



Studi e Ricerche

Ricerche sull'Oriente



Unveiling the Atharvaveda

*Mapping the Cultural and Linguistic
Peculiarities of a Vedic Text*

Edited by Marianna Ferrara and Duccio Lelli



University Press



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE

Collana Studi e Ricerche 202

Ricerche sull'Oriente

Unveiling the Atharvaveda

*Mapping the Cultural and Linguistic
Peculiarities of a Vedic Text*

Edited by Marianna Ferrara and Duccio Lelli



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE

2026

This research received funding from the European Union - Next-GenerationEU - National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) MISSION 4 COMPONENT 2, INVESTIMENT N. 1.1, CALL PRIN 2022 PNRR D.D. 1409 14-09-2022 – (Entangled chronotopes: language, power, bodyscapes and religion in the first ten books of the Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā [ŚŚ]) CUP B53D23023280006.

Copyright © 2026

Sapienza Università Editrice

Piazzale Aldo Moro 5 – 00185 Roma

www.editricesapienza.it

editrice.sapienza@uniroma1.it

Iscrizione Registro Operatori Comunicazione n. 11420

Registry of Communication Workers registration n. 11420

ISBN 978-88-9377-469-7

DOI 10.13133/9788893774697

Pubblicato nel mese di settembre 2026 | *Published in September 2026*



Opera diffusa in modalità *open access* e distribuita con licenza
Creative Commons Attribuzione – Non commerciale – Non opere
derivate 4.0 Internazionale (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Work published in open access form and licensed under Creative Commons Attribution – NonCommercial – NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Impaginazione a cura di | *Layout by:* Marianna Ferrara

In copertina | *Cover image:* AI-generated illustration (ChatGPT, OpenAI), 2026.

*To Marianne S. Oort
and Werner F. Knobl,
dearest friends
and faithful companions
of many Vedic adventures.*

*svasti vah pârāya tamasah
parastāt (MuṇḍU 2.2.6)*

Contents

Abbreviations of Sanskrit Works	9
Introduction	15
<i>Marianna Ferrara, Duccio Lelli</i>	
PART I – LINGUISTICS	
1. What can Pāṇini teach us about the Atharvavedic usages of the perfect tense?	21
<i>Maria Piera Candotti, Tiziana Pontillo</i>	
2. On long-distance relative clauses in early Vedic	67
<i>Davide Mocci</i>	
3. On the informative structure of the sentence in Vedic	91
<i>Massimo Vai</i>	
4. The Vedic prose corpus	107
<i>Oliver Hellwig</i>	
PART II – LEXICON	
5. The meaning and etymology of Skt. <i>sūkarā-</i>	125
<i>Alexander Lubotsky</i>	
6. On the meaning of <i>gaṇá-</i> in the <i>Ṛgveda</i> and the <i>Atharvaveda</i>	139
<i>Duccio Lelli</i>	
7. The scope of <i>bheṣajā</i> in early Vedic medicine	165
<i>Kristen de Joseph</i>	

8. Lexical and etymological remarks on and around the ‘enemy’
in the *Śaunaka-Atharvaveda* (with special emphasis on the third
kāṇḍa) 179
Matteo Macciò, Rosa Ronzitti

PART III – RITUAL

9. High plains drifters: on Gandharvas, Maruts and Kaṇvas
in the *Atharvaveda* 215
Robert Leach
10. On ŚS 1.11 “For trouble-free childbirth” and its parallels 235
Roland A. Pooth
11. The Atharvans and Aṅgirasas as *puróhitas*, founders
of the *agnihotra*, and the *vrātya* culture 255
Paola M. Rossi
12. Jealousy, Envy, and Other Disruptive Emotions
in the *Atharvaveda* 297
Marianna Ferrara

Abbreviations of Sanskrit Works

Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṣṭādhyāyī</i>
AB	<i>Aitareyabrāhmaṇa</i>
ĀpMP	<i>Āpastambamantrapāṭha</i>
ĀpŚS	<i>Āpastambaśrautasūtra</i>
ĀśvŚS	<i>Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtra</i>
AV	<i>Atharvaveda</i>
AVPariś	<i>Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa</i>
BhārŚS	<i>Bhāradvājaśrautasūtra</i>
BĀU	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad</i>
BaudhGS	<i>Baudhāyanagrhyasūtra</i>
BaudhŚS	<i>Baudhāyanaśrautasūtra</i>
ChU	<i>Chāndogyopaniṣad</i>
DrāhŚS	<i>Drāhyāyanaśrautasūtra</i>
GautDhS	<i>Gautamadharmasūtra</i>
GB	<i>Gopathabrāhmaṇa</i>
JB	<i>Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa</i>
KapKS	<i>Kapiṣṭhalakaṭhasaṃhitā</i>
KāthGS	<i>Kāthakagrhyasūtra</i>
KātyŚS	<i>Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra</i>
KauśS	<i>Kauśikasūtra</i>
KS	<i>Kāthakasaṃhitā</i>
KV	<i>Kāśikāvṛtti</i>
LāṭŚS	<i>Lāṭyāyanaśrautasūtra</i>

M	<i>Mahābhāṣya</i>
MaitrU	<i>Maitrāyaṇopaniṣad</i>
MānŚS	<i>Mānavaśrautasūtra</i>
MBh	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
MS	<i>Maitrāyaṇīsaṃhitā</i>
MuṇḍU	<i>Muṇḍakopaniṣad</i>
PārGS	<i>Pāraskaragrhyasūtra</i>
PB	<i>Pañcaviṃśabrahmaṇa</i>
PS	<i>Paippalādasamhitā</i>
Rām	<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>
ṚV	<i>Ṛgveda</i>
ṚVKh	<i>Ṛgvedakhilāni</i>
ŚāṅkhŚS	<i>Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra</i>
ŚBM	<i>Śatapathabrahmaṇa</i> (Madhyandina rec.)
ŚB	<i>Śaḍviṃśabrahmaṇa</i>
ŚS	<i>Śaunakīyasaṃhitā</i>
SV	<i>Sāmaveda</i>
TĀ	<i>Taittirīyāraṇyaka</i>
TB	<i>Taittirīyabrahmaṇa</i>
TS	<i>Taittirīyasaṃhitā</i>
VādhŚS	<i>Vādhūlaśrautasūtra</i>
VaikhŚS	<i>Vaikhāṇasaśrautasūtra</i>
VaitS	<i>Vaitānasūtra</i>
VārŚS	<i>Vārāhaśrautasūtra</i>
VP	<i>Vākyapadīya</i>
VS	<i>Vājasaneyisaṃhitā</i>
VSM	<i>Vājasaneyisaṃhitā</i> (Madhyandina rec.)
Vt	<i>Vārttika</i>
YV	<i>Yajurveda</i>

Sanskrit Works

A: SHARMA, Rama Nath (1987–2003), *The Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini*, 6 Vols., Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi.

AVParīś: *The Parīśiṣṭas of the Atharvaveda*, ed. by George Melville BOLLING

- and Julius VON NEGELEIN (1909–1910), Otto Harrassowitz, Leipzig.
- BhārŚS: KASHIKAR, Cintāmani Ganeśa (1964), *The Śrauta, Paṭṛmedhika and Pariśeṣa Sūtras of Bharadvāja. Critically Edited and Translated*. 2 parts. Vaidika Saṁśodhana Maṇḍala, Poona.
- GB: GAASTRA, Dieuke (1919), *Das Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, E. J. Brill, Leiden.
- JB: VIRA, Raghu, and Chandra LOKESH (1986), *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa of the Samaveda. Complete Text*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.
- KapKS: VIRA, Raghu (1932) *Kapiṣṭhala-Kaṭha-Saṁhitā. A Text of the Black Yajurveda. Critically edited for the first time*, Mehar Chand Lachhman Das, Lahore.
- KātyŚS: WEBER, Albrecht (1859), *The Ārautasūtra of Kātyāyana with Extracts from the Commentaries of Karka and Yājñikadeva*, F. Dümmler, Berlin.
- KauśS: BLOOMFIELD, MAURICE (1890), *The Kauśika Sūtra of the Atharvaveda. With extracts from the Commentaries of Dārila and Keçava*, in “Journal of the American Oriental Society” 14, pp. i–424. <<https://doi.org/10.2307/592399>>.
- KS: VON SCHROEDER, Leopold (1900–1910), *Kāthakam. Die Saṁhitā der Kaṭha-Çākhā*, 3 Vols., F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig (repr. Wiesbaden, 1970–1972).
- KV: SARMA, Āryendra, DESHPANDE, Khanderao, and D. G. PADHYE (1969–1970), *Kāśikā. A Commentary on Pāṇini’s Grammar by Vāmana and Jayāditya*, Sanskrit Academy Osmania University, Hyderabad.
- M: KIELHORN, Franz (1880–1885), *The Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, 3 Vols., Bombay (Reprinted in Osnabrück 1970).
- MS: VON SCHROEDER, Leopold (1881–1886), *Mâitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā. Die Saṁhitā der Mâitrāyaṇīya-Çākhā*, 4 Vols., F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig.
- MuṇḍU: [Muṇḍakopaniṣad] OLIVELLE, Patrick (1998), *The early Upaniṣads: Annotated text and translation*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Nirukta: BHADKAMKAR, H. M., and R. G. BHADKAMKAR (1942–1985). *The Nirukta of Yāska (with Nighaṇṭu). Edited with Durga’s commentary*. 2 Vols., Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona.
- Nirukta-vṛtti of Durga: BHADKAMKAR, H. M. & R. G. BHADKAMKAR, eds. (1942–1985), see above.
- PS: *The Paippalāda-Saṁhitā of the Atharvaveda, I–IV*, ed. by Dipak BHATTACHARYA, Calcutta, 1997–2016. <https://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/corpus/transformations/html/sa_paippalAdasaMhitA.htm>.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 1: Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition: Book 1*, by Thomas ZEHNDER et al. [= Oliver HELLWIG, Robert LEACH, Magdalena PLAMADA, Angelika MALINAR, Paul WIDMER] (2024). <<https://www.atharvaveda-online.uzh.ch/edition/01>>.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 2: ZEHNDER, Thomas (1999), Atharvaveda-Paippalāda, Buch 2, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar eine Sammlung altindischer Zaubersprüche vom Beginn des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr.*, Schulz-Kirchner, Idstein.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 3: SPIERS, Carmen Sylvia (2020), Magie et poésie dans l’Inde ancienne: édition, traduction et commentaire de la Paippalādasamhitā de l’Atharvaveda, livre 3*, PhD Dissertation, École doctorale de l’École pratique des hautes études, Paris.

- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 4: Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition: Book 4*, by Thomas ZEHNDER et al. [= Oliver HELLWIG, Robert LEACH, Magdalena PLAMADA, Angelika MALINAR, Paul WIDMER] (2024). <<https://www.atharvaveda-online.uzh.ch/edition/04>>.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 5: LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2002), Atharvaveda-Paippalāda, Kanda Five: Text, Translation, Commentary*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 6 & 7: GRIFFITHS, Arlo (2009), The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda, Kāṇḍas 6 and 7: A New Edition with Translation and Commentary*, E. Forsten, Groningen.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 8 & 9: KIM, Jeong-Soo (2014), Die Paippalādasamhitā des Atharvaveda: Kāṇḍa 8 und 9*, Verlag J. H. Röll, Dettelbach.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 10: Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition: Book 10*, by Thomas ZEHNDER et al. [= Oliver HELLWIG, Robert LEACH, Magdalena PLAMADA, Angelika MALINAR, Paul WIDMER] (2024). <<https://www.atharvaveda-online.uzh.ch/edition/10>>.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 12: Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition: Book 12*, by Thomas ZEHNDER et al. [= Oliver HELLWIG, Robert LEACH, Paul WIDMER] (2024). <<https://www.atharvaveda-online.uzh.ch/edition/12>>.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 13 & 14: LOPEZ, Carlo A. (2010), Atharvaveda-Paippalāda Kāṇḍas Thirteen and Fourteen: Text, Translation, Commentary*, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 15: LELLI, Duccio (2020), Atharvaveda Paippalāda: Kāṇḍa Fifteen: Text, translation, commentary*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 19: SELVA, Umberto (2019), The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda : a new critical edition of the three 'new' Anuvākas of Kāṇḍa 17 with English translation and commentary*, PhD Thesis, Leiden–Turin.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 19: ZEHNDER et al. (forthcoming)*.
- PS: *Paippalāda-Saṁhitā. Kāṇḍa 20: KUBISCH, Philipp (2012), Paippalāda-Saṁhitā Kāṇḍa 20, Sūkta 1–30. Kritische Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, PhD, Bonn.
- RV: AUFRECHT, Theodor (1877), *Die Hymnen des R̥gveda. Erster Theil, Maṇḍala I–VI & Zweiter Teil, Maṇḍala VII–X*, Adolph Marcus, Bonn.
- RV: JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (2014), *The R̥gveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York.
- RV: VAN NOOTEN, Barend A., and Gary B. HOLLAND (1994), *R̥g Veda: A metrically restored text with an introduction and notes*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- RVKh: SCHEFTELOWITZ, Isidor (1906), *Die Apokryphen des R̥gveda (Khilāni)*, Marcus, Breslau.
- ŚBM: WEBER, Albrecht (1885), *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa in the Mādhyandina-śākhā with Extracts from the Commentaries of Sāyaṇa, Harisvāmin and Dvivedagaṇa*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series office, Varanasi (Reprint 1964).
- ŚS: KIM, Jeong-Soo (2022), *Atharvavedasamhitā der Śaunakaśākhā. Eine neue Edi-*

- tio unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Parallel-stellen der Paippalādasamhitā*, Universität Würzburg. <<https://doi.org/10.25972/OPUS-27703>>.
- ŚS: ORLANDI, Chatia (1991), *Gli inni dell' Atharvaveda (Śaunaka)*, Giardini, Pisa.
- ŚS: VON ROTH, Rudolf, and William Dwight WHITNEY (1856), *Atharva Veda Sanhita* F. Dümmler, Berlin (3rd edition revised by Max Lindenau, Ferd. Dümmler, Berlin, 1924).
- TĀ: MITRA, Rājendralāla (1872), *The Taittirīya Āraṇyaka of the Black Yajur Veda with the Commentary of Sāyaṇācārya*, 2 Vols., Calcutta.
- TB: ŚĀSTRĪ, G. N. (1898), *Kṛṣṇayajurvedīyaṇi Taittirīyabrāhmaṇam*, Poona.
- TS: WEBER, Albrecht (1871–1872), *Die Taittirīya-Samhitā. Erster Theil, Kāṇḍa I–IV & Zweiter Theil, Kāṇḍa V–VII*, 2 Vols., F.A. Brockhaus, Leipzig.
- VaitS: ŚĀSTRĪ, Viśvabandhu (1967), *Vaitāna-śrauta-sūtram*, Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, Hoshiarpur.
- VP: RAU, Wilhelm (1977), *Vākyapadīya by Bhartrhari*, Steiner [u.a.], Wiesbaden.
- VSM: WEBER, Albrecht (1852), *The Vâjasaneyi-Samhitâ in the Mâdhyandina- and the Kâṇva-Çâkhâ with the commentary of Mahidhara*, Ferd. Dümmler/Williams and Norgate, Berlin–London.

Introduction

Beyond the veil of “magic”: new perspectives on the *Atharvaveda*

Marianna Ferrara, Duccio Lelli

This volume represents a first attempt to explore the *Atharvaveda* from beneath the veil of a century of scholarship, prompted by the aims of the project within which it took shape, namely the PRIN 2022 project (“Progetti di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale”) entitled “Entangled Chronotopes: Language, Power, Bodyscapes and Religion in the First Ten Books of the *Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā* [ŚŚ]” (PI Tiziana Pontillo, University of Cagliari). The project involved five Research Units (Cagliari, Genova, Milan, Pisa, and Rome) and focused on the translation of selected books from the *Śaunakīya* recension of the *Atharvaveda*, with particular attention to the role of the body.

From the outset, this focus was understood by the research group as a whole not merely in anatomical or descriptive terms, but as a way of approaching the body as a culturally mediated field through which language, ritual practice, and forms of knowledge are articulated. Building on this framework, the project collectively adopted language as a heuristic device for mapping both real and imagined objects, institutions, ritual practices, and structures of power across the Vedic milieu, thereby enabling the articulation of semantic, cultural, and epistemic dimensions within the text.

On this premise, the project investigated how linguistic and ritual practices, social hierarchies, bodily representations, and religious imaginaries interacted within historically situated configurations of space and time. It is within such configurations that Atharvavedic rituality took shape, spanning everyday and private concerns, public and politically relevant contexts, the mainstream tradition associated with the R̥gvedic and Yajurvedic *corpora*, and its margins, where alternative practices could elicit both efficacy and fear.

Rather than treating these dimensions as discrete domains, the Rome Research Unit approached them as mutually constitutive elements within a dynamic and historically situated network of meanings. From this perspective, attention was directed not only to what the texts say, but also to the logics and conceptual frameworks through which they construct relationships between bodies, environments, and systems of knowledge.

The aim was to move beyond the long-standing view of the Atharvaveda as marginal or anomalous within the Vedic canon and to reconsider it as an authoritative *locus* for exploring the dynamics of authority, normativity, healing practices, political symbolism, and cosmological speculation in early India. It is well known that Atharvavedic studies have undergone a significant turning point with the rediscovery of the *Paippalāda* tradition, which has enabled a reconsideration of the *Atharvaveda* not as peripheral, but as a key site for observing processes of knowledge production and cultural negotiation. The present research thus sought to continue along this trajectory.

Within this framework, the Research Unit at Sapienza University of Rome was coordinated by Marianna Ferrara (Associate Professor of History of Religions), whose research focuses on Vedic ritual traditions, the interplay between politics and religion, and gender approaches to religion. The work of the unit greatly benefited from the significant scholarly contribution of Duccio Lelli, Postdoctoral Research Fellow (2024–2025), whose research interests encompass Vedic studies, the *Atharvaveda*, and Indo-European linguistic and mythological connections. The convergence of these complementary perspectives – on the one hand, ritual and religious practices, and on the other, linguistic and comparative approaches – provided the intellectual framework for the International Workshop “Unveiling the *Atharvaveda*: Mapping the Cultural and Linguistic Peculiarities of a Vedic Text,” held at Sapienza University of Rome on January 30–31, 2025. The workshop brought together all the Research Units involved in the project, along with other international scholars, and the present volume constitutes the outcome of this collaboration.

The workshop was based on the premise that the *Atharvaveda* exhibits distinctive features within the Vedic corpus, particularly in its conceptualizations of the body and its role in ritual practice. In this respect, Atharvavedic texts often engage with the vulnerabilities, imperfections, and precarious conditions of human existence – both physical

and, at times, existential, in relation to the human place in the universe – through forms of expression that may appear strikingly direct or “visceral” when compared to other Vedic materials.

Such characteristics have long contributed to shaping its reception in modern scholarship, where the *Atharvaveda* has frequently been interpreted through categories such as “magic”, “spell-book”, or “sorcery”, thus placing it under a persistent “veil of magic”, often emphasizing materiality, the body, the performative dimension of recitation, and explicitly harmful practices. While these interpretations have highlighted important features of the Atharvavedic *corpora*, they have at times overshadowed other dimensions – political, poetical, psychological, and philosophical – that have more recently come to the fore.

