

Paper proposal for the 2015 ICEMLNI conference:  
“Sur’s Meters Revisited”

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This paper grows out of the recently completed Surdas critical edition project, published now as *Sur’s Ocean: Poems from the Early Tradition* (ed. Bryant, trans. Hawley, Harvard University Press, 2015). An important stage in that project was an early (1992) hypothesis concerning pada meter, presented first at an ancestor of the ICEMLNI conference. That hypothesis involved a then-controversial introduction of the element of syllabic stress into discussions of matra-based meter: that is, an assertion that the meter of the pada was not only measurable in time (syllable length), but also in the intervals between stressed syllables, using an algorithm for syllabic stress first advanced by G.A. Grierson in 1895, and recently resurrected by Constance Fairbanks in her dissertation of 1981.

This paper proposes to update that of twenty years ago, first by rejecting the previous, Prakrit- and Apabhramsha-based approaches to prescriptive meter definitions for the pada; then speculating on the performance parameters of sixteenth-century padas, incorporating work by Rupert Snell (also presented at a proto-ICEMLNI conference, as well as in his edition of the Chaurasi Pad of Hit Harivamsh, 1991) and quite different work by Selina Thielemann on modern temple performances in Braj (2001); and finally by exploring, using the textual variations encountered in the early Sur manuscripts, the use of “4-4” and “3-3-2” matra stress-interval patterns in framing a “semi-formulaic” approach to oral composition.