

URANUS AND THE INVISIBLE PLANETS

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The suggestion (1, 2) of identifying the eighth planet Rahu (or Yahu) of the Burmese tradition with Uranus appears to be untenable.

Rahu and Ketu are familiar terms in Indian tradition (e.g. 3). In popular mythology they are the two demons – in fact the severed head and body, respectively, of a single demon – that are always chasing the Sun and the Moon and causing their eclipses.

In purely astronomical terms, since about AD 500 they are identified with ascending (Rahu) and descending (Ketu) nodes of the lunar orbit and thus naturally connected with eclipses.

Rahu and Ketu have always been considered as two planets, 180° apart, supplementing the seven geocentric ones. Even now, traditional Indian almanacs list them as such.

If the Burmese Rahu is the same as the Indian Rahu – as appears very likely – it is the ascending node of the lunar orbit and in no way connected with Uranus.

REFERENCES

- (1) Chambers, G.F., 1889. *Handbook of Descriptive Astronomy*, Book 1, p. 246, Oxford.
- (2) Wright, D.C., 1987. *Q. Jl R. Astr. Soc.*, **28**, 79.
- (3) Bose, D.M., Sen, S.N. & Subbarayappa, B.V. (eds), 1971. *A Concise History of Science in India*, p. 65, Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi.

THE INVISIBLE PLANET RAHU

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Under the rather misleading heading ‘Uranus in Antiquity’, D.C.Wright (1) mentions a Burmese tradition for an eighth planet named Rahu. There is actually a considerable tradition in the Middle East and Asia for the lunar nodes to be associated with invisible planets, and in particular, in the Hindu mythology, the head of the demon Rahu and his severed body Ketu tried to devour the Sun and Moon whenever the occasion arose. I draw the attention of your readers to the long article on this subject by the late Professor Willy Hartner (2), an associate of this Society.

REFERENCES

- (1) Wright, D.C., 1987. *Q. Jl R. astr. Soc.*, **28**, 79–80.
- (2) Hartner, W., 1938. *Ars Islamica*, **5**(2), 113–154, reprinted in *Oriens-Occidens*, pp. 349–404, Hildesheim.