At the same time, recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted the importance of linguistic features that further contribute to the distinctiveness of the *Atharvaveda*, which has long been overshadowed by its comparison with the *Rgveda*. These studies have shown that its relationship with the so-called “mainstream” Vedic tradition is more complex and nuanced than previously assumed, thus calling into question rigid oppositions between central and marginal forms of Vedic expression. It is against this background that the workshop brought together national and international scholars who, by engaging with the multiple facets of the *Atharvaveda*, brought to light further aspects of its distinctiveness, confirming the sustained scholarly interest in this text.

Building on these developments, the volume is divided into three thematic sections – *Linguistics*, *Lexicon*, and *Ritual* – which reflect the main research axes of the project and collectively aim to illuminate the textual, semantic, and performative dimensions of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā*. These sections are not isolated domains but complementary perspectives reflecting a shared concern with the ways in which language, body, social organization, and ritual practice shape and organize experience within the cultural horizon of the Atharvavedic healing tradition and the political context of early forms of sovereignty.

The first section explores key linguistic features of the Atharvavedic *corpora*, situating them within the broader history of Vedic language. The contributions examine verbal morphology and grammatical reflection, including insights derived from Pāṇinian analysis (Maria Piera Candotti and Tiziana Pontillo), syntactic structures (Davide Mocchi), discourse organization (Massimo Vai), and the interaction between metrical and prose materials (Oliver Hellwig). Particular attention is

devoted to the interaction between metrical and prose materials, as well as to the distinctive features that characterize Atharvavedic language in comparison with other Vedic *Samhitās*.

The second section focuses on lexical and semantic analysis, investigating key terms and semantic fields within the Atharvavedic recensions and in comparison with the Ṛgvedic tradition. The contributions examine the etymology of specific lexical items (Alexander Lubotsky), the semantic range of key terms across Vedic texts (Duccio Lelli), and lexical domains related to healing and cosmology (Kristen de Joseph), as well as enmity and social organization (Matteo Macciò and Rosa Ronzitti), thereby showing how the *Atharvaveda* brings together a richly stratified constellation of semantic and cultural scenarios.

Finally, the third section turns to ritual practices and religious representations, examining the Atharvavedins' role in shaping ritual authority, Brahmanical identity, and the bodily construction of both the individual and the community. The contributions explore mythological figures and semi-divine beings (Robert Leach), ritual contexts related to childbirth and their textual parallels (Roland A. Pooth), the role of Atharvans and Aṅgirasas within ritual traditions (Paola M. Rossi), and the ritual codification of socially disruptive emotions, such as jealousy and envy, in Atharvavedic texts (Marianna Ferrara).

By situating Atharvavedic materials within an interdisciplinary framework, this volume has sought to highlight the features that mark the *Atharvaveda* as a distinctive text within the Vedic tradition. Its originality does not lie in the fact that its putative authors engage with the negotiation of power, order, and religious authority – issues that are central to the Vedic tradition as a whole and that place the *Atharvaveda* fully in line with other Vedic collections. Rather, these themes emerge here according to distinctive logics, shaped by the centrality accorded to the body and to its vulnerability, within a vision of order that must nonetheless be preserved from collapse.

The inquiry thus returns to the body from which it set out, now with a broader perspective that shifts the focus from the *Atharvaveda*'s perceived unconventionality to its richness, beyond the interpretative veil that has long obscured its conceptual and cultural richness.

PART I

LINGUISTICS

1. What can Pāṇini teach us about the Atharvavedic usages of the perfect tense?*

Maria Piera Candotti, Tiziana Pontillo

Abstract

The present work is based on the 107 occurrences of the indicative perfect occurring in Books 1 and 4 of the *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda*. These have been taken as a sample to advance a new hypothesis on what may be identified as the two most general features in the use of the perfect in these Vedic sources. Alongside the non-dynamic feature that has already been highlighted (even though with varying degrees of emphasis) in contemporary scholarship, we propose to add a nominalising feature. Both traits work in synergy; they are common to all our occurrences and could, if confirmed in other sources, help us overcome the extreme fragmentariness in the description of the uses of the perfect that characterises contemporary description of the perfect. This assumption is mainly based on some extremely interesting observations proposed by Louis Renou in 1925 and on some information provided by Pāṇini's grammar in particular on a new interpretation of the term *parokṣa* used in A 3.2.115.

Keywords

Atharvaveda language; Perfect indicative; *Parokṣa*; Pāṇini.

* This paper is the result of a joint work discussed and shared by both authors. However, Maria Piera Candotti is responsible for §§ 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and Tiziana Pontillo for §§ 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10. All translations are the authors' unless otherwise noted. The present work is partly based on study material shared with Roland Pooth and Davide Mocci on the *Śaunakīya Saṃhitā* Books 1 and 4. In fact this contribution is part of the "Entangled Chronotopes: Language, Power, Bodyscapes and Religion in the First Ten Books of the *Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā*" project, funded by the European Union (Next Generation EU, Mission 4, Component 1, CUP F53D23008030006). Our thanks to Frank Köhler for his suggestions and improvements.

1. What temporal reference for perfect forms in the Vedic language?

In the spectrum of the time-honoured assumptions regarding the reconstruction of the function of the Indo-European perfect, its lexical aspect or Aktionsart has often been underlined by projecting what is partially found in Indo-Aryan and Greek evidence onto the prehistoric phase. In particular, according to Kiparsky (1998, p. 29) “Sanskrit presents a classic case of the evolution of aspect to tense. [...] For Proto-Indo-European, the aorist and perfect are reconstructed as purely aspectual categories, with respectively perfective and stative value.”¹ On a theoretical level, the latter category indicates a condition of the subject, when no change occurs, i.e. nothing “happens”, and it is conceived as an antonym of “dynamic”. However, it is hard to find a description of these two categories neatly recorded in the language in terms of clear oppositions and, despite several extensive and excellent works devoted to the perfect in Indo-Iranian, such as that by Kümmel dating back to 2000, some questions remain open.

As is well known, Vedic perfect usages have been classified according to several categories². Sometimes the number of distinctions and sub-categories scholars have assumed over time in order to explain the usages of the Vedic perfect seem to be almost incompatible with the

¹ As regards the proto-Indeuropean perfect, Lazzeroni (2016, p. 8, with reference to Di Giovine 1996, pp. 270–271) clarifies how the perfect must specifically be interpreted in terms of *Aktionsart*, what is also called “lexical aspect”: “il perfetto non codifica un aspetto, bensì lo stato del soggetto conseguente al compiersi di un processo (‘resultativer Stativ’ nella definizione di Kümmel), una *Aktionsart*, dunque (‘naktostatische Aktionsart’: Kümmel, 2000, p. 680), dello stesso tipo del causativo, dell’intensivo e del desiderativo.”

² Here we have omitted several other patterns of research that are far from our present line of inquiry. For instance, one important line of research on the perfect has traced the middle and the perfect back to a single mediopassive diathesis as opposed to an active diathesis. In particular, Renou (1925, pp. 14–15) noticed that perfect active forms are sometimes associated with middle present forms, as in RV 10.107.8: [...] *ná bhojá mamrur* [...] *na vyathante* ‘les libéraux ne meurent point [...] ils ne subissent ébranlement’, where ‘le parfait marque l’état actuel; le présent l’entrée dans cet état’. On the other hand, since some scholars (see e.g. Renou 1925, p. 10; Berrettoni 1976; Strunk 1977) pointed out that some Greek or Indo-Iranian verbs lack any form of the perfect, defectiveness seemed to be able to offer an interesting key to understanding the more ancient aspectual value of the several verbal stems, particularly that of the perfect. We decided to concentrate on a single track of research, which the linguistic material under examination seems to illuminate better.

actual common functioning of a real language³. For instance, Kümmel (2000, pp. 66–82) even distinguishes seven types of Indo-Iranian perfect and uses Vedic examples to illustrate them all. The first two types come under the common label of *Perfekt als Aktionsartkategorie des erreichten Zustand*. “The lexikalisierte Perfektopräsens” (1) is the designation of very common verbal forms such as *veda* ‘he knows’, *pupośa* ‘he is rich in’, where the relevant relationship with the prior action respectively denoted by its verbal base, i.e. ‘to see’ and ‘to flourish’ has been, so to say, crystallised (Kümmel 2000, pp. 69–70). In this category the scholar also includes the perfect verb forms *āha*, *āhuḥ* ‘he says, they say’ whose paradigm is largely defective. The second category is the so-called “naktostatische Perfekt” (2) which indicates a state attained by the subject as the result of a prior verbal action (Kümmel 2000, p. 66). Within a syntactical perspective, a nactostative perfect corresponds to a present tense and can also be used as such in a general way⁴. The third-person singular perfect indicative forms *jāgāra* ‘he is awake’ in RV 5.44.15 and *bibhāya* ‘he is frightened’ in RV 5.83.2 are two examples of the many selected by Kümmel (2000, p. 67). From a synchronic point of view, most of the nactostative perfect forms have to be regarded as independent verbs because they only exist in a derivative relationship with other verbal forms from the same root. There are nevertheless rare cases where Kümmel points out an opposition between the meaning conveyed by perfect and aorist forms deriving from the same root. Among Kümmel’s examples, we find the perfect form *iyāya* (from *i-* ‘to come’) in opposition to the aorist form *aiṣīt*; the perfect *āpa* (from *āp-* ‘to obtain’), in opposition to the aorist *āpat*, but it is clearly stated that this contrastive usage is no longer fully productive in the Vedic language (Kümmel 2000, p. 70). Besides these two categories with Aktionsart values, Kümmel identifies four other categories which come under the general label of “Tempuskategorie mit Vergangenheitsbezug”, a temporal category (i.e. no longer aspectual) with some reference to the past⁵. The different kinds of reference to the past are described

³ See Jamison (2002, p. 352) on the categories established in Kümmel (2000): “One sometimes feels that the author is drawing functional distinctions only because he is capable of conceptualizing them, not because they can be discerned in the textual materials we have.”

⁴ Also this second category is restricted by Kümmel to a specific list of verbal bases.

⁵ Kümmel (2000, p. 71) considers that the hint of the past derives from the resultative aspect of nactostative: “Solange diese Handlung impliziert war, also zumindest

as follows. Category (3) is constituted by the perfect which denotes an extended present tense, i.e. “das Perfekt der erweiterten Gegenwart” in Kümmel’s words (2000, pp. 72–73). In this case, the preterite action has not been completed but is still ongoing in the present time. This “extended present” in the Vedic language can be further clarified by adverbial expressions such as *purá* ‘before’, *nūnám* ‘now’ or *śásvad* and *satrá* ‘always’ (as already noticed e.g. by Delbrück 1897, p. 214). Kümmel (2000, p. 72) translates the relevant selected stanzas placing special emphasis on when the action is performed, that is both in the past and in the present⁶. Moreover, in line with Delbrück (1897, pp. 214–215), Kümmel singles out “Das comprehensive Perfekt” (4) as a use of the perfect that aims to summarise the entire past up to the limit of the present with the omission of the feature “lasting in the present”⁷. Kümmel’s (2000, pp. 75) “Resultativperfekt” (5) is used to convey the result of the designated past action which is still evident in the present state of the agent⁸. Finally, “Das nichtresultative Perfekt” (6) is used when an action is almost solemnly enunciated as a matter of fact without a resultative value but rather as something more generally relevant to the present⁹. In addition to these six early-Vedic types, a seventh category, characteristic of young Vedic prose, sanctions a preterital and narrative use of the perfect.

All in all, one of the most important assumptions about the early Vedic perfect maintained by many scholars is that it often has a pres-

mitverstanden wurde, war es aber möglich, den Fokus vom resultierenden Zustand in Richtung der vergangenen Handlung zu verschieben; dieser Vorgang läßt sich als resultative Metonymie bezeichnen.”

⁶ One of the selected examples is RV 8.67.16: *śásvad dhí vah sudānava āditya ūtibhir vayām | purānūnām bubhujmāhe ||* ‘O munificent Ādityas, indeed we always have benefited from your help.’ Cf. transl. Kümmel (2000, p. 72) “Denn immerfort haben, ihr guten Geber, Ādityas, durch eure Hilfen wir früher und jetzt Nutzen.”

⁷ See e.g. RV 2.27.14ab: *adīte mitra varunotā mṛṣa | yád vo vayām cakṛmā kác cid āgaḥ ||* ‘Aditi, Mitra and Varuṇa, forgive us if we have (so far) caused you any offense.’ Cf. transl. Kümmel (2000, p. 73): “Aditi, Mitra und Varuṇa, verzeih, wenn wir euch (bisher) irgendein Unrecht getan haben!”

⁸ See e.g. RV 1.145.1a: *tám prcchatā śá jagāmā śá veda |* ‘Ask this one! He came (and now he is there), he knows.’ Cf. transl. Kümmel (2000, p. 75): “Diesen frag! Der ist gekommen (und jetzt da), der weiß es.”

⁹ See e.g. RV 5.32.7cd: *yád iṃ vājrasya prābhṛtau dadābha víśvasya jantór adhamāṇ cakāra |* ‘When, by brandishing the club at him, he defeated him, he made him the lowest of all the creatures.’ Cf. transl. Kümmel (2000, p. 73): “Als er [Indra] ihn [den Dämon Dānava] beim Schleudern der Keule geschädigt hat, hat er ihn niedriger als jedes Geschöpf gemacht.”

ent-time reference or that it extends through the past, including the time of the utterance. Some scholars (see e.g. Hoffmann 1967, p. 160; Kümmel 2000, p. 78) even assert that the perfect indicative is never used with a purely past time reference in early Vedic, while Dahl (2010, pp. 344–347) emphasises that this assumption “runs into the difficulty that the Perfect indicative in some case seems to be compatible with pre-hodiernal and remote past reference times.” Dahl (2010, pp. 348; 366) for instance reflects on the following clause:

(a) RV 10.55.5d = ŚS 9.10.9d

adyā mamāra sā hyāḥ sám āna

Today he has died. Yesterday he was still fully breathing¹⁰.

and considers the hapax perfect form (*sám*) *āna* as a piece of evidence that a genuine past time can be expressed by the perfect indicative in Vedic sources. Nevertheless he (2010, p. 361) also points out that this same hymn is found in the Śaunaka *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā*, which means that it belongs to a relatively late layer of the *Ṛgveda* corpus. Kümmel (2000, pp. 96–97) also considers the hapax (*sám*) *āna* derived from the verbal root *an-* ‘to breathe’ as a neologism, created as an alternant form to the elsewhere attested present and aorist forms which have the same durative value. On the other hand, Jamison (2002, p. 352), underlines “the influence of poetic devices and rhetorical pressures in the choice of morphological forms” and analyses this perfect form as “a nonce formation directly inspired by its semantic opposite, *mamāra* ‘died’ in the same Pāda.” Nonetheless, we wonder whether a slightly different perspective should be adopted for this example. More specifically, we propose an analysis of these two perfect forms (*mamāra* and

¹⁰ Cf. Kümmel’s translation (2000, pp. 96; 370): “Heute ist er (der Mond) gestorben – so hat er gestern noch geatmet.” The whole RV stanza reads as follows: *vidhūṃ dadrāṇāṃ sāmāne bahūnāṃ yūvānāṃ sántam palitō jagāra | devāsya paśya kāvyaṃ mahitvādyā mamāra sā hyāḥ sám āna ||* ‘The solitary (moon?) running in the crowd of many (stars?) – though he was young, the gray one swallowed him – behold the poetic skill of the god in his greatness. (In simple language): today he died; yesterday he was (still) utterly breathing’ (transl. Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1465). In fact, Jamison (ibid., p. 352 explains that “the form does not owe its momentary existence to the structural pattern of the formations belonging to the root (a feature, as it were, of ‘langue’), but to rhetorical impulse in the immediate context (‘parole’).” As far as the accent of *mamāra* is concerned cf. Elizarenkova 1995, p. 259: “If the speaker perceives even a slight degree of contraposition between the simple sentences that make up a complex one, that feeling entails the appearance of the accent in the verb of the first sentence.”

āna) which goes beyond the contrast between the present and past categories¹¹ and instead takes advantage of the opposition between dynamic and non-dynamic verbal expressions. We are thus advancing the hypothesis that these two perfect forms work as a sort of qualifying word, used as a predicate noun, with respect to the subject, i.e. the moon, which today is ‘the one which has died’ i.e. a “new” moon and yesterday was still a “waning” moon, namely ‘the one which breathed’. This is in line with what Renou (1925, p. 25) ascribed to the perfect indicative form, by defining it “une forme de représentation et non de description”. In other words, these two phrases with *mamāra* and (*sām*) *āna* seem to be equivalent to two nominal clauses, rather than describing a verbal action with all its perceived factual details.

Here we aim to reflect upon this assumed “nominal facies” of several Vedic perfect forms to try and show how this may even be of help in overcoming the problematic dichotomy between present and past time references for the perfect forms. We will first focus on some discussed ṚV examples before turning to the analysis of the occurrences of perfect forms in two allegedly archaic books of the *Atharvaveda* which will allow us to put our hypothesis to the test.

2. Rediscussing some ṚV examples with an alleged past time meaning

Let us try to tackle this problem by returning to what Dahl pointed out, especially (2010, pp. 344–347) in his reflection on cases of the perfect form that coexist with an imperfect or aorist form, such as in the following stanza. In his opinion the perfect form seems to be compatible with a past time reference rather than conveying a present tense (Dahl 2010, p. 349).

(b) ṚV 2.15.1

prā ghā nv āsya mahatō mahāni satyā satyāsya kāraṇāni vocam |
trīkadrukeṣv apibat sutāsyaśyā māde āhim indro jaghāna ||

¹¹ Moreover, it is evident that the pure verbal form in itself is not sufficient to express time, since the temporal opposition between the two clauses relies on the two adverbs of time.

I now announce the great deeds of the great one, the real deeds of the real one. He drank of the (soma) juice in the Trikadrukas¹². In his inebriation Indra smashed the snake.

Although the perfect indicative form *jaghāna* denotes a situation in the remote, mythical past and hence has more or less the same temporal reference as the coordinated imperfect form *apibat*, Dahl recognises that this does not mean that there are no other relevant differences between the two forms in such a context. He is also well aware of the fact that several other scholars consider that perfect and imperfect always convey a different discourse function¹³, even though, all too often, no alternative specific label is advanced for these examples of the perfect that coexist with imperfect and aorist, i.e. it seems that this diversity is stated almost apodictically.

Furthermore, on the basis of the fact that existential and universal quantified adverbs such as *sādā* ‘always’, *śāśvat* ‘continuously’ are used far more frequently to modify perfect indicative forms than imperfect or aorist indicative ones, several scholars have pointed out that the perfect indicative is the regular expression of habituality in the past in early Vedic¹⁴. Nonetheless, if we do not limit our analysis to a single sentence but consider the whole hymn in which this stanza appears, we realise that the perfect form *jaghāna* (*mimāya*, *tasthuh*, *pipeṣa*, *jaghantha*, *vivide*: stanzas 3, 5, 6, 9) is closely associated to a refrain repeated eight times as the last *pāda* of stanzas 2.15.2–9, which also resumes the action of smashing Vṛtra; namely:

(c) ṚV 2.15.2d=3d=4d=5d=6d=7d=8d=9d
sómasya tā máda índraś cakāra

In his inebriation due to Soma Indra realised these deeds.

It is tempting to consider this refrain with the perfect form *cakāra* and the similar antecedent with the perfect form *jaghāna* as something radically different from the enunciation of a dynamic action (with attention to all its perceived factual details). Rather, those verbal forms enunciate the sheer occurrence of that action that frames the character, labels

¹² i.e. in the three Soma vessels or among the Maruts, according to Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 422.

