no beginning in time. They have always been. They never arose. The present-day Vedic teachers have heard the Vedas from their teachers, and their teachers also had teachers from whom they learned the Vedas, and so on—without beginning. According to Śāṅkhya, all the world, except puruṣa and prakṛti which are eternal, undergo destruction (i.e. dissolution in prakṛti) during pralaya, emerging from prakṛti again at the beginning of a new kalpa. The Vedas also undergo dissolution during pralaya, and the tradition of their recitation breaks.

22 By smṛtis Vācaspati means dharmaśāstras.
23 … tac ca svatah-pramāṇam apauruṣeya-veda-vākyya-janitavena sakala-dosāsāṅkā-vinirmitatvavena yuktaṁ bhavati evam veda-mūla-smṛtiḥāsa-puruṣa-vākyya-janitam api jiñānam yuktam ādi-viduṣaṁ ca kapilasya kalpādau kalpāntarādhīta-śruti-smaraṇa-sambhavaḥ ....
Vācaspati Miśra seems to be aware of the difficulties of fitting the Mīmāṁsā view on the Vedas into the Saṃkhya doctrine. How does he solve these difficulties? We can reconstruct his solution on the basis of the following passage: “And the primeval sage Kapila at the beginning of the kalpa remembers śruti studied [by him] during the [previous] kalpa(s)” (see TK 5 cited above). By saying that Kapila at the beginning of the kalpa remembers the Vedas studied by him before the time of dissolution (pralaya), Vācaspati tries to preserve the continuity of the Vedic recitation before and after pralaya. From this passage it is clear that the Vedas of the new cycle of the existence of the world are similar to the Vedas before pralaya, and that there are persons (or a person, namely, Kapila, who is identified by Saṃkhya as its founder) with extraordinary capacities who are able to remember the Vedas studied before pralaya and, in that way, to recommence the tradition of the Vedic recitation interrupted by pralaya.

The Jayamaṅgalā

The JM stands out against the background of most Saṃkhya texts (i.e. the texts containing suggestions or direct statements that the Vedas are without an author), for it follows from its commentary to the definition of authoritative verbal testimony that the Vedas have an author or authors. Below I shall cite the relevant fragment of this commentary. JM 5:

“And (ca) authoritative verbal testimony is the word of authority”—thus [it is said in the SK]…. That word (śruti) which came [to us] from authoritative persons (āpta) through the uninterrupted learned tradition (śruti-paramparā) is [called] authoritative verbal testimony. An object which has been perceived or inferred by them [i.e. by authoritative persons] is presented (upadiśyate) to another [person] by means of words—in order to give rise in another [person] to [such a] knowledge (bodha) which is similar to [their] own knowledge. That [verbal testimony] which is authoritative verbal testimony does not shake (na plavate).24

Unlike most Saṃkhya commentators, the present commentator speaks only about one type of authoritative verbal testimony, namely, the word of authoritative persons. The author of the JM does not draw a distinction between Vedic utterances and other authoritative utterances. He holds that all the authoritative utterances are based on perception or inference of certain objects by trustworthy persons (according to Saṃkhya theory of the scope of the third pramāṇa these objects are the objects reachable neither by perception of ordinary people nor by inference which rests upon such a perception). It follows from this that the Vedic utterances also have an author or authors. It is not clear if the Vedas have one author (for example, Kapila) or many authors (for example, different ṛṣis). It is not clear, also,

24 āpta-śrutī āpta-vacanaṁ cēti | (...) | āptebhyo yā śrutī-paramparayā śrutī āgata udd āpta-vacanam tair dṛṣṭo’nūmito vārtahaḥ paratra sva-bodha-sadrśa-bodhāntarotpattaye sābdenopadiśyate | yad āpta-vacanaṁ tan na plavate |
whether the capacity of the direct cognition of unseen reality of this author/these authors is limited. It is said that authoritative persons base their reliable statements both on perception and inference, from which it follows that all of these authorities or some of them are not capable of perceiving all the objects. If perception of each authoritative person embraced all the objects, there would be no mention of acquiring knowledge by inference. It is not specified in the JM if all the authorities obtain knowledge by inference also or it refers only to those authorities which are not the authors of the Vedas; so it is not clear whether the authority/authorities which composed the Vedas based their trustworthy utterances not only on perception but also on inference.

It is difficult not to notice a close resemblance between the above-cited definition of authoritative verbal testimony of the JM and the definition of the Yogasūtras (ca. 500–700 CE (?)), given in its commentary on sūtra I, 1, 7 of the Yogasūtra (though the author of the JM uses for authoritative verbal testimony the Sāmkhya term āpta-vacana and not the Yogic term āgama we find in the Yogasūtras). I would like to emphasize that the above-cited fragment of the JM was interpreted in the context of the JM and Sāmkhya (and not in the context of Yoga). Unlike Sāmkhya (see kārikā 6 of the SK and the commentaries to this kārikā), Yoga (see such texts as Yogasūtras, Yogasūtras, Tattvavaiśārañḍī (ca. 841 CE or ca. 976 CE) of Vācaspati Miśra, and Rājamārtanda (ca. 1150 CE) by Bhoja Rāja) does not state that authoritative verbal testimony has independent scope including only those things which cannot be validly cognized by perception or inference of ordinary people (i.e. people not endowed with an extraordinary capacity of perception of imperceptible reality). Hence, in Yoga authoritative verbal testimony is a source of valid knowledge of those things also which are reachable by perception and inference of ordinary people, and inference mentioned in the definition of āgama given in the Yogasūtras is probably a means of cognition of those authorities which are ordinary people (and not of those authorities which are capable of direct cognition of unseen reality). It follows from this that in the context of Yoga (unlike in the context of Sāmkhya) this mention about an inferential cognition of authoritative persons does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that all or some of the authorities which communicate about imperceptible reality cognize this reality not only by means of perception but also by means of inference.

