

UNDERSTANDING OF PRECESSION BY ANCIENT HINDUS

REFERENCE – Suryasiddhanta BY REV. E. Burgess ..

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Among the Greek astronomers, Hipparchus is regarded as the first who discovered the precession of the equinoxes; their rate of motion, however, seems not to have been confidently determined by him, although he pronounces it to be at any rate not less than $36''$ yearly. For a thorough discussion of the subject of the precession in Greek astronomy see Delambre's History of Ancient Astronomy, ii. 247, etc. From the observations reported as the data whence Hipparchus made his discovery, Delambre deduces very nearly the true rate of the precession. Ptolemy, however, was so unfortunate as to adopt for the true rate Hipparchus's minimum, of $36''$ a year: the subject is treated of by him in the seventh book of the Syntaxis. The actual motion of the equinox at the present time is $50''.25$; its rate is slowly on the increase, having been, at the epoch of the Greek astronomy, somewhat less than $50''$. How the Hindus succeeded in arriving at a determination of it so much more accurate than was made by the great Greek astronomer, or whether it was anything more than a lucky hit on their part, we will not attempt here to discuss.