¹³ See e.g. Hoffmann 1967, p. 160; Kümmel 2000, p. 77.

¹⁴ See e.g. Renou 1925, p. 23; Kiparsky 1998, pp. 33–35.

him once and for all, and somehow “freezes” him in the role of Vṛtra’s slayer and in the image of the hero who accomplished this exploit. In our opinion this category of the frozen image of an action that qualifies the agent might also explain the coexistence of present forms with a perfect in the following stanza cited by Kümmel (2000, pp. 72–73) to show a special case of the present perfect when the preterite action is not completed, but is still ongoing in the present, namely the so-called “extended present”¹⁵:

(d) RV 2.28.4cd

nā śrāmyanti nā ví mucanty eté váyo nā paptū raghuyá párijman ||

These [streams] do not get tired nor do they stretch out, like birds they keep on flying swiftly all over the place¹⁶.

The notion of the continuous action of rivers is at the core of this hemistich according to Kümmel (2010, pp. 72–73). If we consider the whole stanza, we can nevertheless see a more complex pattern at play: in the previous hemistich Varuṇa is said to be the one who first emitted (*asṛ-jat*) waters and this action projected into a mythical past is expressed by an imperfect form. The first two verbal forms following the aorist are present indicative and are at variance with the final perfect indicative form *paptuḥ* which conveys a permanent feature of the rivers, envisioned as “flying birds”. Nevertheless, this feature is not established outside a temporal frame, it has a precise beginning when the water first sprang forth, mentioned by means of the imperfect form. The opposition between the perfect form and the two present indicative forms, which both convey the two durative actions, seems to depend on the fact that the latter are not built upon a fixed frame of simile.

This use of perfect as denoting a characterisation of the agent also recalls what Di Giovine (1990, p. 82 fn. 171) noted for the perfect in Greek and sometimes in Vedic (e.g. in four occurrences of *mimāya* in RV 1.164.41; 3.53.15; 3.55.13; 10.27.14 from the verb *mā-* ‘to bellow’) whereby the perfect conveyed a quality of the animal, i.e. ‘that which bellows’, rather than the description of the cow’s vocal action.

¹⁵ “Als eine Art Sonderfall des präsentischen Perfekts könnte man es bezeichnen, wenn die präteritale Handlung nicht abgeschlossen ist, sondern in der Gegenwart immer noch an-dauert. Es handelt sich dann um die ‘erweiterte Gegenwart’.”

¹⁶ Cf. transl. Kümmel 2000, p. 72: “Diese [Ströme] ermüden nicht noch spannen sie aus, wie Vögel fliegen sie [immer schon] schnell in ihrem Umlauf.”

3. The role of past in the characterisation of the agent: occurrences selected from ŚS 1 and 4

Let us now analyse a sample of ŚS occurrences, selected from the whole survey of Books 1 and 4 of the allegedly most ancient books¹⁷. These books were chosen merely because, within the context of our Project (mentioned above in fn. 1), their analysis and re-interpretation was assigned to our two research units. A table containing the whole list of occurrences with relevant classifications has been included. We will start by testing the hypothesis that in early-Vedic most occurrences of the perfect still retain a strong aspectual connotation characterised by a non-dynamic feature. This understanding of the action conveyed by perfect forms – not seen in its unfolding but simply in the fact that it has occurred – is the one that allowed us, for instance, to account for the uses of the imperfect and the perfect in (b) in the previous passages. Let us now analyse some telling examples.

In the following stanza the perfect form *tasthiṣe* whose understood subject is *ākṣyam*, i.e. the eye ointment mentioned in stanza 1, coexists with two phrases with the present *as-*.

(1) ŚS 4.9.2

paripāṇaṃ pūruṣāṇāṃ
paripāṇaṃ gāvāṃ asi |
āśvānāṃ ārvatāṃ
paripāṇāya tasthiṣe ||

You are an overall protection for men, you are an overall protection for cattle. You are the one who stands for the sake of an overall protection of horses and steeds.

We have translated it as “you are the one who stands” which means “the one who stood up and stands” for the sake of protection: as compared to the previous present copula, the perfect seems to refer to a kind of past solemn assignment (hinted at in the previous stanza where the gods are described as the givers of the medicine)

¹⁷ See Witzel 1997, p. 281: “Taking all of the preceding into account, it seems to be the case that ŚS 1–5, 8–12 = PS 1–15, 16–17 are the two older sections. They form the core of the Atharvaveda texts dealing with sorcery and speculation and can be dated ad quem with the introduction of iron (1200 B.C.). In fact, they agree in general with Mantra period language. However, AV 13–18 = PS 18, may be, – at least in part, – of a slightly later age, that of the later Saṃhitā period (TS), or even that of some early Brāhmaṇas such as the older parts of AB.”

at the origin of the current function¹⁸. While the present copula simply states the fact that the eye ointment is a form of protection, the perfect clause adds the information that it also offered protection in the past, that it was designated to do so. Thus, the phrase with the perfect seems to play the role of a qualifier for the understood subject and in this function it can easily alternate with a nominal clause, as if it were a nominal form rather than a verbal one. If we wish to stick to Kümmel's categories, we can frame this analysis of perfect as "non-resultative perfect", where the characteristic result in the present is replaced by a more "general relevance for the present". The perfect thus serves to emphasise a past action as currently important, so that it sometimes seems to be "used almost" solemnly (Kümmel 2000, p. 77; cf. Renou 1925, p. 41). For instance, in the following stanza, Agni's role is associated with three past actions conveyed by three perfect forms that constitute a label for the god and encapsulate his prestige forever in the present.

(2) ŚS 4.6.1

*brāhmaṇó jajñe prathamó
dāśaśīrṣo dāśāsyah |
sá sómaṇ prathamāḥ papau
sá cakārārasāṇ viśám ||*

The Brahman-knower – the ten-headed, ten-mouthed one – is the one who was born as first. He (the sacrificial Agni) is the one who first drank Soma, he is the one who made the poison sapless (= harmless) [for himself].

In the following three occurrences of the perfect indicative forms, the role of Vena seems to analogously be epitomized by them, while a couple of imperfect forms in the same passage are actually used to depict a dynamic verbal action.

(3) ŚS 4.1.3–4

*prá yó jajñé vidvān asya bándhur
viśvā devānāṇ jánimā vivakti |
bráhma bráhmana új jabhāra mādhyān
nīcāir uccāiḥ svadhā abhí prá tasthau ||*

¹⁸ ŚS 4.9.1: *ēhi jīvāṇ trāyamāṇaṇ pārvatasyāsy ākṣyam | viśvebhīr devāir dattāṇ paridhīr jīvanāya kām ||* 'Come here, defending life! You are the eye ointment coming from the mountain, given by all the gods as an enclosure just for life.'

*sá hí diváh sá prthivyā rtasthá
mahí kṣémanṇ ródasī áskabhāyat |
mahān mahí askabhāyad vi jātó
dyāṇ sādma pāṛthivaṇ ca rájaḥ ||*

The one who (= Bandhu = Vena) was born as knowing [it (= Brahman)], [he who is] the connection (= Vena) with this (= Brahman), recounts all the births of the gods; he [is the one who] carried Brahman up out of the middle of Brahman; he (= Vena) [is the one who] advanced downwards, upwards according to his intrinsic law. For he (= Vena) belonging to the heaven, (he) belonging to the earth, standing in the *ṛta*, upheld the two great worlds (namely earth and heaven), as his resting place. Once born (*jāta*) as great, he (= Vena) upheld the two great [worlds] separating [them], the heaven as [his] seat and the earthly space.

Sometimes the perfect form of *bhū-* is used as a midpoint between the dynamic verb and copula. In the following stanza a main clause with a second-person singular imperative verbal form *á vaha* is combined with a causal clause with a second-person singular perfect indicative form *babhúvitha*.

(4) ŚS 1.7.1
*stuvānám agna á vaha
yātudhānaṇ kimīdīnam |
tvám hí deva vanditó
hantá dásyor babhúvitha*

Bring the sorcerer Kimīdin here, (who will be) announcing himself then, O Agni, because you, O god, are one who has become the revered slayer of the foreigner.

Here the perfect is used to introduce a habitual and stable property characterising the subject, i.e. of god Agni, rather than to refer to a past event that happened prior to the reference time of the imperative in the main clause¹⁹. The action of slaying the foreigner may take place many times, but the title of slayer was obtained once and for all.

Nevertheless, this example differs from the previous one, because the verbal base *bhū-* simply accompanies the phrase which conveys the characterisation of the subject (*vanditó hantá dásyoḥ* ‘the revered slayer of the foreigner’), while the verbal form *tasthiṣe* alone conveys at least a portion of the final characterisation.

¹⁹ Cf. transl. Whitney 1905, p. 7: “thou hast become slayer of the barbarian”.

As regards the assumed meaning conveyed by the perfect forms here analysed, it is noteworthy that Renou (1925, pp. 24–25) considers the perfect tense as the verbal form that expresses the past in the most general and least specific way. The scholar maintains that the reason why a poet chooses the perfect form is that he is focusing on the present state resulting from the evocation of the past, in order to create a representation more than a description of the action performed by the eye ointment. Renou also emphasises the fact that such a structure is found with great frequency in the *Atharvaveda*²⁰.

The fifth stanza analysed here has been classified as a riddle. The whole stanza can be better understood if we start from the second-person plural imperative form *brūta* ‘say, respond!’.

(5) ŚS 4.11.5 ~ PS 3.25.4

yāsya nēse yajñāpatir nā yajñō
nāsya dātēse nā pratigrahītā
yō viśvajid viśvabhīd viśvākarmā
gharmāṇi no brūta yatamās cātuspāt ||

[If one says:] Neither the giver, nor the one who accepts is master of the one of whom neither the lord of sacrifice is master nor the sacrifice. Respond to us: “the hot drink” which is the one who conquers everything, bears everything, realizes everything, which is that which is quintessentially endowed with four feet.

In other words, the first hemistich may be read in the following manner: ‘If one asks you (pl.): “Who is the one of whom neither the giver nor the one who accepts is master”, you should answer: “the hot drink”’. The definition of *gharma*, i.e. the key for solving the riddle, uses two verbal clauses with the same perfect form (*īse*) and a nominal clause with three noun predicates alongside each other. The three segments that make up the definition list the qualities of the hot drink. There is no trace of a dynamic action in the perfect forms. Once again, the verbal form *īse* is equal to a nominal clause: ‘he is master of’.

²⁰ See Renou 1925, pp. 7; 24–25: “en un certain sens il s’agit donc d’une variante du présent, mais c’est un présent qui noterait le fait actuel en tant que résultante, non en tant que procès duratif, et qui porterait en lui de façon implicite le fait passé qui l’a provoqué.” ; “Le parfait est la forme qui exprime le passé de la façon la plus générale et la moins déterminée [...] Mais ce qui contribue à le fixer dans ces formules est que le poète dirige son attention sur l’état actuel qui résulte de l’évocation du passé : c’est une forme de représentation et non de description. [...] Ce type de phrase est surtout fréquent dans l’Atharvaveda.”

An analogous riddle structure is used in the renowned hymn ŚS 4.2 that in great part matches ṚV 10.12. The perfect forms are again used to define the characteristics of the god the devotees are looking for as the most suitable recipient of their devotion – see below (11) and (12).

Again, it is Renou who singled out a special structure involving the perfect which also appeared in several of the passages from the *Atharvaveda* texts we examined, including the just quoted stanza.

Un type de phrase fréquent, et dans lequel le parfait est à peu près constant, est celui où la proposition, introduite par un relatif neutre ou indéfini, par une conjonction *yadī*, *yāt*, *yāthā*, exprime un fait qui se situe dans le passé d’une façon indéterminée [...] il suffit que la proposition secondaire présente si peu que se soit le caractère d’indétermination pour que le parfait y apparaisse. [...] C’est dans ces formules des hymnes magiques, qui étaient vraisemblablement d’un type archaïque et traditionnel, que s’est conservé, en védique l’emploi du parfait le moins éloigné de l’usage primitif. [...] Le parfait se trouve 259 fois après le relatif (ou une forme issue du thème du relatif) dans l’*Atharvaveda*. (Renou 1925, p. 24)

The following simple charm is another good example of a perfect form introduced by a neuter relative pronoun working as a subordinating conjunction.

(6) ŚS 1.10.3 = PS 1.9.3

yād uvákthāṇṛtam

jihváyā vṛjināṇi bahú |

rājñas tvā satyádharmaṇo

muñcāmi vāruṇād ahám ||

If you have told a crooked lie many times with your tongue, I release you from the King, from Varuṇa, whose laws are true.

The first-person subject declares that he is able to release the interlocutor from the risk of being caught by Varuṇa who punishes liars and also clearly explains that no matter how many times the liar may have told lies, how or even exactly when he did so, he will in any case release him. It is noteworthy that the clause introduced by *yād* does not describe the action of lying as a process, but places it in a past characterised by indeterminacy, as if it were merely stating that the interlocutor is a liar.

In all the examples seen so far the perfect form expresses a relevant categorisation of the agent in the present time: the eye ointment in (1) is described in the present of the ritual action as characterised by the fact that it has been a means of protection since time immemorial, Agni in (2) is the first born, first drinker and so on; the person who is a liar in (6) asks for mercy from Varuṇa and so on. The past time is never expressed in the examples of this paragraph. It is instead implied in the derivation of the meaning of the characterising action itself²¹ which is presented as having a temporal dimension: in the already discussed examples Agni is not characterised (in the present) as drinking Soma, but as having been the first drinker of it.

4. Focusing on the verbal moods associated with perfect forms: the perfect epitomizing the conditions for the dynamic action

Our analysis of this structure with a relative pronoun has allowed us to single out a recursive association of moods and tenses involving the perfect in ŚS books 1 and 4. This led us to realise that clauses with a perfect form introduced by relative pronouns – often neuter forms used as subordinating conjunctions – are frequently followed by an imperative, injunctive or optative form. In fact, even though (3) is also a specific kind of text, namely a riddle, it actually contains this very structure.

(7) ŚS 4.7.7 = ŚS 5.6.2 = PS 6.11.2

ānāptā yé vaḥ prathamā

past participle (nominal clause)

yāni kármāṇi cakriré |

perfect

vīrān no átra mā dabhan

injunctive

tád va etát puró dadhe ||

present

For this very purpose I put this [= spell] forward: [namely] that now they – whichever excellent ones among you are unequalled²², whatever deeds were performed [by them] – may not harm our heroes!

²¹ Here we extend Kümmel's notation (2000, p. 70) on most nactostatives to the entire category of perfects. About nactostatives Kümmel noted that they are only in a derivative relation with the other tenses and modes of the same root ("die nur in derivativer Beziehung zu anderen Verbalstämmen der Wurzel stehen").

²² Lit. "who cannot be reached", thus peerless, unequalled.

The spell itself is preceded by two relative clauses where indeterminacy prevails: “whatever deeds are or were performed by them any-where and anytime”. This epitomizes the conditions at stake with reference to the wish expressed. It goes almost without saying that the action expressed by the perfect is not seen in its dynamic aspect as the indeterminacy itself suggests. Another interesting feature is that here the perfect is not used to characterise the agent but rather the object of the action.

Once again, in the following stanza, the imperative form alone conveys the action as a process.

(8) ŚS 1.28.3 = ŚS 4.17.3 ~ PS 5.23.3

<i>yā śaśāpa śāpanena</i>	perfect
<i>yāghām²³ mūram ādadhé </i>	perfect
<i>yā rāsasya hāraṇāya jātām</i>	
<i>ārebhé tokām attu sã </i>	perfect + imperative

The one (f.) who cursed with curses, who held wickedness for (her own) root, who took hold of a (new)born child for seizing the sap – let her eat her own offspring!

In our opinion, the indeterminacy of the three relative clauses is the crucial feature which justifies the use of the perfect instead of another past tense.

(9) ŚS 1.33.1 ~ PS 1.25.1

<i>hiraṇyavarṇāḥ śúcayaḥ pāvakā</i>	past participle (2 relative clauses)
<i>yāsu jātāḥ savitā yāsv agnīḥ </i>	
<i>yā agnīm gārbhaṁ dadhiré suvārṇās</i>	perfect (1 relative clause)
<i>tā na āpaḥ śām syonā bhavantu</i>	imperative

The gold-coloured, bright and purifying ones, in which Savitṛ was born, and in which Agni (was born), which (pl.) continue to carry Agni as an embryo, the well-coloured ones – let those waters become healing and cosy for us!

Here three qualifying words (*hiraṇyavarṇāḥ śúcayaḥ pāvakāḥ*) are used in parallel with a relative clause including a perfect form. All four of them together characterise the agent, i.e. the waters, and together make up the subordinate part of the stanza, whose main clause contains the imperative *bhavantu*.

²³ **yā vāghām* (Lubotsky 2002, p. 82).

The renowned riddle in ŚS 4.2 ends with a question conveyed by an optative form and this verbal form is the only one that denotes a real process, namely the action of paying homage to a god.

(10) ŚS 4.2.1

<i>yá ātmadā baladā yāsya víśva</i>	
<i>upāsate praśiṣaṃ yāsya devāḥ </i>	present indicative
<i>yò 'syése dvipádo yás cátuṣpadaḥ</i>	perfect
<i>kásmāi devāya haviṣā vidhema </i>	optative

To which god should we pay homage with the oblation? To the one who gives [his] life, who gives [his] strength? To the one whose precept everyone abides by, whose [precept] the gods [abide by]? To the one who is the master of the biped and the quadruped?

This stanza includes five relative clauses which define the potential god to whom the poet wonders whether he should pay homage. The perfect form *īse* is used in parallel with *upapadasamāsa* (*ātma-da-*, *ba-la-da-*) used as qualifiers in nominal clauses introduced by relative pronouns and even with a relative clause with a present indicative form (*upāsate*).

But the perfect seems to be such a strong instrument of nominalisation and subordination that it can also recur in contexts that lack an explicit relative and yet hint at a hierarchical relationship between the two main clauses. In the following stanza, taken from the same hymn ŚS 4.2, the pattern is very similar, even though there are no relative clauses.

(11) ŚS 4.2.7

<i>hiranyagarbhāḥ sám avartatāgre</i>	imperfect
<i>bhūtāsya jātāḥ pātir ēka āsīt </i>	past participle + imperfect
<i>sá dādhāra pṛthivīm utá dyāṃ</i>	perfect
<i>kásmāi devāya haviṣā vidhema </i>	optative

To which god should we pay homage with the oblation? In the beginning, [this god] developed as the golden embryo; after being born, he was the sole lord of creation. He is the one who holds Earth and Heaven firm.

The contrast between the two imperfect forms (*avartata* and *āsīt*) and the perfect form *dādhāra* is extremely interesting. The first of the former two in fact conveys a dynamic action carried out by the god whom the

poet identifies as the beneficiary of the planned homage, the second a well-determined function in progress, obtained by the god at a specific time, i.e. when he was born. The discontinuity of the third clause is not only marked by the perfect form which defines the god and assigns him a status ('He is the one who holds Earth and Heaven'), but also by the initial pronoun *sá*, which indicates a clear break.