25 Cf. Yogasūtras I, 1, 7:

āptena dṛṣṭo 'numito vārthaḥ paratra sva-bodha-saṁkrāntaye śabdenopaḍiśyate śabdāt tad-artha-visaṣyā vṛttih śrotur āgamaḥ | yasyāśraṣādheyarthaḥ vaktā na drṣṭaumārthaḥ sa āgamaḥ plavate | mūla-vaktari tu drṣṭānumātārthe nirvīplavah svāt ||

An object which has been perceived or inferred by authoritative person (āpta) is presented (upadiśyate) by means of words – in order to transmit [his] own knowledge (bodha) to another [person]. Authoritative verbal testimony (āgama) is [such] a process (vṛtti) [taking place in the mind] of the hearer [which has been engendered] by [authoritative] word [and] has as [its] object the meaning of that [word]. If a speaker [communicates] about an unbelievable object [or] an object which has not been perceived or inferred, such authoritative verbal testimony (āgama) shakes (plavate). But if the original speaker has [himself] perceived or inferred the object, [such authoritative verbal testimony] will be indestructible.
Conclusion and Perspectives for Future Research

The aim of this paper was to reconstruct the classical Sāṁkhya view on the authorship of the Vedas. The research was based on the commentaries to the SK definition of authoritative verbal testimony (given in kārikā 5) which contain the main evidence (both direct and indirect) for reconstruction of this view. Besides the fragments where the classical Sāṁkhya writers explain the SK definition of authoritative verbal testimony, the fragment of TK 2 containing the direct evidence in the question of the authorship of the Vedas was considered. In that way all the direct evidence I had found in the texts of classical Sāṁkhya (it seems not to be numerous, formulated three times only—in YD 5, TK 5, and TK 2) was taken into account.

The analysis presented in this article leads to the following conclusion. According to most classical Sāṁkhya commentaries, the Vedas have no author. Such conclusion is supported by all the direct evidence we find in the classical Sāṁkhya texts and by indirect evidence given in five classical Sāṁkhya commentaries to the definition of authoritative verbal testimony. In YD 5, TK 5, and TK 2 the Sāṁkhya writers state directly that the Vedas have no author. The fragments containing the direct evidence are influenced by Mīmāṃsā. Vācaspati Miśra in the TK, trying to fit the Mīmāṃsā idea of the uninterrupted tradition of recitation of the authorless Vedas in the doctrine of Sāṁkhya which accepts the conception of periodic dissolutions (pralaya) of the world, suggests, first, that the Vedas after pralaya are similar to the Vedas before pralaya, second, that there are persons (or a person, i.e. Kapila) capable of remembering the Vedas existing before pralaya and recommencing in that way the tradition of their recitation interrupted by pralaya. As regards the indirect evidence, it is as follows: first, in SVr 5 and SSVr 5 the commentators, distinguishing between authorities who uttered the Vedas and authorities to whom we owe dharmaśāstras, call the authors (kāra, kāṛṛ) only the latter authorities; second, in GB 5, MV 5, and YD 5 utterances of authoritative persons and utterances of the Vedas, which are not associated with any authorities, represent two separate types of authoritative utterances.

The only commentary which seems to suggest that the Vedas have an author (or authors) is the JM. According to the JM definition of authoritative verbal testimony, which is influenced by Yoga, all the authoritative utterances are based on perception or inference of certain objects by authoritative persons (see JM 5). It follows from this that the Vedas too have an author or authors.

Future research perspectives include, first of all, clearing up whether the classical Sāṁkhya texts contain other indirect evidence in the question of the authorship of the Vedas. In order to clear it up we should examine carefully all the fragments where there are mentions of the Vedas, authoritative utterances, Kapila, ṛṣis, and the like persons. After that we should study pre-Īśvara-Kṛṣṇa Sāṁkhya material and postclassical Sāṁkhya texts, as well as external evidence, i.e. the evidence presented in the texts which do not belong to Sāṁkhya tradition.
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Sāṅkhya Texts and Abbreviations

GB. Sāṅkhyaśāstraīkāhāsya, or Gauḍapādabhāṣya = The Sāṅkhya Kārikā with an Exposition Called Candrikā by Nārāyaṇa Tirtha, and Gauḍapādācārya’s Commentary (1883), Edited by Beçanarāma Tripaṭhi. Benares: Messrs. Braj B. Das & Co. (Benares Sanskrit Series. No. 9.).

JM. Jayamaṅgalā = Sāṅkhyaśāstraīkā of Śrimad Śivarākṣaṇa with the Māṭharavṛtti of Māṭharcārya and the Jayamaṅgalā of Śrī Śaṅkara (1970). Edited by Viṣṇuprasāda Śarmā [MV] and Satkāriśarmā Vangyā [MV]. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office. (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series. No. 56.).

MV. Māṭharavṛtti—see above JM. Jayamaṅgalā.

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SSVṛ. Sāṅkhyaśūtrapatīvṛtti = Sāṅkhya-Saptati-Vṛtti (VI). (1973). Edited by E. A. Solomon. Ahmedabad: Gujarat University (Bibliotheca Indica. New Series. No. 688.).

SVṛ. Sāṅkhyaśūtravṛtti = Sāṅkhya-Vṛtti (VI) (1973). Edited by E. A. Solomon. Ahmedabad: Gujarat University.

TK. Sāṅkhyaśūtatvavakānumūḍī = Sankhyaratvata Koumudi by Bachaspati Misra. (1871). Edited with a Commentary by Taranatha Tarkavachaspati. Calcutta: Sucharu Press.

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