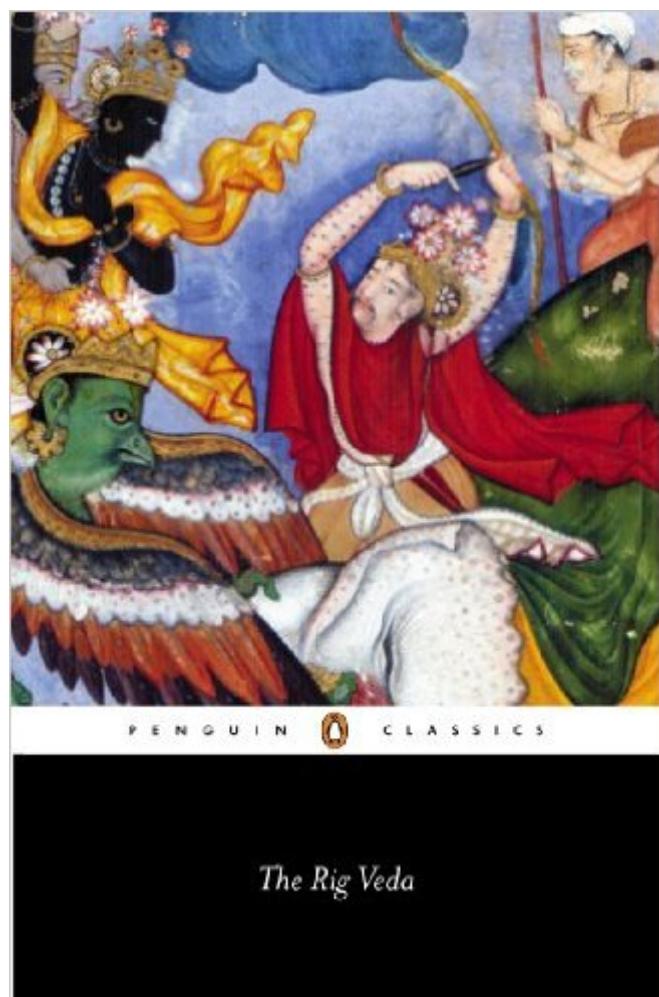


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The Rig Veda (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The earliest of the four Hindu religious scriptures known as the Vedas, and the first extensive composition to survive in any Indo-European language, the Rig Veda (c. 1200-900 BC) is a collection of over 1,000 individual Sanskrit hymns. A work of intricate beauty, it provides a unique insight into early Indian mythology, religion and culture. This selection of 108 of the hymns, chosen for their eloquence and wisdom, focuses on the enduring themes of creation, sacrifice, death, women, the sacred plant soma and the gods. Inspirational and profound, it provides a fascinating introduction to one of the founding texts of Hindu scripture - an awesome and venerable ancient work of Vedic ritual, prayer, philosophy, legend and faith. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

This is a re-issue, in Penguin's current format, and with new cover art, of the Penguin Classics volume previously listed by as "The Rig Veda: An Anthology of One Hundred Eight Hymns," published in 1981 (and as of October 2005, confusingly still available from), as translated and edited by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty. That was her married name, since dropped, to the

accompaniment of endless bibliographic and bookselling confusion. She is now known as Wendy Doniger, and is the "Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions" at the University of Chicago. (She has reported receiving mail with interesting combinations of names and titles.) Upon inspection, the "new edition" is revealed to be one of Penguin's cosmetic re-packagings to make the whole line uniform (and mostly quite handsome), and not one of the revised editions which have also been appearing as part of the same project. I offer here, with some modifications, my review of the 1981 edition (itself previously reissued in a larger format, with new cover art, some years ago, but also not otherwise changed). Meanwhile, I suggest trying the page for the older edition of "The Rig Veda: An Anthology..." if you are interested in a variety of responses by over a dozen other reviewers. And, again, don't let the title and name variations suggest that they are different books, of exactly the same length, from the very same publisher! (As a matter of fact, the actual front-cover title of these editions has been just "The Rig Veda" all along.) Under any form of her name, Wendy Doniger is a distinguished interpreter and translator of Vedic and classical Sanskrit texts, and of Indian religions in general. Her books are often witty, and at times quite dense with detail.

listing for this book has at times contained a possibly confusing abundance of Wendys. Keeping it simple; Wendy Doniger used Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty on her earlier books, and uses Wendy Doniger for books published after her divorce; a few older printings of some of them have "Wendy O'Flaherty" on them somewhere. Hence the variants, which can leave some works (like this one) in bibliographic purgatory. (To add to the possible confusion, she is now the "Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions" at the University of Chicago, and has reported receiving mail with interesting combinations of names.) A re-issue by Penguin, listed by with the simpler title of "The Rig Veda," and a new cover design and art, but no other changes, has appeared (September 2005) as by Wendy Doniger; I have offered a new version of this review with it, with some different emphases, and have also reviewed a Kessinger e-book of the old R.T.H. Griffiths "complete" translation. (Well, really complete, IF you can read Latin, and if you find an unlisted appendix -- Griffiths took some care not to offend Victorian sensibilities, and Kessinger was a little careless.) Secondly, under any form of the names, Wendy Doniger is a distinguished interpreter and translator of Vedic and classical Sanskrit texts, and of Indian religions in general. Her books are often witty, and at times quite dense with detail. She fully appreciates the playfulness of many versions of Hindu stories of the gods. ("Play" being in fact an explicit theme in some of them.) In this volume she presents a selection of very ancient poems, in quite readable translations,

and backs them up with detailed interpretive and bibliographic notes.

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