The same pattern is repeated in the following two stanzas:

(12) ŚS 4.8.3

<i>ātīṣṭhantaṃ pári víśve abhūṣaṃ</i>	present participle + imperfect
<i>chriyaṃ vāsānaś carati svārociḥ </i>	present
<i>mahát tát vṛṣṇo ásurasya nāma-</i>	nominal clause
<i>á viśvárūpo amṛtāni tasthau </i>	perfect

All went around [him] who was standing close – to honour him; dressed in splendour, he moves around radiating his light; great is the name/the fame of that bull of a lord; dazzling with all colours he is one who stands close to immortal [worlds].

(13) ŚS 4.8.4

<i>vyāghró ádhi vaiyāghre</i>	
<i>ví kramasva díśo mahíḥ </i>	imperative
<i>viśas tvā sárva vāñchantv</i>	imperative
<i>ápo divyáḥ páyasvatíḥ </i>	

As a tiger on a tiger's skin, walk towards the great cardinal points: let all communities want you; [let] the divine waters rich in milk [want you]!

Stanza (12) lists a series of concrete details which allow the observers to select the right candidate for the Rājasūya. The perfect is only used in the last *pāda* where the definition of the chieftain candidate takes place, passing through the polyptoton *ātīṣṭhantaṃ ... á ... tasthau* which means that the one who is close to the community (*viś-*), who assists them, will then be close to the immortal world. This is a leader's prerogative and is how he manages to reach heaven. Stanza (13) with its two imperative forms signifies exactly which actions take place on the basis of the mentioned prerogative of their chieftain. The two imperatives express an invitation to the leader and the community respectively to act in a specific time and space.

Analogous examples are represented by (14) (15) and (16). In (14) we actually find a relative conjunction in the subordinate clause which

is however characterised by an imperfect form, while the perfect appears in one of the two main clauses.

(14) ŚS 1.25.1 = PS 1.32.1

<i>yád agnir āpo ādahat pravísya</i>	imperfect
<i>yátrākṛṇvan dharmadhṛto námāṃsi </i>	imperfect
<i>tátra ta āhuh paramāṃ janítram</i>	perfect
<i>sá naḥ saṃvidvān pári vṛṇgdhi takman </i>	perfect participle + imperative

Where the law keepers paid homage (lit. made bows) when Agni burned the waters after having entered them, there²⁴ – they say – is your ultimate birthplace. Thus, recognising us, You O Fever²⁵, spare us!

The two imperfect forms describe an action carried out at a precise time and in a precise place without any hint of indeterminacy. The perfect form *āhuh* on the other hand conveys an action which is repeated many times. Together with the perfect participle it constitutes a condition, a *de facto* state of affairs, as is clearly shown by the participle *saṃvidvān*. The action conveyed by the imperative form *vṛṇgdhi* is based on such a state of affairs.

(15) and (16) must be read together in order to fully appreciate the shift from the aorist and imperfect forms to the perfect immediately before the imperative:

(15) ŚS 4.14.1

<i>ajó hy āgnér ājaniṣṭa śókāt</i>	aorist
<i>só apaśyaj janitāram āgre </i>	imperfect
<i>téna devā devātām āgra āyan</i>	imperfect
<i>téna rōhān ruruhur médhyāsaḥ </i>	perfect

Indeed the billy-goat has been born from the heat of the fire, it saw in the beginning the one who begot himself. Through it in the beginning the gods came to god-like status. Through it, those fit for the sacrifice ascend the ascents.

²⁴ i.e. at that place and time, at that moment.

²⁵ This is our attempt to render the implicit anaphoric function of *sáh* that takes up *t[e]* [...] *paramāṃ janítram*. Although *tátra ta āhuh paramāṃ janítram* is formally a principal, its role is therefore subordinate to the imperative phrase.

(16) ŚS 4.14.2

krāmadhvam agnínā nākam
úkhyān hásteṣu bíbhṛataḥ
divás pr̥sthāṇi svàr gatvā
miśrá devébhīr ādhvam ||

imperative

Step towards the firmament through the fire, bearing in your hands
 those [fires] being in the pot; after coming to the back of the sky, [i.e.]
 the sun, sit mingled with the gods

In (15) we find a sigmatic aorist (*ájaniṣṭa*), referring to something that happens in the ritual context, and two forms of the imperfect, whose past time reference is well-defined due to the repeated adverb *ágre*, followed by a single form of the perfect. The latter signifies the prerogative of the wise man, i.e. of the virtuous sacrificer who – as a rule – has access to heaven, so that in the following stanza the imperative form is an invitation to actually do what he is allowed, i.e. to step toward the firmament. In (16) the imperative form *krāmadhvam* accomplishes the usual syntactic pattern we are focusing on here.

The shade of indeterminacy in examples (8), (9) and (10) is in fact quite common and has already been pointed out, e.g. by Renou (1925, p. 24). But, in actual fact, this is not the distinctive feature of the use of the perfect but rather a consequence of it being used to indicate the factual conditions for the development of the dynamic action often expressed in the imperative or in other non-indicative ways. Although rarer, in our data there is no lack of relative clauses with specific meaning. We have already seen a case of this in (3). In (17) the perfect indicative form is introduced by a relative pronoun and, as usual, the characteristic of the subject conveyed by the perfect constitutes the precondition that allows the action conveyed by the subsequent imperative to come about, but indeterminacy is not part of the passage. The relative pronoun refers to two individual gods, explicitly mentioned in the same stanza.

(17) ŚS 4.25.1

vāyóḥ savitúr vidáthāni manmahe
yāv ātmanvād viśátho yáu ca rákṣathaḥ |
yáu víśvasya paribhū babhūvāthus
táu no muñcatam āṇhasaḥ ||

present

present + present

perfect

imperative

Of Vāyu, of Savitar we are honouring the assemblies: you two who enter and who defend what is endowed with *ātman*; you two who

have become the ones who encompass the all — do you free us from anguish!

In the analogous structure in (18), the relative pronoun clearly refers to the powerful rice mess called *brahmaudanā*.

(18) ŚS 4.35.3

<i>yó dādhāra pr̥thivīm viśvābhōjasam</i>	perfect
<i>yó antāriṣam āpr̥ṇād rāsena </i>	imperfect
<i>yó āstabhnād divam ūrdhvó mahimnā</i>	imperfect
<i>tēnaudanēnāti tarāṇi mṛtyúm </i>	subjunctive

That which sustained (and sustains) the all-nourishing earth; which filled the atmosphere with sap; which, uplifted, established the sky with might – by that rice mess let me overcome death.

(19) is extremely illustrative since it has three relative clauses, all containing the third-person plural perfect form *cakrúḥ*, which precede a main clause with an imperative form of a transitive verb whose patient is denoted by a plural noun, namely an *upapadasamāsa*-, whose right-hand constituent is a root-noun derived from the same verbal base (*kṛtyākṛt*-). In other words, this noun in the main clause seems to be equivalent to the relative subordinate clause with the perfect form.

(19) ŚS 4.17.4 ~ PS 5.23.6²⁶

<i>yāñ te cakrúr āmé pātre</i>	perfect
<i>yāñ cakrúr nīlālohitē </i>	perfect
<i>āmé māñsé kṛtyāñ yāñ cakrús</i>	perfect
<i>táyā kṛtyākṛto jahi </i>	imperative

By means of that which they made for you on an unripe vessel by means of that which they made on that which is red and blue, by means of that witchcraft they performed on the unripe flesh, kill the witchcraft-makers!

Finally, let us draw attention to the following example where the usual relative clause with a perfect form followed by an injunction does not

²⁶ In the PS parallel there are only two and not three relative clauses with the third-person plural perfect form of *kṛ*-.

refer either to the agent or to the patient, but merely to an instrument that will allow the agents to carry out the action of reaching heaven.

(20) ŚS 4.11.6

<i>yéna devāḥ svār āruruhúr</i>	perfect
<i>hitvā śārīram amṛtasya nābhim </i>	
<i>téna geṣma sukṛtasya lokām</i>	injunctive
<i>gharmāsya vraténa tāpasā yaśasyāvah </i>	

May we – who are desiring glory – go to the world of merit by means of that by whose means the gods, after quitting their body, ascended to the sun, to the navel of non-death, i.e. by means of austerities, by means of the observance of the hot drink!

The perfect form *āruruhúr* contributes to defining the means by which the agent of the injunctive verbal form, i.e. the first-person plural *geṣma* carries out the action of reaching heaven.

5. Different degrees of lexicalization

Our analysis of the meaning conveyed by the occurrences of the perfect indicative in Books 1 and 4 of the ŚS also led us to realise that these 107 forms show a line of continuum from the unquestionably lexicalised usages of the perfect up to the less lexicalised ones, a continuum based on the relevance of the past action conveyed by the etymon in the construction of the meaning output of the perfect form. We came up with three main categories on the basis of these premises:

- A Derived perfects: when the action of the etymon does not correspond to the action conveyed by the perfect.
e.g. ŚS 4.11.5: *yāsya nése yajñāpatir ná yajñó* '[of the one] of whom neither the lord of sacrifice is master nor the sacrifice'.
- B Altered perfects: The action in the etymon is modified (mostly from dynamic to stative/ copula) in comparison with the action expressed by the perfect.
e.g. ŚS 1.7.6: *asmākārthāya jajñiṣe* 'you were born for our business'²⁷.

²⁷ This seems to be a mirror-image process to that highlighted by Lazzeroni (2016, p. 18) in his reflection on the use of modes in the perfect when he points out that a stative construct can take on an ingressive (i.e. dynamic) value when declined according to non-indicative modes (among which subjunctive with future value): "*Tizio è vecchio* designa uno stato permanente, *a poco a poco anche Tizio sarà vecchio*, se il futuro non ha valore anticipatorio (v. sopra), ha valenza ingressiva: essere = divenire."

- C Simple perfects. The action of the etymon is the same as the action expressed by the perfect.

e.g. ŚS 1.28.3: *yā śaśāpa śāpanena* 'she who has cursed with a curse'.

This is definitely a fresh perspective on the perfect indicative forms and we are persuaded that this classification can actually help us in accounting for the specific semantic content of the perfect form versus the present. Our three categories largely match Kümmel's categories, namely A matches his *lexikalisierte Perfektopräsens*; *naktostatische Perfekt*, B, the *naktostatische Perfekt* and *Resultativperfekt*, and C, the *Perfekt der erweiterten Gegenwart*; *comprehensive Perfekt* and *nichtresultative Perfekt*. However, our categories also make it possible to account for these different shades of meaning using a single criterium, namely that of the role of the past in constructing the verbal meaning in the perfect tense.

The following table also summarises two other important distinctive features in the occurrences analysed. First of all, we recorded the syntactic role played by clauses that contained the perfect forms, that is whether they were main or subordinate clauses introduced by relative pronouns or subordinating conjunctions derived from them, also including cases where the value of the relative items is that of indefinite relative pronouns. We also singled out the main clauses that play a role comparable to that of subordinate clauses due to the semantic and logic function they convey with respect to another contiguous clause. Finally, we reconstructed the immediate verbal context in such a way as to show not only the numerical relevance of the interplay of the perfect forms with the present and nominal forms of the verb but also the relevance of its position in the vicinity of a non-indicative mode (49 times)²⁸.

LEGENDA

M = Main clause

sub M = Main clause with an almost subordinate function

R = Perfect introduced by a relative pronoun (/conjunction)

RI = Perfect introduced by a relative pronoun with a relative indefinite value + indeterminacy

A = Derived perfects

B = Altered perfects

C = Simple perfects

²⁸ Both features are amply discussed in § 4.

Nr.	Occurrence	Time/mode context	Syntax	Lexicalization of the past
1	1.2.1 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + perfect +	sub M	A
2	1.2.1 <i>vid-</i>	imperative.	sub M	A
3	1.3.1 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + subjunctive + imperative.	sub M	A
4	1.3.2 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + subjunctive + imperative.	sub M	A
5	1.3.3 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + subjunctive + imperative.	sub M	A
6	1.3.4 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + subjunctive + imperative.	sub M	A
7	1.3.5 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + subjunctive + imperative.	sub M	A
8	1.7.1 <i>bhū-</i>	imperative + perfect.	sub M	B/C
9	1.7.6 <i>jan-</i>	imperative + perfect + imperative.	sub M	B/C
10	1.8.4 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + imperative.	RI	A
11	1.10.3 <i>vac-</i>	perfect + present.	RI	C
12	1.12.1 <i>vi-kram-</i>	subjunctive + perfect.	R	C
13	1.12.3 <i>ā-viś-</i>	imperative + perfect + imperative.	R	B
14	1.13.3 <i>vid-</i>	imperative + present + perfect + present.	M	A
15	1.16.2 <i>adhy-āh</i>	perfect + present.	M	A/C
16	1.16.3 <i>sah-</i>	present + present + perfect.	M	A/B
17	1.24.1 <i>as-</i>	nominal clause + perfect +	M	C
18	1.24.1 <i>kṛ-</i>	perfect + perfect + aorist +	M	C
19	1.24.2 <i>kṛ-</i>	aorist.	M	C
20	1.25.1 <i>āh-</i>	imperfect + imperfect + perfect + imperative.	M	A
21	1.27.3 <i>dhṛṣ-</i>	aorist + perfect + nominal clause.	sub M	C
22	1.28.3 <i>śap-</i>	perfect + perfect + perfect	RI	C
23	1.28.3 <i>dā</i>	+imperative.	RI	C
24	1.28.3 <i>ārambh-</i>		RI	C
25	1.29.1 <i>abhi-vṛdh-</i>	perfect + imperative + aorist.	R	C
26	1.32.2 <i>vid-</i>	perfect.	M	A
27	1.33.1 <i>dhṛ-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + imperative.	R	B/C
28	1.33.2 <i>dhṛ-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + imperative.	R	B/C
29	1.33.3 <i>dhṛ-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + imperative.	R	B/C

30	ŚS 4.1.3 <i>jan-</i>	perfect + present + perfect +	R	B
31	ŚS 4.1.3 <i>ud-bhṛ-</i>	perfect.	sub M	C
32	ŚS 4.1.3 <i>sthā-</i>		sub M	C
33	ŚS 4.1.6 <i>jan-</i>	present + perfect + present.	M	B
34	ŚS 4.2.1 <i>īś-</i>	nominal clause + present + perfect + optative.	RI	A
35	ŚS 4.2.2 <i>bhū-</i>	perfect + optative.	RI	C
36	ŚS 4.2.5 <i>ah-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + optative.	RI	A
37	ŚS 4.2.7 <i>dhṛ-</i>	imperfect + imperfect + perfect + optative.	M	C
38	ŚS 4.6.1 <i>jan-</i>	perfect + perfect+perfect.	M	B
39	ŚS 4.6.1 <i>pā-</i> (<i>pibati</i>)		M	C
40	ŚS 4.6.1 <i>kṛ-</i>		M	C
41	ŚS 4.6.2 <i>vi-sthā-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + aorist.	RI	B
42	ŚS 4.7.7 <i>kṛ-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + injunctive + present.	RI	C
43	ŚS 4.8.1 <i>bhū-</i>	present + perfect + present + imperative.	M	B/C
43	ŚS 4.8.3 <i>sthā-</i>	imperfect + present + nominal clause + perfect.	M	C
45	ŚS 4.9.2 <i>sthā-</i>	present + perfect.	M	C
46	ŚS 4.9.3 <i>vid-</i>	present + perfect + present.	M	A
47	ŚS 4.10.2 <i>adhi-jan-</i>	perfect + present.	R	C
48	ŚS 4.10.6 <i>adhi-jan-</i>	present + perfect + present + injunctive.	M	C
49	ŚS 4.10.7 <i>bhū</i>	perfect + present + present + imperative.	M	B
50	ŚS 4.11.1 <i>dhṛ-</i>	perfect + perfect + perfect +	M	B/C
51	ŚS 4.11.1 <i>dhṛ-</i>	perfect.	M	B/C
52	ŚS 4.11.1 <i>dhṛ-</i>		M	B/C
53	ŚS 4.11.1 <i>ā-viś-</i>		M	B
54	ŚS 4.11.5 <i>īś-</i>	perfect + perfect + nominal	R	A
55	ŚS 4.11.5 <i>īś-</i>	clause + imperative.	M	A
56	ŚS 4.11.6 <i>ruh-</i>	perfect + injunctive.	R	B/C
57	ŚS 4.11.9 <i>vid-</i>	perfect + present + perfect.	R	A
58	ŚS 4.11.9 <i>vid-</i>		M	A
59	ŚS 4.11.11 <i>ah-</i>	perfect + perfect + nominal	M	A
60	ŚS 4.11.11 <i>upa-vid-</i>	clause.	R	C
61	ŚS 4.11.12 <i>vid-</i>	present + present + present + present + perfect.	M	A
62	ŚS 4.12.7 <i>saṃ-śṛ-</i>	perfect + perfect +	RI	C
63	ŚS 4.12.7 <i>han-</i>	subjunctive.	RI	C

64	ŚS 4.14.1 <i>ruh-</i>	aorist + imperfect + imperfect + perfect.	M	B/C
65	ŚS 4.14.4 <i>vi-tan-</i>	present + present + perfect.	R	C
66	ŚS 4.15.10 <i>bhū</i>	perfect + imperative.	R	B
67	ŚS 4.16 1 <i>vid-</i>	present + present + perfect.	M	A
68	ŚS 4.16 2 <i>vid-</i>	present + present + present + perfect + perfect.	M	A
69	ŚS 4.17.1 <i>kṛ-</i>	present + perfect.	sub M	C
70	ŚS 4.17.3 <i>śap-</i>	perfect + perfect + perfect +	RI	C
71	ŚS 4.17.3 <i>ā-dhā-</i>	imperative.	RI	C
72	ŚS 4.17.3 <i>ā-rambh-</i>		RI	C
73	ŚS 4.17.4 <i>kṛ-</i>	perfect + perfect + perfect +	RI	C
74	ŚS 4.17.4 <i>kṛ-</i>	imperative.	RI	C
75	ŚS 4.17.4 <i>kṛ-</i>		RI	C
76	ŚS 4.18.5 <i>kṛ-</i>	aorist + perfect.	RI	C
77	ŚS 4.18.6 <i>kṛ-</i>	perfect+ perfect + perfect +	RI	C
78	ŚS 4.18.6 <i>śak-</i>	perfect.	RI	C
79	ŚS 4.18.6 <i>śṛ-</i>		RI	C
80	ŚS 4.18.6 <i>kṛ-</i>		RI	C
81	ŚS 4.19.7 <i>saṃ-bhū-</i>	perfect + imperative.	M	B
82	ŚS 4.20.3 <i>ā-ruh-</i>	present + perfect.	sub M	B/C
83	ŚS 4.23.5 <i>ji-</i>	imperfect (causative) + imperfect + perfect + imperative.	R	C
84	ŚS 4.24.2 <i>ā-ruj-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + nominal clause + imperative.	R	C
85	ŚS 4.24.5 <i>śri-</i>	present + present + perfect + imperative.	R	C
86	ŚS 4.24.6 <i>jan-</i>	perfect + past participle + past participle + aorist + imperative.	R	B
87	ŚS 4.25.1 <i>bhū-</i>	present + present + present + perfect + imperative.	R	B
88	ŚS 4.25.2 <i>anv-aś-</i>	nominal clause + past participle + perfect + imperative.	R I	C
89	ŚS 4.27.6 <i>ṛch-</i>	perfect + present + imperative.	R	B
90	ŚS 4.28.4 <i>ā-rabh-</i>	perfect + aorist + perfect +	R	C
91	ŚS 4.28.4 <i>īś-</i>	imperative.	R	A
92	ŚS 4.30.5 <i>ā-viś-</i>	present + present + perfect.	sub M	C
93	ŚS 4.30.8 <i>sāmbhū-</i>	present + perfect.	M	B
94	ŚS 4.31.3 <i>ā ruh-</i>	imperative + imperative + perfect + subjunctive.	M	C

95	ŚS 4.31.5 <i>vid-</i>	imperative + present +	M	A
96	ŚS 4.31.5 <i>ābhū-</i>	perfect + perfect.	R	C
97	ŚS 4.32.2 <i>as-</i>	perfect (copula in nominal clause) + present + imperative.	sub M	C
98	ŚS 4.32.5 <i>hīḍ-</i>	present + perfect + imperative.	M	C
99	ŚS 4.34.5 <i>ā-viś-</i>	nominal clause + perfect + present + imperative + imperative.	M	C
100	ŚS 4.35.2 <i>pac-</i>	imperfect + imperfect + perfect + subjunctive.	R	C
101	ŚS 4.35.3 <i>dhṛ-</i>	perfect + imperfect + imperfect + subjunctive.	R	C
102	ŚS 4.35.4 <i>āp-</i>	nominal clause + nominal clause + perfect + subjunctive.	R	C
103	ŚS 4.35.5 <i>bhū-</i>	perfect + present + nominal clause + subjunctive.	R	B
104	ŚS 4.35.6 <i>sam-bhū-</i>	perfect + perfect + nominal	R	C
105	ŚS 4.35.6 <i>bhū-</i>	clause + subjunctive.		B
106	ŚS 4.37.1–2 <i>han-</i>	perfect + perfect +	sub M	C
107	ŚS 4.37.1–2 <i>jhan-</i>	imperative.	sub M	C

All in all, 54 perfect indicative forms are included in a main clause and 52 in a relative subordinate clause (24 of which are characterised by the indeterminacy commonly conveyed by a clause introduced by an indefinite-relative pronoun). However, it is also true to say that 18 of the 54 main clauses play a subordinating role in the terms explained above. The verbal forms we have labelled as “simple perfects” are prevalent, with 54 occurrences, 14 are “altered perfects”; these two categories involve a wide range of different verbal bases, while there are 24 occurrences of “derived perfects”, whose verbal bases are exclusively *vid-*, *ah-*, *iś-*. It is not always easy to decide whether an occurrence belongs to category B or category C since it may be hard to establish the basic synchronic meaning (beyond the etymological meaning), which would allow us to confidently draw a boundary with the meaning assumed to be altered in the form of perfect.

Therefore, the unique alteration of meaning conveyed by the perfect with respect to the primary meaning of the base is that resulting from its nominalising effect on verbal expressions. The sole shared

point we can single out in the ŚS 1 and 4 usages of the perfect tense (instead of the present or other past tenses) seems to be the non-dynamic trait of the verb which accounts for the role it plays at the time of utterance as a feature of one of the actants.

6. The evidence in Pāṇini's and Vedic data

In the second part of this paper we will concentrate on Pāṇini's work to see whether it can help us in better understanding the meaning and function of the perfect. The relationship between Pāṇini and the Vedic texts has long been a topic of controversial debate and goes beyond the scope of this paper²⁹. We are nevertheless convinced that, with due diligence, Pāṇini provides valuable evidence for the interpretation of Vedic linguistic data provided that we move beyond an approach that limits itself to checking which textual layer (and closed set of texts) best responds to Pāṇinian rules. From Deshpande 1985 onwards, it has generally been accepted that the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* was intended to account for a specific linguistic repertoire as a whole: this repertoire (strongly influenced by the religious and ritual dimension in which the author was immersed) included both forms with archaic or archaizing features, typical of the *Samhitās* (and marked by domain delimitations of use such as *chandasi*), and features contemporary to the author which are described by all the rules not specifically restricted to a certain domain. In any case, the language described by the grammar is on the whole a late-Vedic language³⁰; with the exception of anything that is marked as archaic and applied to a restricted domain, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is a grammar accounting for a productive competence and specifically for the linguistic competence required to perform the activity of being an officiant, with what follows: selecting, memorising, and possibly adapting Vedic texts to several ritual contexts. The next part of our paper will concentrate on the most general rule concerning the perfect, leaving the occurrences strictly restricted to the domain of *chandas* for future study.

²⁹ For an incomplete but updated overview of the bibliography see Candotti, Pontillo 2022, § 1.1.

³⁰ It is well known that, for example, aorist forms and accentuation are taught without domain limitation.

7. The perfect as a preterite category in Pāṇini

As is well known, the general structure governing the description of preterite tenses in Pāṇini (excluding some purely Vedic facts which we will discuss in a forthcoming publication) is based on three main semantic traits. Most formations (verbal and non-verbal) with preterite value are taught in the sense of the past tense with no further specification:

A 3.2.84: *bhūte* ‘When a past time is to be conveyed.’

The teaching of the aorist tense also falls under the same constraint:

A 3.2.110: [*bhūte*] *luṇ* ‘When a past time is to be conveyed the LUN̐ (aorist) endings occur.’³¹

The imperfect and perfect are instead taught as semantic subsets created by either one (for the former) or two (for the latter) specific semantic conditions:

A 3.2.111: [*bhūte*] *anadyatane laṇ* ‘When a past time not reaching the present day is to be conveyed, LAN̐ (imperfect) endings occur.’³²

A 3.2.115 [*bhūte*] [*anadyatane*] *parokṣe liṭ* ‘When a past time not reaching the present day which is out of perception is to be conveyed, LIṬ / perfect endings occur.’³³

As far as the general structure is concerned, we can therefore say that Pāṇini clearly places the perfect within the preterite category, more specifically in that of preterites that have no relation to the present tense. Moreover, he also identifies it with the specification *parokṣe* lit. ‘out of perception’, a term to which we will return below (§ 7). Within

³¹ The specific aorist-bases are constructed upon this abstract frame by affixation in the group of rules beginning with A 3.1.43 [*dhātōḥ*] *cli luṇi* ‘After any verbal base and before LUN̐ (aorist) endings, the affix CLI occurs.’ → *asīcat*. CLI is a cover term for all the affixes forming aorist stems.

³² Since no specific stem-formation affixes are taught before imperfect affixes, the default present affixes apply.

³³ The reduplication is accounted for by A 6.1.8: [*ekāco dve prathamasya* 6.1.1] [*ajāder dvitīyasya* 6.1.2] *liṭi dhātor anabhyāsasya* ‘After any verbal base without a reduplication syllable and before LIṬ (perfect) endings, two syllables come in the place of the first syllable of a monosyllabic verbal base or in the place of the second syllable of a verbal base beginning with a vowel.’

a purely semantic perspective, rather than opposing the aorist, the perfect is thus constructed in comparison with the imperfect. This interpretation makes the domains of the imperfect and the perfect mutually exclusive sets: the aorist therefore does not apply in the domain of application of either the imperfect or the perfect and similarly the imperfect does not apply in the domain of application of the perfect. These rules have traditionally been interpreted against the background of the relationship between a general rule and a specific rule, which then found a concise description in Joshi, Kiparsky (2005) who postulated an implicit meta-rule favouring the maximisation of interactions between rules, stating that if a rule can bleed or feed another rule it will³⁴. Nevertheless, precisely while analysing the reciprocal interactions between the three aforementioned rules, Kiparsky (2009, p. 38) actually notes that the determination of whether the general rule is blocked by the specific rules in the case at hand is a “thorny” question. While he gives no reason for this difficulty, he goes on to state that “[a]ccording to the normal principles of interpretation of Pāṇini’s grammar, the competition between three incompatible morphological elements should induce blocking. The perfect should block the imperfect, and the imperfect in turn should block the aorist”, and adds that “[s]everal specific formulations of Pāṇini’s rules also presuppose such a blocking relation”³⁵. In fact, what at first sight seems a sharp and clear picture is complicated by the presence of a meta-rule that allows the optional application of conflicting rules specifically in the case of primary affixation. The different subsets of abstract endings are in fact taught under the provision of metarule A 3.1.94 *vā ’sarūpo ’striyām* which states that the affixes under this heading apply optionally (i.e. alternate with the affixes taught in a general way) provided that they do not have the same form and that they are not affixes for deriving feminine stems³⁶. This would imply

³⁴ Joshi, Kiparsky 2005, p. 4: “The way to maximize *siddha* relations is to apply rules in whatever order yields a result that is different from the result of applying them simultaneously. In other words, rules apply in that order in which they interact as much as possible (which maximizes feeding and bleeding).”

³⁵ Rules with the co-ordinative particle *ca*, for example, as in A 3.2.116 *haśāśvator lañ ca* ‘in co-occurrence with the particles *ha* and *śāśvat* also LAN (imperfect) endings occur [in the meaning of a general past]’, show that a specific tool is necessary in order to grant the optional application of two rules (in the example, of the rules teaching aorist and imperfect endings) since the blocking would otherwise apply.

³⁶ Kiparsky 1979, p. 27: “The rule stipulates that special rules (*apavādas*) between 3.1.94

that the different subsets of preterite endings (imperfect aorist and perfect) were optional, i.e. that in addition to the perfect forms, the aorist and imperfect forms were also in use in the *parokṣe* semantic domain, while, in the *anadyatane* domain, the aorist could be used alongside the forms of the imperfect. This is undoubtedly an unwanted outcome and Kātyāyana already proposed that the application of A 3.1.94 is prohibited in the case of the substitutes of abstract subsets of verb endings.

M II p. 79 l. 26 vt. 6 *ad* A 3.1.94

prayoge cel lādeṣeṣu pratiṣedhaḥ [6]

If the criterion lies in the usage then it is necessary to teach a prohibition in the case of substitutes for the abstract forms in LA.

And Patañjali (M II p. 79 l. 26 – p. 80 l. 2 *ad* A 3.1.94 vt. 6) comments on this Vārttika as follows:

prayoge cel lādeṣeṣu pratiṣedho vaktavyaḥ. hyo 'pacad ity atra luṇ api prāpnoti. śvaḥ paktety atra lṛḍ api prāpnoti. naiṣa doṣaḥ. ācāryapraṇvṛttir jñāpayati na lādeṣeṣu vāsarūpo bhavātīti yad ayam haśaśvator laṇ ca ity āha.

If the criterion lies in (the idioms of) usage, then it is necessary to teach a prohibition in the case of substitutes for the abstract forms in LA. In the phrase *hyo 'pacat* 'yesterday he cooked (imperfect)' the LUN (aorist) could also be used³⁷; in the phrase *śvaḥ paktā* 'tomorrow he will cook' (periphrastic future) the simple future (LRṬ)³⁸ could also be used. There is no such defect; an act of the teacher makes it clear that in the case of the substitutes of the abstract forms in LA there is no optionality for the desinences having a different form and it is the fact that he says *haśaśvator laṇ ca* (A 3.2.116)³⁹.

and 3.4.117 are all optional, and specifically, all constitute preferred options (*vā*). That is, they do not block the general rules obligatorily but as it were preferentially: the general rules can be applied instead, although the special rules are preferred."

³⁷ The various tense-endings, substitutes of LA, are supposed to be different in actual usage since they come from distinct subtypes of LA. The aorist, taught by A 3.2.110 in the meaning of generic past, as already mentioned, could also be used in the specific meaning of a past that does not reach the present which is specifically (and preferably) taught for the imperfect in A 3.2.111.

³⁸ The rules involved are A 3.3.13: *lṛt śeṣe ca* 'LRṬ (future) endings occur in the sense of future when co-occurring with an action having as an aim another action and in the remaining cases,' and A 3.3.15: [*bhaviṣyati*] *anadyatane luṭ* 'LUṬ (periphrastic future) occurs in the meaning of a future action not extending to the present day.'

³⁹ Example discussed in footnote 35.

On the other hand, we consider that while it is true that the semantics of the three tenses is constructed with a increasing set of constraints, this does not entail that the three mentioned main rules are in a relationship of the general/specific kind. In fact, *bhūte* A 3.2.110), *bhūte anadyatane* (A 3.2.111), and *bhūte anadyatane parokṣe* (A 3.2.115) are three completely different meaning constraints which the speaker is supposed to take into account in selecting the desired tense affix without any possible overlapping.

This leads us to delineate the preterite system described by Pāṇini as already being constructed upon time constraints and characterised by a fundamental division between the generic past (aorist) and the non-actual past (imperfect and perfect), the latter further distinguished according to whether the action is *parokṣa* or not⁴⁰. Pāṇini does account for present or atemporal usages of the perfect but only in restricted domains. We will concentrate on these very general rules, while an analysis of the restricted rules will be dealt with in a future paper.

8. What is *parokṣa*? Patañjali establishes the traditional interpretation

The restriction *parokṣe* lit. ‘out of perception’ is thus crucial for understanding the productive dimension of the perfect. Since the term is very rarely used by Pāṇini, we are forced to interpret it also in the light of its possible technical usages in contemporary late-Vedic literature.

The traditional interpretation of the term (which finds partial support in several commentaries) considers that the locative limits its application to those cases of the non-hodiernal past in which the speaker has not directly witnessed the events he or she is narrating. This interpretation is commonly found in most well-known translations and studies of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*:

Böhtling 1887: “[...] Handlung, bei der man nicht zugegen war”.

Vasu 1891: “[...] unperceived by the narrator”.

⁴⁰ This description may well suit some stage of the preterital system – see, e.g. Dahl 2010, pp. 264 and ff. – but it is rather problematic for the later Vedic layers. See Kiparsky 2009, p. 38: “In post-Pāṇinian usage, the aorist can refer to any past event, whereas the imperfect and perfect are restricted as described above. Apparently, linguistic change has undone the original blocking relationship.”

Renou 1966: “([...] pur exprimer qqch) hors de la vue (du sujet parlant)”.

Katre 1987: “beyond the perception of the speaker”.

This interpretation of the rule has also had a considerable effect on the interpretation of linguistic facts concerning the perfect. The most striking example is Renou, who dedicates an entire short chapter of his volume on the perfect to *Le parfait et l'expérience personnelle*. He begins by stating that in the most ancient Vedic literature,

Une distinction entre l'imparfait et l'aoriste, d'une part, et le parfait, de l'autre, [...] est que cette dernière forme est évitée là où l'on attend une première personne au cours d'une narration passée. (Renou 1925, p. 82)

Nevertheless, there are already several traces in the commentaries indicating that the term *parokṣa* was considered problematic for a number of reasons. In the wake of Kātyāyana's *vārttikas*, after discussing the phonic form of the term, Patañjali reflects on what is qualified as being beyond perception and in particular he considers four possible candidates: tense (*kāla*), verbal base (*dhātu*), the meaning of the verbal base (*dhātvartha*) or actants (*sādhana*). The first of these is discarded since it cannot descend by *anuvṛtti*. The second (which obviously descends from A 3.1.81) is likewise discarded because the opposition *pratyakṣa* vs. *parokṣa* is not relevant as regards the form of the words⁴¹. At this point Patañjali proposes a secondary meaning for the term *dhātu*, i.e. “meaning of the verbal base” i.e. the *kriyā* action.

M II p. 120 l. 7–10 ad A 3.2.115

śabde 'sambhavād arthe kāryaṃ vijñāsyate. parokṣe dhātau dhātvartha iti. kaḥ punar dhātvarthaḥ. kriyā. kriyāyāṃ parokṣāyām. yady evaṃ hyo 'pacad ity atrāpi liṭ prāpnoti. kiṃ kāraṇam | kriyā nāmeyam atyantāparidṛṣṭānumānā-gamyāśakyā piṇḍībhūtā nidarśayituṃ yathā garbho nirluṭhitaḥ.

Since [if *dhātu*] means a linguistic form, [the operation] is impossible, the operation must be understood considering that [*dhātu*] means a linguistic meaning: when a verbal base is beyond perception, i.e. when the meaning of a verbal base is beyond perception. And what is the meaning of a verbal base? Action. When an action is beyond perception. If this is so, then also in the sentence “Yesterday he cooked (imperfect)”

⁴¹ M II p. 120 l. 6–7 ad A 3.2.115: *dhātur vai śabdo na ca śabdasya pratyakṣaparokṣatāyāṃ sambhavo 'sti.*

one uses perfect endings. Why? What is called action is something which cannot absolutely be seen/perceived but must be inferred: it cannot be revealed once it obtains a material body as if it were an embryo which has been discarded⁴².

Patañjali thus rejects the possibility of reading *parokṣa* as a feature of the action, on the basis that an action can never be grasped as an action by direct perception precisely because it does not have the status of a material object. This is far from being an idle remark, made just for the sake of the argument, seeing that it is also asserted in almost the same words in the lengthy commentary on the term *dhātu* (A 1.3.1)⁴³. Overall, the whole argument we are discussing here is developed much more in depth under the above-mentioned *sūtra*⁴⁴. Now, the point is that, if an action is intrinsically beyond perception, its absence is not a useful feature to account for the specific usage of the perfect.

This leads us to the last possibility, namely that it is the actants⁴⁵ – provided that they are understood as material and perceivable entities – who must be out of perception in order to justify the usage of the perfect.

M II p. 120 l. 10–12 *ad* A 3.2.115

evaṃ tarhi sādhanēṣu parokṣeṣu. sādhanēṣu ca bhavataḥ kaḥ sampratyayaḥ. yadi tāvad guṇasamudāyaḥ sādhanam sādhanam api anumānagamyam | athānyat guṇebhyaḥ sādhanam bhavati pratyakṣaparokṣatāyāṃ sambhavaḥ.

If it is so, then [let us interpret] “when the actants are beyond perception”. What do you mean by “actant”? If an actant is a cluster of qualities, then the actant must also be inferred. Then the actant is something

⁴² A variant reading *yathā garbho 'nirluṭhitaḥ* has been suggested already by Kaiyaṭa. The meaning would be that an action is never perceptible exactly as an embryo not yet released from the womb. See Ogawa 2005, p. 104 fn. 6 and Cardona 1991, p. 453 fn. 47.

⁴³ M I p. 254 l. 15–16 *ad* A 1.3.1 vt. 2 *kriyā nāmeyam atyantāparidṛṣṭā. aśakyā kriyā piṇḍībhūtā nīdarśayitum yathā garbho nirluṭhitaḥ. sā asāv anumānagamyā.*

⁴⁴ See Ogawa's (2005) dense monography on this topic.

⁴⁵ The actants are considered such a crucial element in the definition of an action that in the above-mentioned commentary on A 1.3.1 Patañjali names them as a means to infer an action from a substance: see M I p. 254 l. 17–18 *ad* A 1.3.1: *iha sarveṣu sādhanēṣu saṃnihiteṣu kadācit pacatīty etad bhavati kadācin na bhavati. yasmin saṃnihite pacatīty etad bhavati sā nūnaṃ kriyā* ‘In everyday usage, when all the actants are in place, sometimes it is [fit] to say “he cooks” and sometimes it is not. That situation in which, once established it is fit to say “he cooks” that is the action.’

different from the quality⁴⁶: in this case there is the possibility of being both *pratyakṣa* and *parokṣa*⁴⁷.

The condition of being beyond perception is, moreover, completely disconnected from the temporal dimension. As the following examples show, an action can be *parokṣa* and have occurred in the distant past, in the near past or even outside a temporal dimension.

M II p. 120 l. 16–17 *ad* A 3.2.115

kathamjātiyakam punaḥ parokṣam nāma. kecit tāvad āhur varṣasatavṛttam parokṣam iti. apara āhuh kaṭāntaritam parokṣam iti | apara āhur dvyahavṛttam tryahavṛttam ceti.

Of what kind is then what is labelled as “being beyond perception”? Some say thus: *parokṣa* is what happened a hundred years ago. Some others say: it is what is separated by a mat. Some others say: also what happened two or three days ago.

To sum up, there are some interesting linguistic points that emerge from this long discussion. First of all we may notice that the speaker and the time of speech are the points of reference on which the pret-erite system in general and the perfect in particular are constructed. Moreover, the cognitive rather than linguistic dimension of the opposition between *pratyakṣa* and *parokṣa* in Patañjali’s discussion is extremely intriguing. This is a surprising gnoseological turn in the grammatical sphere since it may entail that it is not possible to linguistically signify action *qua* action. Such a position is unacceptable since Patañjali himself says (see note 46) that, once all the actants are in place (and perceivable), an action is specifically what makes one use a verb (like *pacati*) to convey the meaning of a process. As can also be seen in Bhartṛhari’s definition of *kriyā*, what is at stake here is the fact that verbal bases are capable of signifying something as being

⁴⁶ On a possible Sāmkhya origin of this terminology see Wezler (1986) who does not quote our passage but cites M II p. 366 l. 26 *ad* A 5.1.119: *guṇasamdrāvo dravyam* and M II p. 200 l. 14 *ad* A 4.1.3: *guṇasamudāyo dravyam*.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Patañjali (M II p. 120 l. 12–15 *ad* A 3.2.115) further specifies that only actants in the linguistic and restricted meaning are at stake here: it is not sufficient to see the rice water being thrown away after cooking and flowing along the road or to hear some typical sounds of water boiling to make an action *pratyakṣa* (*atha yadānena rathyāyān taṇḍulodakam dṛṣṭam katham tatra bhavitavyam. yadi tāvat sādhanēṣu parokṣeṣu papāceti bhavitavyam. bhavanti hi tasya sādhanāni parokṣāni. atha ya ete kriyākṛtā viśeṣāś cītkārāḥ phūtkārāś ceti teṣu parokṣeṣu. evam api papāceti bhavitavyam*).

endowed with a sequence (*krama*) whether that sequence is directly perceptible or inferred:

VP 3.8.1

*yāvat siddham asiddham vā sādhyatvenābhidhīyate |
āśritakramarūpatvāt tat kriyeti pratīyate ||*

Whatever, be it brought to accomplishment or not⁴⁸, is expressed through the condition of having to be brought to accomplishment because of its being founded on a sequential form is understood as an action (*kriyā*).

As we have seen, the condition of being *atyantāparidṛṣṭa-* is a crucial element in Patañjali's conception of *kriyā* but this does not however prevent him from considering the fact that language is capable of expressing an action conceptualised as an action even if it is not directly perceived as such. Therefore, Patañjali's difficulty in our passage seems to lie specifically in his interpretation of *parokṣa* with reference to the assumed incapacity on the speaker's part to perceive actions as such. This leads to the consideration of the condition of being *parokṣa* as being proper to all kinds of actions and thus of little use in identifying what is specific to an action expressed with the perfect. Patañjali's solution, as we have seen, is to shift the condition of being *parokṣa* to the actants⁴⁹.

9. Difficulties in dealing with *parokṣatā*: proposals of integration to/ modification of the text

Moreover, this interpretation of *parokṣa* as 'beyond the perception of the speaker' has raised some issues for grammarians. A first problem was already raised by Pāṇini⁵⁰ in the context of A 3.2.115 itself, re-

⁴⁸ Thus, even completely accomplished past actions may nevertheless be signified as actions.

⁴⁹ Significantly, KV *ad* A 3.2.115 accepts *dhātuvārtha*, i.e., the meaning of a verbal base, as that which must be characterised as being beyond perception.

⁵⁰ And the need for an integration or specific interpretation is also highlighted in the Kāśikā with almost the same words: KV *ad* A 3.2.115: *uttamaviśaye 'pi cittavyākṣepāt parokṣatā sambhavaty eva. tad yathā. supto 'haṃ kila vilālāpa* 'There may be the condition of being beyond perception also in the first person because of a distraction of the mind. For example: once fallen asleep I, so they say, began to blab.'

garding the usage of the first person of the perfect which should in fact not be possible within this semantic framework:

M II p. 120 l. 17–23 *ad* A 3.2.115

sarvathottamaḥ na sidhyati. sūptamattayor uttama iti vaktavyam. sūpto 'ham kila vilalāpa. matto 'ham kila vilalāpa. sūpto nū aham kila vilalāpa. matto nū aham kila vilalāpa. athavā bhavati vai kaścij jāgarad api vartamānakālaṃ nopalabhate. tad yathā. vaiyākaraṇānāṃ śakaṭāyāno rathamārga āsīnaḥ śakaṭasārthaṃ yāntaṃ nopalabhate. kiṃ punaḥ kāraṇam jāgarad api vartamānakālaṃ nopalabhate. manasā saṃyuktānīndriyāṇy upalabdḥau kāraṇāni bhavanti manaso 'sānnidhyāt.

The first person is realized nowhere: it is necessary to say that the first person of someone who is sleeping or is confused [is realized]: “asleep, it seems (*kila*), I blabbed”; “confused, it seems (*kila*), I blabbed”; “now asleep, it seems (*kila*), I have blabbed”; “now confused, it seems (*kila*), I have blabbed”. Or indeed it may happen that someone even when awake does not understand what is going on. For example: Śakaṭāyāna sitting (lit. ppp) on the edge of the carriageway in the midst of the grammarians does not perceive the multitude of chariots which are going by. How can it be that even when awake one does not perceive what is going on? The organs of sense become causes in the perception of things (only) in connection with the mind: thus because of their lack of connection with the mind.

Moreover, already Kātyāyana proposed to integrate some teachings to the general rule concerning imperfect forms (A 3.2.111) in order to account for some *parokṣa* usages of it:

M II 119 l. 3 vt. 2 *ad* A 3.2.111

parokṣe ca lokavijñāte prayoktur darśanaviśaye.

Also in the meaning of something out of the speaker's view but very well known in the world and being within the speaker's range of sight.

which Patañjali (M II 119 l. 4–7 *ad* A 3.2.111 vt. 2) comments on as follows:

*parokṣe ca lokavijñāte prayoktur darśanaviśaye laṃ vaktavyaḥ. aruṇad yavanaḥ śāketam. aruṇad yavanaḥ madhyamikām. parokṣa iti kim artham. udaḡād ādityaḥ. lokavijñāta iti kim artham. cakāra kaṭaṃ devadattaḥ. prayoktur darśana-
viśaya iti kim artham. jaghāna kaṃsam kila vāsudevaḥ.*

The imperfect must also be taught in the meaning of something out of the speaker's view but very well known in the world and in the range of

sight of the speaker: “The Greek besieged (imperfect) Sāketa; the Greek besieged Madhyamikā (impf.)”. Why the mention of “out of perception”? for cases such as “The sun just arose (aor.)”⁵¹. Why the mention of “well-known in the world”? for cases such as “Devadatta has made (pf.) a mat”⁵². Why the mention of “within the range of sight of the speaker”? for cases such as “Vāsudeva, they say, killed Kaṃsa (pf.)”⁵³.

Lastly, the *Kāśikāvṛtti* requires an integration that accounts for the usage of the perfect in the context of absolute negation:

KV *ad* A 3.2.115

atyantāpahnave ca liḍ vaktavyaḥ. kaliṅgeṣu sthito 'si? nānaṃ kaliṅgaṃ jagāma. dakṣiṇāpathaṃ praviṣto 'si ? nānaṃ dakṣiṇāpathaṃ praviveśa.

One should teach the perfect endings also in the meaning of complete denial. “Were you/ have you been among the Kaliṅgas? I have never been among the Kaliṅgas”; “Have you entered the southern path? I have never entered the southern path”.

10. The linguistic meaning of the opposition *pratyakṣa/parokṣa*: focus on the late Vedic technical literature

Recourse to the meaning of *parokṣa* as witnessed in the exegetical late-Vedic literature would allow us to solve not all, but at least a number of these issues. As is well known, the term is used, particularly within *nirvacana* literature, to indicate non-segmentable forms and meanings which cannot be analysed and broken down into lesser units of compositional meaning. Let us recall here the extremely well-known passage from the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*:

Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 6.1.1.2

yad aindha tasmād indhaḥ. indho ha vai tam indra ity ācakṣate parókṣaṃ parókṣakāmā hí devāḥ.

⁵¹ The restriction *parokṣe* blocks the usage of the imperfect in cases where only the aorist is allowed as in the quoted example where the rising of the sun has been witnessed by the speaker.

⁵² The restriction *lokavijñāte* again blocks the usage of the imperfect in cases where only the perfect is allowed as in the quoted example where the action of making a mat is not well known.

⁵³ The restriction *prayoktur darśanaviśaye* blocks the usage of the imperfect in cases where only the perfect is allowed as in the quoted episode of the killing of Kaṃsa by Kṛṣṇa which is outside the speaker’s range of sight. It is placed in a mythical past.

Since he kindled, then he is Indha: indeed Indha is called Indra in an opaque (out of perception) way, since the gods love what is beyond perception.

In *Nirukta* 9.20, the term *ulūkhala* ('mortar') is commented in a passage, once again attributed to a *Brāhmaṇa*-text, with a syntax that is almost identical to the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* passage.

uru me kurv ity abravīt. tad ulūkhalam abhavat. urukaramś ca etat tad ulūkhalam ity ācakṣate parokṣena iti ca brāhmaṇam.

He said, "make me broad" (*uru kr-*). It became the mortar (*ulūkhara*): that which is the *urukara* 'action of making wide' is opaquely called *ulūkhala*: thus it is also said in a commentary.

Durga, *Nirukta*'s commentator, characterises the act of spelling out the meaning that is at the basis of the *nirvacana* activity as making analysable what was not:

Nirukta-vṛtti of Durga 121, 14–15

apihitasyārthasya parokṣavṛttāu atiparokṣavṛttau vā śabde niḥkṣya vigrhya vacanaṃ nirvacanam |

A spelling out is the explanation (*vacana*) of a meaning which was concealed in a word whose formation is either beyond perception or totally beyond perception [obtained] after dragging out (*niḥ-*) and taking separately (*vi-*) [the meaning constituents].

It is interesting to note that, albeit in a different context, Yāska himself also uses the opposition between *pratyakṣa* and *parokṣa*, to create a threefold classification of the verses (*ṛc*) depending on whether the praises (*stuti*) are expressed indirectly (*parokṣa* lit. 'beyond perception'), directly (*pratyakṣa* lit. 'perceivably') or are addressed to oneself in the first person. The indirect expression of praise is characterised as follows:

Nirukta 7.1–2

tatra parokṣakṛtāḥ sarvābhir nāmavibhaktibhir yuyjante prathamapuruṣaiś ca ākhyātasya. indro diva indra īśe pṛthivyāḥ. indram id gāthino bṛhat. indreṇa ete tṛtsavo vevīṣānāḥ. indrāya sāmā gāyata. nendrād ṛte pavate dhāma kiṃcana. indrasya nu vīryāni pravocam. indre kāmā ayaṃsata iti.

Among them, stanzas [in which praise] is given indirectly are connected with any nominal ending and with the third person of the verb; e.g.

“Indra (nom.) is the master of heaven, Indra is the master of earth”⁵⁴;
 “Indra (acc.) loftily the chanters (have praised, *anūṣata* aor.)”⁵⁵; “with
 Indra (str.) these Ṛṭsu are active”⁵⁶; “may you (pl.) chant the hymns
 to Indra (dat.)”⁵⁷; “no residence indeed is pure without Indra (abl.)”⁵⁸;
 “I will sing forth the heroic deeds of Indra (gen.)”⁵⁹; “in Indra the
 desires rest”⁶⁰.

The verses in which praise is instead directly expressed, that is ones where praise is directly perceivable, are characterised by the use of the second-person of the verb and the second-person pronoun in the vocative (*tvam iti caitena sarvanāman*)⁶¹, e.g. *tvam indra balād adhi* ‘you O Indra (were born) from strength’⁶² or *vi na indra mṛdho jahi* ‘O Indra, slay our enemies’⁶³. Moreover, Yāska highlights the fact that, in some verses, it is the praisers (*stotr*) who are directly addressed while the praised ones (*stotavya*) may not be acknowledged. He gives the following examples: *mā cid anyad viśaṃsata* ‘glorify (imperative 3rd person pl.) no one else (o friends)’⁶⁴; *kanvā abhipragāyata* ‘O Kanvas, sing forth’⁶⁵ and *upapreta kuśikāś cetayadhvam* ‘Approach o Kanvas, be careful’⁶⁶.

⁵⁴ ṚV 10.89.10.

⁵⁵ ṚV 1.7.1; ŚS 20.38.4; 47.4; 70.7; SV 1.198; 2.146.

⁵⁶ ṚV 7.18.15.

⁵⁷ ṚV 8.98.1; ŚS 20.62.5; SV 1.388; 2.375.

⁵⁸ ṚV 10.69.6; SV 2.720.

⁵⁹ ṚV 1.32.1; cf. ŚS 2.5.5.

⁶⁰ Untraced quotation, cf. Roth 1852 [1976], p. 100.

⁶¹ The sentence *tvam iti caitena sarvanāman* describing the second feature of direct praise does not merely signify that this is characterised by a second-person pronoun but rather, more specifically, that pronoun must occur in the specific form in which it is quoted i.e. nominative/ vocative. This matches well with the preceding statement that identified the occurrence of the name of the praised one in all endings as a specific feature of indirect praise.

⁶² ṚV 10.153.2; ŚS 20.93.5; SV 1.120.

⁶³ ṚV 10.152.4; ŚS 1.21.2; SV 2.1218; VS 8.44; 18.70.

⁶⁴ ṚV 8.1.1; ŚS 20.85.1; SV 1.242; 2.710. Indra as the praised one is quoted in the immediately following hemistich.

⁶⁵ ṚV 1.37.1: here again the praised one, i.e. the cohort of Maruts is expressed in the preceding verses of the same stanza.

⁶⁶ ṚV 3.53.11. Here it is only inferable that the one who is praised is the horse mentioned in the following hemistich introduced by the second-person plural imperative *pramuñcata*.

We thus actually have four ways of expressing praise namely (a) *ātmastuti*: (b) direct praise in which the meaning of the verbal base in the second person directly addresses the praised one, (c) partially direct praise in which the praiser is addressed in the second person and the praised is only mentioned, and (d) indirect praise in which the praised is mentioned without being addressed. As can be seen, the term *parokṣa* in no way indicates the absence or non-perception of a word signifying the praised one in c) and d): rather, the term indicates that the person being praised is only indirectly/ obliquely characterised as such. The real point is that the grammatical and syntactical structure of the sentence does not directly convey the fact that it is praise since the praised one is not expressed in the vocative and the verb is not in the second person⁶⁷.

We can summarise the above findings by saying that in the Late-Vedic technical literature the term *parokṣa* identifies different linguistic occurrences in which the meaning is not directly conveyed by the surface level utterance and in this sense the meaning is said to be beyond perception. Of course, this begs the question of whether this meaning of the term is applicable in our case. In what sense does the perfect convey an action in a way that is beyond perception, indirect, opaque?

11. An action not directly conveyed as an action

We are convinced that in A 3.2.115 Pāṇini does not feel the need to define the term *parokṣe liṭ* since he uses it with a meaning that corresponds to its meaning in the remaining technical Vedic literature. If the rule is interpreted in this way, it teaches to use the perfect to convey the meaning of a pre-hodiernal past action which, however, is not directly meant as an action, i.e. as consisting of a sequence (*krama*). Perfect forms are undoubtedly full verbal forms (*tiñ* in Pāṇinian terms) but the meaning they convey is not that of an action as characterised by a sequence (*krama*), which is the prototypical form of an action. The relevant action is thus only indirectly expressed by the verbal form, just as the surface form *ulūkhala* 'mortar' only indirectly conveys the "real meaning" i.e. the mortar as the one which said

⁶⁷ The direct expression of praise does not mandatorily involve the use of a mode other than the indicative.

uru me kuru ‘make me broad’ and just as the verse *indro diva indra īśe prthivyāḥ* ‘Indra (nom.) is the master of heaven, Indra is the master of earth’ only indirectly conveys its real aim/meaning, which is to address praise to Indra. In all these examples the surface linguistic form does not account for the true nature of what they denote.

One wonders how an action can be conveyed in an indirect way and, conversely, in what sense the usage of full verbal forms may be considered as directly conveying this. In this regard, one cannot fail to recall how in the *Nirukta* there is an awareness of the fact that the action or condition (*bhāva*) can be expressed in two ways, either through a verbal form or through a more noun-like form:

Nirukta 1.1

tatra etan nāmākhyātayor lakṣaṇam pradiśanti. bhāvapradhānam ākhyātam sattvapradhānāni nāmāni. tad yatra ubhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ pūrvāparībhūtam bhāvam ākhyātenācaṣṭe vrajati pacatīti. upakramaprabhṛtyapavargaparyantam mūrtam sattvabhūtam sattoanāmabhir vrajyā paktir iti.

On this point they indicate this defining characteristic of a substantive and of a verb: the verb has an event as its main meaning, while the substantives have an entity as their main meaning. And when both have an event as their principal meaning, an event developing from a former to a later stage is expressed with a verb: “he goes”, “he cooks”⁶⁸. An

⁶⁸ In this regard, here we do not follow Cardona’s 2019 proposal to which we refer for an updated presentation of the various elements and the bibliography cited therein. Cardona proposes a punctuation of the paragraph that renders *yatra ubhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ* as an independent sentence which he interprets as meaning that where both (noun and verb) occur (i.e. in the context of a sentence) then it is the action that is the main element for both. Moreover, although it is not clear to us whether the two actions are interconnected, he attributes the syntagm *upakramaprabhṛtyapavargaparyanta-* to both verbal and nominal forms. The construction he proposes also finds support in numerous quotations adopted in later commentaries, as well as in the use of the syntagm in other contexts. However, we have chosen to disagree with him on this point and therefore remain with the punctuation and interpretation adopted first by Gode and then by Sarup. Lack of space prevents a full explanation of our reasons here, but let us advance three brief observations to justify our choice: a) Cardona states that the reading he endorses (which amounts to a reflection on the status of sentences) is perfectly consistent with the general argument of the paragraph. But the reading we selected (that is a reflection on the means of representing an action by means of a noun) also fits in very well with the assertion that nouns generally have essence as their main element; b) the choice of attributing *upakramaprabhṛtyapavargaparyanta-* to both nouns and verbs weakens the structure of the opposition between the two without adding anything significant to the definition of the verb c) the use of the dual to indicate a sentence is clumsy: if we stay with the fourfold division we should say that what characterises a sentence is the usage of the four types of words; and if we consider only the basic couple verb-

event embodied from the beginning to the end and having acquired the status of an entity is expressed with entity-names: “act of wandering”, “act of cooking”.

Let us recall that time constraints in Pāṇini’s system are not limited to full verbal forms but may also be conveyed by primary nominal derivatives, as shown by rules such as A 3.2.85 [*bhūte*] *karaṇe yajaḥ* that teaches to form the *upapadasamāsa agniṣṭomayājīn* ‘one who has performed a ritual with the Agniṣṭoma’ by adding the suffix *-in* after the verbal base *yaj-* in the meaning of an agent who has accomplished the action in the past. It is thus completely sound, in Pāṇini’s system, to equate a perfect form to a quasi-nominal form (with included past meaning) in which actions are conveyed not in their sequential dimension but as frozen entities⁶⁹. Analogously, an action mentioned through a perfect verbal form does not convey either its development in time or the role of the different actants, but the pure and simple fact that it has happened. In the first part of this article, we discussed the fact that in ŚS 1.7.6, for example, the action of being born expressed by means of a perfect form is not conveyed in its dynamic aspect but simply in its having happened in the past in order to create the condition in the present: *asmākārthāya jajñiṣe* ‘you were born for our business’. Similarly, the action of a fever penetrating the human body in ŚS 1.12.3 (*pāruṣ-parur āvivéśā*) is conveyed not as a sequence of actions (as the usage of a verbal form would suggest) but as an event leading to a result (the fever is everywhere).

If we accept this interpretation of the term *parokṣa*, we are however at the same time also obliged to admit that this meaning had probably already been lost by the time of the first commentators. This, on the other hand, might also justify the difficulties they encountered in accounting for the uses of the perfect. More particularly, within the proposed interpretation of *parokṣa*, the use of the first person would be possible even without the need for supplementary *vārttika*⁷⁰. Similarly,

noun there is no reason to consider that a kind of minimal syntagm was meant to represent the sentence in the *Nirukta*.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, as will be discussed in the second part of this research, some rules teach that the perfect verbal forms may be substituted, sometimes even preferably, by the corresponding perfect participles.

⁷⁰ The low frequency of the first-person perfect, frequently evoked by Renou, would in any case be justified given its adjectival dimension that is ill-suited to typical first-

it would not be necessary to supplement the Pāṇinian text to account for supposed *parokṣa* uses of the imperfect understood in the sense of the narrative imperfect that the speaker did not witness. In fact, having or not having witnessed the action is not what is at stake. Similarly, the use of the perfect in the case of negations, which so puzzled the authors of the *Kāśīkā*, turns out instead to be perfectly consistent with the interpretation we propose: an action that is not performed but only mentioned in order to be negated falls perfectly under the category of the perfect.

12. Conclusions

At the end of this two-pronged approach to the perfect usages we thus wish to reiterate – limited to the evidence in the two books of the *Atharvaveda* analysed here – that what the different usages have in common (and which may constitute the trigger behind the speaker's choice to use the perfect) first of all is the non-dynamic representation of any action (and not only the ones expressed by inherently stative verbal bases). Such a non-dynamic representation is at the heart of the Pāṇinian description too, provided one accepts a late-Vedic interpretation of the term *parokṣa*. And it is precisely the relevance of this non-dynamic feature that makes the perfect particularly suitable in a series of contexts that we have tried to enucleate: 'nominal' use (§ 3) to characterise an actant by means of an action that characterises it, him or her, and an indefinite use to indicate an action that creates a precondition in the present (§ 4). As regards temporal reference, in our occurrences, the perfect always refers to the speaker's present tense or a dimension completely detached from the temporal context. This does not mean that the past tense does not play a role in the final construction of the verb, but that its role focuses on the derivation of the lexical meaning of the base. In the forms in which this meaning is completely lexicalised, as Kümmel has already pointed out, the colouring of the past tense is almost completely lost, but prior to these forms there are various gradations in which the past tense can be more or less perceptible at the level of the derivation of meaning.

person narrative contexts. Moreover, first-person perfects with a nominal value are possible, see, eg. RV 10.125.6 (*āviveśa*) and 8 (*saṃbabhūva*).

References

- BERRETTONI, Pierangiolo (1976), *Per un'analisi del rapporto tra significato lessicale e aspetto in greco antico*, in "Studi e Saggi linguistici", 16, pp. 207–236.
- BÖTHLINGK, Otto (1897), *Pāṇini's Grammatik*, hrsg., übers., erl. und mit verschiedenen Indices versehen, Haessel, Leipzig.
- CANDOTTI, Maria Piera, and PONTILLO, Tiziana (2022), *Dispensing with ellipsis in the analysis of Sanskrit bahuvrīhi: Resurfacing, testing and assessing Pāṇini's model*, in Emily Manetta (ed.), *Proceedings of Special theme Session 1 in 35th South Asian Languages Analysis Roundtable "Ellipsis in South Asian Languages"*, in "Journal of South Asian Linguistics", 12, 1, pp. 1–22.
- CARDONA, George (1991), *A path yet taken, some Indian arguments concerning time*, in "Journal of the American oriental Society", 111, pp. 445–464.
- CARDONA, George (2019) *Philology, Text History and History of Ideas*, in "Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism: Saṃbhāṣā", 35, pp. 1–33.
- DAHL, Eystein (2010), *Time, Tense and Aspect in Early Vedic Grammar Exploring Inflectional Semantics in the R̥gveda*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- DELBRÜCK, Berthold (1897), *Vergleichende Syntax der Indogermanischen Sprachen, Zweiter Teil*, Trübner, Strassburg.
- DESHPANDE, Madhav M. (1985), *Historical Change and the Theology of Eternal Sanskrit*, in "Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung", 98, 1, pp. 122–149.
- DI GIOVINE, Paolo (1990; 1996), *Studio sul perfetto indoeuropeo*, 2 Vols., Il Calamo, Roma.
- ELIZARENKOVA, Tatyana Yakovlevna (1995), *Language and Style of the Vedic R̥ṣis*. Edited with an Introduction by Wendy Doniger, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- HOFFMANN, Karl (1967), *Der Injunktiv im Veda*, Winter, Heidelberg.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. (2002), *Review of Kümmel, Martin Joachim, Das Perfekt im Indoiranischen. Eine Untersuchung der Form and Funktion einer ererbten Kategorie des Verbums und ihrer Weiterentwicklung in den altindoiranischen Sprachen*. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2000. XI, 755 pp. (also: PhD Thesis Freiburg i. Brsg. 19), in "Indo-Iranian Journal", 45, pp. 350–352.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (transl.) (2014), *The R̥gveda. The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, 3 Vols., Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- JOSHI, Shivram Dattatray, and Paul KIPARSKY (2005), *The Extended Siddha-Principle*, in "Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute", 86, pp. 1–26.
- KATRE, Sumitra Mangesh (1987) (ed., transl.), *Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini*, University of Texas, Austin.

- KIPARSKY, Paul (1968), *Tense and Mood in Indo-European Syntax*, in “Foundations of Language”, 4, 1, pp. 30–57.
- KIPARSKY, Paul (1998), *Aspect and event structure in Vedic*, in “Yearbook of South Asian languages and linguistics”, 1, pp. 29–62.
- KIPARSKY, Paul (2009), *On the Architecture of Pāṇini’s Grammar*, in Gérard Huet, Amba Kulkarni, Peter Scharf (eds.), *Sanskrit Computational Linguistics. ISCLS 2007, ISCLS 2008. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, Vol. 5402, Springer, Berlin–Heidelberg, pp. 33–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-00155-0_2>.
- KÜMMEL, Martin J. (2000), *Das Perfekt im Indoiranischen. Eine Untersuchung der Form und Funktion einer ererbten Kategorie des Verbums und ihrer Weiterentwicklung in den altindoiranischen Sprachen*, Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- LAZZERONI, Romano (2016), *Statività e modalità: i modi del perfetto*, in “Studi e Saggi Linguistici”, LIV, 1, pp. 7–25.
- OGAWA, Hideyo (2005), *Process and Language: A Study of the Mahābhāṣya ad A 1.3.1 bhūvadāyo dhāvataṣaḥ*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.
- RENOU, Louis (1925), *La valeur du parfait dans les hymnes védiques*, Champion, Paris.
- RENOU, Louis (1966) (ed.), *La grammaire de Pāṇini: texte sanskrit, traduction française avec extraits des commentaires*, École française d’Extrême-Orient, Paris.
- ROTH, Rudolph (1852) (ed.), *Jāśka’s Nirukta sammt den Nighaṇṭavas*, Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, Göttingen. [Reprinted 1976, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt].
- STRUNK, Klaus (1977), *Oberlegungen zu Defektivität und Suppletion im Griechischen und Indogermanischen*, in “Glotta”, 55, pp. 7–9.
- VASU, Srisa Chandra (1891) (ed., trans.), *The Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini*, repr. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1988 [Literary Licensing, Allahabad 1988].
- WEZLER, Albrecht (1986), *A note on Mahābhāṣya II 366.26: guṇasaṃdravo draṇyam*. *Studies on Mallavādin’s Dvādaśāraṇayacakra II*, in Hōjun Nagasaki, Shōzen Kumoi (ed.), *Buddhism and Its Relation to Other Religions: Essays in Honour of Dr. Shōzen Kumoi on his Seventieth Birthday*, Heirakuji Shoten, Kyoto, pp. 1–33.
- WHITNEY, William Dwight (1905), *Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā: Translated with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary. Revised and Brought Nearer to Completion and Edited by Charles Rockwell Lanman*, 2 Vols., Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- WITZEL, Michael (1997), *The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu*, in Michael Witzel (ed.), *Inside the Texts, Beyond the Texts: New approaches to the Study of the Vedas*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp. 257–348.

2. On long-distance relative clauses in early Vedic*

Davide Mocci

Abstract

Vedic relative clauses are well-studied inasmuch as they constitute the most prominent example of subordination in this language. Nonetheless, the existence of long-distance relative clauses has never been acknowledged for Vedic. By combining formal linguistic considerations (§§ 1–4) with detailed textual analysis (§§ 5–7), I argue that long-distance relative clauses are indeed attested in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Ṛgveda*. This discovery has far-reaching implications for Vedic grammar and the study of subordination in Indo-European linguistics (§ 8).

Keywords

Verbal accent; Formal linguistics; Subordination; Operator scope.

* This contribution is funded by the European Union (Next Generation EU, Mission 4, Component 1, CUP F53D23008030006), as part of the Research Project of National Interest (PRIN PNRR 2022) “Entangled chronotopes: language, power, bodyscapes and religion in the first ten books of the *Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā* [ŚS]” (Principal Investigator: Tiziana Pontillo). I would also like to mention that the completion of this contribution was made possible by a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science post-doctoral fellowship (short term [PE]) at Kyoto University (“Formal syntax meets quantitative techniques in reconstructing the Indo-Aryan cultural archetype”), for which I am deeply grateful. I wish to thank Kyoko Amano, Frank Köhler, Tiziana Pontillo, Massimo Vai, as well as the audience at the workshop *Unveiling the Atharvaveda* (Rome, 30–31 January 2025) for very helpful commentary on the ideas contained in this paper. My gratitude also goes to the organizers of this workshop, Marianna Ferrara and Duccio Lelli, for creating a very stimulating and friendly forum to discuss and learn new things on the language and culture of the *Atharvaveda*. Finally, please note that all translations are by the Author, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

1. Background

In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus asks his disciples a couple of intriguing questions, emphasized in bold in the Ancient Greek and English versions below¹:

Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτὸν προσευχόμενον κατὰ μόνας συνῆσαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταί, καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτοὺς λέγων **Τίνα με οἱ ὄχλοι λέγουσιν εἶναι;** οἱ δὲ ἀποκριθέντες εἶπαν Ἰωάννην τὸν βαπτιστήν, ἄλλοι δὲ Ἠλίαν, ἄλλοι δὲ ὅτι προφήτης τις τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀνέστη. εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς **Ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι;** Πέτρος δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν Τὸν χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ. ὁ δὲ ἐπιτιμήσας αὐτοῖς παρήγγειλεν μηδενὶ λέγειν τοῦτο (Luke 9.18–21).

It happened, as he was praying alone, that the disciples were with him, and he asked them, “**Who do the multitudes say that I am?**”. They answered, “‘John the Baptizer,’ but others say, ‘Elijah,’ and others, that one of the old prophets is risen again.” He said to them, “But **who do you say that I am?**” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” But he warned them, and commanded them to tell this to no one (transl. Rainbow Missions Inc. 2000–2024).

By asking the questions at stake (i.e., *Who do the multitudes say that I am?*; *Who do you say that I am?*), Jesus is interested in understanding not his own, genuine identity, but rather the identity that the multitudes or his own disciples ascribe to him. To expose the fundamental difference between these two perspectives, it may be useful to ponder on the following examples:

- (1) For which value of x , **I am x** .
- (2) a. For which value of x , **the multitudes say that I am x** .
b. For which value of x , **you disciples say that I am x** .

Answering (1) and (2) implies assigning a value to x . However, while the value assigned to x in (1) merely depends on a state of affairs or situation (i.e., Jesus’s genuine identity regardless of one’s beliefs), the value assigned to x in (2) depends on the beliefs held by people other than Jesus about the identity of Jesus himself, regardless of the veracity of those beliefs. The meaning of *Who do the multitudes say that I am?* and

¹ The Ancient Greek text is taken from the online edition in Perseus (Crane 2025), based on Westcott, Hort 1881. The English translation is also available online via Perseus.

Who do you say that I am? coincides with the examples in (2), as opposed to the example in (1)².

Now, crucially, the examples in (2) make it graphically explicit that the interrogative pronoun *who*, corresponding to x here, is spelled out only once (i.e., in sentence-initial position: *who do the multitudes say that I am?*; *who do you say that I am?*), but is indeed assigned two different interpretations: on the one hand, *who* is interpreted as an operator that binds a variable x (*for which value of x*); on the other hand, *who* is interpreted as a variable x predicated of the first person pronoun *I* (*I am x*)³. Variables are by definition semantic objects that do not have a denotation per se: their denotation varies across assignments (Heim, Kratzer 1998, pp. 116–117)⁴. For example, x will denote the son of God if it is assigned the value “the son of God” in (2), or it will denote Pontius Pilate if it is assigned the value “Pontius Pilate”. This makes it possible to understand what it means for *who* to be interpreted as a variable-binding operator in the questions asked by Jesus. Let us consider how.

2. Variables and operators

Operators are linguistic devices that bind a variable contained in a complete proposition. As a consequence of this binding, the value of the proposition-internal variable becomes dependent on the type of operator being used (see Bussmann 1996, p. 839)⁵. To understand this

² On the use of examples like (1) and (2) to paraphrase interrogative clauses, see, e.g., Chomsky 1993 [1981], pp. 193–194; Rizzi 1982, p. 64. For an updated formal semantic approach to the meaning of interrogative clauses, see Beltrame et al. 2025, § 2.1.3.

³ One may also go as far as to contend that *who* is spelled out once, but is interpreted in two different loci of the sentence, namely in sentence-initial and sentence-final position. See Moro (2017, p. 98) for insightful remarks in this connection.

⁴ Chomsky (1981) [1993], p. 136, defines variables as follows: “A variable is a trace bound by an operator; it is an R-expression, functions in the manner of a name (with interesting exceptions), is Case-marked and assigned a θ -role.” Here ‘R-expression’ stands for ‘referential expression’, i.e., an expression that is neither an anaphor like *herself* nor a pronominal like *she*, while θ -roles are notions like agent, patient, recipient, experiencer, etc.

⁵ Technically, the operator is an element in A-bar position (a position where grammatical case is not assigned: typically, a left-peripheral position associated with the signification of scope-discourse semantic values such as topic, focus, quantification) that binds an element in A-position (a position where grammatical case is assigned: typically, a position that codifies a grammatical function such as subject and direct object). As a consequence of this binding, the two elements in the

point, let us go back to the examples in (2a–b). For ease of exposition, let us identify the interpretation of *who* as a variable-binding operator with the formula *for which value of x*, and the interpretation of *who* as an operator-bound variable with the occurrence of *x* in the complete propositions *the multitudes say that I am x* and *you disciples say that I am x*. In this way, saying that *who* is interpreted as an operator in the pair of questions asked by Jesus (i.e., *Who do the multitudes say that I am?*; *Who do you say that I am?*) is tantamount to saying that the formula *for which value of x* binds the occurrence of *x* in the complete propositions of (2a–b), i.e., *the multitudes say that I am x* and *you disciples say that I am x*. This binding then ensures that, whatever value is assigned to the occurrence of *x* in *for which value of x*, that value must be inherited by the occurrence of *x* in the complete propositions *the multitudes say that I am x* and *you disciples say that I am x*. To put the same thing differently, the operator denoted by *who* brings it about that, once a value V_1 is assigned to the occurrence of *x* in *for which value of x*, the occurrence of *x* in the aforesaid complete propositions of (2a–b) cannot be assigned a value V_2 other than V_1 .

Thus, we understand that, when he answers Jesus's question *Who do you say that I am?*, Peter assigns the value "Christ of God" to the occurrence of *x* in the formula *for which value of x* of (2b). Since *who*, in its interpretation as an operator, connects this occurrence of *x* with the proposition-internal occurrence of *x* of (2b) (i.e., *you disciples say that I am x*), the value "Christ of God" is inherited, as it were, by the occurrence of *x* in the complete proposition *you disciples say that I am x*. Accordingly, to answer Jesus's question *Who do you say that I am?* means interpreting both the example-initial and the example-final occurrence of *x* in (2b) (*For which value of x, you disciples say that I am x*) as referring to the Christ of God⁶:

(3) For the value "Christ of God" of *x*, we disciples say that you are *x*.

More importantly, the complete proposition prefaced by *for which value of x* may or may not coincide with the clause where the operator-bound variable (e.g., *x* in *you disciples say that I am x*) fulfills its grammatical

A- and A-bar positions are interpreted as co-indexed or co-referential. See May 1985, pp. 31–52 for relevant discussion.

⁶ See Heim, Kratzer 1998, pp. 92–119 for an explicit treatment of variables and operators in natural languages.

function. Another look at the contrast between (1) and (2a–b) may help to make this point clear. Thus, when it comes to (1), the clause introduced by *for which value of x* is the clause headed by the copula *am* (i.e., *I am x*), which is also the clause where variable *x* fulfills the grammatical function of predicate: *for which value of x, I am x*. By contrast, in the case of (2a–b), the clause introduced by the operator *for which value of x* is the clause headed by the lexical verb *say* (*for which value of x, the multitudes say* [2a]; *for which value of x, you disciples say* [2b]), whereas the clause where variable *x* performs the grammatical function of predicate is the clause headed by the copula *am* (i.e., *I am x* [2a–b]), so a clause other than the one headed by *say*.

3. Long-distance dependencies

Crucially, the largest clause introduced by an operator like *for which value of x* is technically referred to as the scope of the operator⁷. Given the identity – established above (§2) – between the interpretation of *who* as an operator and the formula *for which value of x*, one may say that interrogative pronouns like *who* have scope, and that this scope is non-distinct from the scope of *for which value of x*. Thus, the scope of *who* in the two questions under examination (*Who do the multitudes say that I am?*; *Who do you say that I am?*), which is non-distinct from the scope of *for which value of x* in (2a–b), consists in *the multitudes say that I am x* (2a) and *you disciples say that I am x* (2b). It therefore turns out that, in these questions, the interrogative pronoun scopes over a larger clause (*the multitudes say that I am x*) than the one where the interrogative pronoun fulfills its grammatical function (*I am x*).

When the clause over which an interrogative pronoun (interpreted as a variable-binding operator: *for which value of x*) takes scope is larger than the clause in which such a pronoun (now interpreted as an operator-bound variable: *x*) fulfills its grammatical function, a long-distance interrogative clause obtains (Chomsky 1973; 1977; Cinque 1990). Thus, both *Who do the multitudes say that I am?* and *Who do you say that I am?* qualify as long-distance interrogative clauses, and so do their Ancient Greek analogs (Τίνα με οἱ ὄχλοι λέγουσιν εἶναι, in addition to Ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι)⁸.

⁷ For a refined definition of scope in terms of c-command, see May 1985, p. 5.

⁸ Cf. also the Latin analogs from St. Jerome's Vulgate: *Quem me dicunt esse turbae?*

Long-distance interrogative clauses constitute a specific example of so-called long-distance dependencies. A long-distance dependency is a preferential relationship between an operator and the variable bound by it, such that the operator and the variable are contained in two different clauses. When the operator is denoted by an interrogative pronoun, the resulting long-distance dependency is known as long-distance interrogative clause. Other kinds of long-distance dependencies exist in natural languages. Thus, along with long-distance interrogative clauses, one also finds long-distance relative clauses, where the operator is denoted by a relative pronoun, exemplified in (4) for English.

(4) The girl to whom I believe that Jimmy spoke.

This sentence may be paraphrased as in (5), along the lines of Rizzi (1982, p. 64)⁹.

(5) The girl x such that **I believe that Jimmy spoke to x .**

If we abstract away from the segment *the girl*, which serves the sole purpose of restricting the possible values of x to the members of the set of girls, (5) results as comparable to (2a–b) in all relevant respects. Thus, just as the interrogative pronoun *who*, despite being spelled out once, was assigned two different interpretations in the two questions asked by Jesus (*Who do the multitudes say that I am?*; *Who do you say that I am?*) – i.e., it was interpreted as an operator that binds a variable x (i.e., as *for which value of x*) and as an operator-bound variable x performing the grammatical function of predicate (*I am x*), as was made graphically explicit in (2a–b) – in the same way the relative pronoun *whom* of (4) is spelled out only once, but is assigned two different interpretations, which are made graphically explicit in (5): it is interpreted both as a variable-binding operator (*the girl x such that*) and as an operator-bound variable fulfilling a grammatical function (notably, the function of complement of the verb *spoke*: *Jimmy spoke to x*).

and *Vos autem quem me esse dicitis?* (the text of the Vulgate is also accessible via the Perseus Digital Library).

⁹ In formal semantics, the meaning of relative clauses is modeled via sets: see, e.g., Heim, Kratzer 1998, pp. 86–130.

In (5), too, the operator denoted by the relative pronoun (*the girl x such that*) is to be understood as a device that binds the variable *x* contained in the complete proposition *I believe that Jimmy spoke to x*: as a consequence of this binding, the values assigned to the occurrence of *x* contained within the formula *the girl x such that* cannot differ from the values assigned to the occurrence of *x* within the complete proposition *I believe that Jimmy spoke to x*. Accordingly, just like the interrogative pronouns of the quote from the Gospel according to Luke, the relative pronoun of (4), too, can be said to take scope, and this scope can be identified with the scope of the operator *the girl x such that*. Considering that the scope of this operator is the largest clause introduced by *the girl x such that* (i.e., *I believe that Jimmy spoke to x*), the relative pronoun occurring in (4), too, results as scoping over *I believe that Jimmy spoke to x*. Now, crucially, the clause over which the relative pronoun scopes (*I believe that Jimmy spoke to x*) is larger than the clause in which the relative pronoun performs its grammatical function, i.e., the clause headed by the verb *spoke* (*Jimmy spoke to x*). Hence, (5) proves that (4) qualifies as a long-distance relative clause.

Long-distance dependencies have gone unnoticed in Vedic scholarship. In the remainder of this study, I argue that long-distance dependencies exist in early Vedic by considering data from relative clauses in the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* (§§5–7). Since accent plays a fundamental role in the present inquiry (§4), only the *Śaunakīya* recension of the *Atharvaveda* will be considered, the *Paippalāda* recension failing to keep track of the accent.

4. Vedic accent as a scope marker

In the following stanza from the *Atharvaveda*, a series of relative clauses in *pādas* a–c are followed by the matrix clause in *pāda* d (*sá no muñcatv āṇhasaḥ*)¹⁰. Both the relative pronouns (*yásya*; *yám*; *yásmín*) and the demonstrative pronoun (*sá*) refer to Indra:

¹⁰ In essence, a *pāda* (lit. ‘foot’) is the metrical unit of a verse (see Elizarenkova 1995, pp. 111–112, for an overview of Vedic *pādas* with special reference to the *Rgveda*). It should be noted that *pāda* d of *Atharvaveda Śaunakīya* 4.24.5 is given as *sá* °°° in Kim’s (2022) critical edition, while it recurs as *sá no muñcatv āṇhasaḥ* in stanzas 1 and 7. For convenience, I reproduce the extended form of the *pāda* here.

ŚS 4.24.5

yāsya jūṣṭiṃ somīnaḥ **kāmāyante**
yām hāvanta iṣumantaṃ gāviṣṭau |
yāsminn arkāḥ **śísriyé** yāsminn ójaḥ
sá no muñcatv āṇhasaḥ ||

May he free us from anguish, [he] whose enjoyment those possessing (i.e., having access to) Soma wish for, whom they invoke as [their] archer during the cattle-raid, over whom the flash of lightning is spread, over whom fierceness [is spread].

Here I shall confine my attention to the following three relative clauses, where both the relative pronoun and the verbal predicate are emphasized in bold:

- (i) **yāsya** jūṣṭiṃ somīnaḥ **kāmāyante**;
- (ii) **yām** **hāvanta** iṣumantaṃ gāviṣṭau;
- (iii) **yāsminn** arkāḥ **śísriyé**.

The relative clauses in (i)–(iii) contrast with the matrix clause *sá no muñcatv āṇhasaḥ*, in that the verbal predicate is accented only in (i)–(iii). Such a contrast follows from a well-known rule of Vedic grammar. Let us consider how.

In Vedic, “the finite verbal form in an independent clause has no accent if this form does not begin a sentence or a *pāda*, but it has an accent in a subordinate clause” (Elizarenkova 1995, p. 250)¹¹. The verbal predicates of (i)–(iii) (i.e., **kāmāyante**, **hāvante**, and **śísriyé**) do not begin either a *pāda* or a sentence; however, they are contained in relative clauses, which of course qualify as subordinate clauses¹². Therefore, the verbal predicates of (i)–(iii) are assigned the pitch accent in compliance with the general accentuation rule of Vedic grammar. By contrast, *muñcatu* of *pāda* d (*sá no muñcatv āṇhasaḥ*) counts as neither *pāda*-initial nor sentence-initial, and is contained in an independent (matrix) clause. This causes *muñcatu* to remain unaccented in the stanza under examination.

¹¹ More precisely, the general accentuation rule provides for finite verbs in dependent clauses to bear the pitch accent in Vedic, where the notion ‘dependent clause’ includes, but is not limited to, subordinate clauses (Elizarenkova 1995, p. 251). The distinction between subordinate and dependent clauses can be disregarded for our purposes, but cf. Elizarenkova 1995, pp. 250–259 for an insightful discussion.

¹² For a general overview of subordination in early Vedic, see Hettrich 1988 and Viti 2007. For a formal perspective see instead Vai 2018.

Now, the relative clauses in (i)–(iii) can be paraphrased along the following lines:

- (6) a. *yásya júṣṭim somínaḥ kāmáyante*
 b. The man *x* such that **those possessing Soma wish for**
(kāmáyante) ***x*'s enjoyment.**
- (7) a. *yám hávanta íṣumantaṁ gáviṣṭau*
 b. The man *x* such that **they invoke** (*hávante*) ***x* as their archer**
during the cattle-raid.
- (8) a. *yásminn arkáh śísriyé*
 b. The man *x* such that **the flash of lightning is spread** (*śísriyé*)
over *x*.

As the paraphrases in (6)–(8) show, early Vedic relative pronouns are spelled out once but are interpreted twice: as variable-binding operators (*the man x such that*), and as operator-bound variables fulfilling a given grammatical function. Qua variable-binding operators, the relative pronouns in (6)–(8) take scope: their scope, emphasized in bold in (6)–(8), is the largest clause introduced by the formula *the man x such that*. Thus, in each of these examples, the clause scoped over by the relative pronoun is the clause headed by an accented verb: *kāmáyante* (6); *hávante* (7); *śísriyé* (8). This datum makes it possible to think of verbal accent as a scope marker: in relative clauses, the clause headed by an accented verb is the clause over which the relative pronoun takes scope.

In the next sections we shall see how verbal accent, viewed as a scope marker, can be used as a crucial diagnostic to identify long-distance relative clauses in early Vedic.

5. Long-distance relative clauses in early Vedic: *yátra*

Let us consider another stanza from the *Atharvaveda*. In the working translation reported below, *véttha* ‘you know’ (*pāda* a) is read as directly connected to the relative pronoun *yátra* ‘where’, ‘wherever’. In keeping with this reading, the poet would be talking about a place where Agni acquires knowledge of the births (*jániman-*) of the devourers (*atrín-*).

ŚS 1.8.4

*yátra*iṣāṁ agne jánimāni *véttha*
gúhā satām atrínāṁ jātavedaḥ

*tāṃs tvāṃ brāhmaṇā vāvṛdhānó
jahy eṣāṃ śatatārham agne ||*

O Agni, wherever you become aware of their (= the Atrins') births – of the devourers that are in secret, O Jātavedas – these, O Agni, do you – who prospered by means of the sacred formulation – smash by piercing a hundred of them.

However, a place where the event of Agni knowing the devourers' births takes place fails to be fine-tuned to the content of the stanza, which is ultimately targeted on the annihilation of the devourers by Agni. Indeed, from the perspective of this stanza, what really matters for Agni's annihilation of the devourers is not the place where Agni acquires a given kind of knowledge (i.e., the knowledge of the devourers' births), but rather the place where the devourers' births take place. This is because, if Agni knows where they were born, it can burn and eliminate not only the extant devourers, but also their nest, as it were, i.e., the offspring of the extant devourers.

Weber understood the problematic nature of a translation like the one reported above which posits a place of knowledge as opposed to a place of birth. In order to take care of it, he read *véttha* as 'you find' (*pāda* a) as opposed to 'you know', while he continued to take this verb as directly connected to the relative pronoun *yātra* 'where', 'wherever' (cf. also Bloomfield 1897, p. 65):

Wo Agni du ihre Geschlechter findest, der versteckten Fresser, o Schätzenspender! Die tödte du, mächtig durch mein Gebet hier, Agni! in hundert Todesart. (Weber 1858, p. 401)

Weber's proposal solves the problem connected with the postulation of a place where the event of acquiring a specific kind of knowledge takes place: in accordance with Weber's reading, the place spoken of is one where the devourers' births are found (by Agni) – i.e., sticking to the image used above, the nest of the devourers. However, this proposal raises another issue, in that the meaning of the perfect forms of *vid-* (including *véttha*) is systematically 'to know', not 'to find', in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Rgveda* (Kümmel 2000, pp. 495–496).

As a result, I will adopt an alternative reading of this Atharvavedic passage where *véttha* bears the ordinary meaning 'you know', but allows the places referred to by the poet via the relative pronoun *yātra* to be the places where the devourers' births take place, according to the

poet's knowledge. All that is needed to unlock this reading is to take *yātra* not as a locative complement of *véttha*, but rather as a locative predicate of a nominal sentence whose subject is the noun phrase *eṣām ... jānimāni* 'their births', the copula *as-* (here rendered as 'take place') being understood. Put another way, I paraphrase *pāda* a as in (9b) as opposed to (9c)¹³.

- (9) a. *yātraiṣām agne jānimāni véttha*
 b. The place x such that **you, Agni, know that their (i.e., the devourers') births take place in x.**
 c. *The place x such that **you, Agni, know their (i.e., the devourers') births and the birth-knowing event takes place in x.**

In this way, the problematic existence of a place of knowledge (i.e., a place where the event of Agni knowing the devourers' births takes place) dissolves. In its stead, we get places of birth, i.e., places known to Agni as ones where the devourers were born: these places are concealed, given that the Atrins are said to live (*sat-*, lit. 'exist') in secret (*gúhā*). Therefore, the point made by the poet in this stanza is that, even though the places where the devourers were born are concealed and hence inaccessible to us, Agni is still able to locate these places and eliminate the devourers at their births, thereby preventing any possibility for them to thrive in the present as well as the future. Accordingly, the interpretation of *Atharvaveda Śaunakīya* 1.8.4 can be given as follows:

O Agni, wherever you know that their (= the Atrins') births existed (= took place) – despite the Atrins existing (= living) in secret, O Jātavedas – these, O Agni, do you – who prospered by means of the sacred formulation – smash by piercing a hundred of them.

Now, the present interpretation of *pāda* a implies that *yātra* is interpreted not only as the locative predicate of *eṣām ... jānimāni* 'their

¹³ Whitney's translation is ambiguous, in that *wherever* may refer both to a place of knowledge (in case *wherever* is interpreted as a locative complement of *thou knowest*) and to a place of birth (in case *wherever* is interpreted as the predicate of *the births of them*): "Wherever, O Agni, thou knowest the births of them, of the devourers that are in secret, O Jātavedas, them do thou, increasing through worship (*brāhmaṇ*)—slay of them, O Agni, with hundredfold transfixion." (Whitney 1905, p. 8). I am thankful to Kristen de Joseph and Carmen Spiers for kindly discussing the subtleties hidden behind Whitney's translation with me.

births', but also as a scope-taking operator that binds the occurrences of variable x : I take this operator to be non-distinct from the formula *the place x such that* (see above, [9]), and the scope of the operator to be non-distinct from the scope of *the place x such that*. The scope of *yátra* is the largest clause introduced by the operator *the place x such that*, hence *you, Agni, know that their births take place in x* , corresponding to the whole clause headed by the accented verb *véttha*: i.e., *yátraisām agne jánimāni véttha*.

Thus, the accent on *véttha* does not mark the clause in which the relative pronoun *yátra* fulfills its grammatical function: indeed, such a clause is to be identified with the nominal clause having *eṣām ... jánimāni* 'their births' as its subject, which lacks an inflected verb. In point of fact, the accent on *véttha* marks the clause scoped over by *yátra* as an operator. Since the clause scoped over by *yátra* is larger than the clause in which *yátra* fulfills its grammatical function (i.e., the clause headed by *véttha* contains the nominal clause having *eṣām ... jánimāni* as its subject), I conclude that *yátraisām agne jánimāni véttha* is a long-distance relative clause. In the following sections, two additional instances of long-distance relative clauses will be considered.

6. Long-distance relative clauses in early Vedic: *yásya*

In a most profound Vedic hymn, the question as to what the primitive principle of the universe is gets identified with the question as to who the god worth receiving our worship is. The hymn at stake is *Atharvaveda Śaunakīya* 4.2, a stanza of which is reproduced below.

ŚS 4.2.4

[*yásya* dyáur urvī pr̥thivī ca mahī]

[*yásyādā* urv à1ntárikṣam] |

[*yásyāsáu* súro vītato mahitvā]

kásmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||

To which god should we pay homage with the oblation? To the one to whom Wide Heaven and Great Earth belong? To the one to whom that wide midspace belongs? To the one to whom that extended sun belongs by [his] greatness?

In this stanza, the poet lists a series of properties which characterize the god worth receiving our worship. These properties, intended to

foster the identification of the god at stake, are expressed by means of relative clauses:

- (10) a. *yásya dyáur uroí prthiví ca mahí*
 b. The god x such that **Wide Heaven and Great Earth belong to x**.
- (11) a. *yásyādá urv àntárikṣam*
 b. The god x such that **that wide midspace belongs to x**.
- (12) a. *yásyāsáu súro vítato mahitvā*
 b. The god x such that **that extended sun belongs to x by [his = x's] greatness**.

Each of these three relative clauses constitutes a nominal sentence where the relative pronoun fulfills the function of genitival predicate (*yásya* ‘of whom’) expressing a possessor, while the subject (e.g., *dyáur uroí prthiví ca mahí* ‘Wide Heaven and Great Earth’ in [10]) denotes the corresponding possessum. Thus, e.g., *yásya dyáur uroí prthiví ca mahí* (10) literally translates as ‘whose are Wide Heaven and Great Earth’.

While the paraphrases in (10)–(12) are not instances of long-distance relative clauses, they are instrumental in helping us choose the correct analysis for a difficult passage, which immediately follows the stanza which we have just examined. The passage in question is reproduced below¹⁴.

ŚS 4.2.5

yásya víśve himávanto mahitvā
samudré yásya rasām id āhúh |
imás ca pradīśo yásya bāhū
kásmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||

To which god should we pay homage with the oblation? To the one to whom all snowy [mountains] belong by [his] greatness? To the one to whom it is said that even the Rasā river [that flows] in the water mass belongs? Or to the one to whom these cardinal points belong [as if they were his] arms?

The relative clauses in *pādas* a and c are unproblematic: as shown in (13)–(14), their analysis runs along exactly parallel lines to the anal-

¹⁴ The Rasā river mentioned in *pāda* c is “the river at the border of the world that separates heaven and earth” (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1572).

ysis in (10)–(12). Hence, they do not qualify as long-distance relative clauses.

- (13) a. *yásya víśve himávanto mahitvā*
 b. The god x such that **all snowy mountains belong to x by [his (= x's)] greatness.**
- (14) a. *imāś ca pradīśo yásya bāhú*
 b. The god x such that **these cardinal points belong to x as [if they were his (= x's)] arms.**

On the other hand, *pāda* b, reproduced as (15a) below, requires careful consideration. Readings like (15b) and (15c) should be excluded (hence the star prefixed to them) inasmuch as they are inconsistent with the context of *Atharvaveda Śaunakīya* 4.2.4–5, where the relative pronoun *yásya* ‘whose’ is a possessor-denoting predicate of a nominal sentence in which the copula is silent and the subject denotes the corresponding possessum: see examples (10) through (14) above¹⁵. Indeed, only the readings in (15d) and (15e) are fully consistent with such a context.

- (15) a. *samudré yásya rasām id āhúḥ*
 b. *the god x such that **they speak about x's river named Rasā and flowing in the water mass.**
 c. *the god x such that **they say that the river named Rasā and flowing in the water exists due to x's [greatness].**
 d. the god x such that **the Rasā river flowing in the water mass belongs to x – they say.**
 e. the god x such that **they say (= it is said) that the Rasā river flowing in the water mass belongs to x.**

The reading in (15d) is indirectly espoused by Renou and Jamison and Brereton, to the extent that they translate a text – i.e., *Rgveda* 10.121.4b (*yásya samudrāṇ rasāyā sahāhúḥ*) – which differs minimally from *Atharvaveda Śaunakīya* 4.2.5b (*samudré yásya rasām id āhúḥ*). Their translation reads as follows¹⁶:

¹⁵ For (15c) cf. Thieme's translation of the parallel *pāda* in *Rgveda* 10.121.4b (*yásya samudrāṇ rasāyā sahāhúḥ*): “[durch] dessen [Größe], wie man sagt, der Ozean mitsamt dem Weltenstrom ist” (Thieme 1966, p. 69).

¹⁶ The *Rgveda* text follows the edition by van Nooten, Holland 1994.

RV 10.121.4

yásya imé himávanto mahitvā
yásya samudrāṇ rasáyā sahāhúḥ
yásya imāḥ pradīśo yásya bāhū
kásmāi devāya haviṣā vidhema ||

Lui auquel appartiennent, en sa puissance, ces (monts) de neige, **auquel appartient l'océan avec la Rasā, dit-on**, auquel ces quartiers du ciel, (qui forment) ses bras – quel est le dieu que nous devons adorer par l'oblation? (transl. Renou 1956, p. 119).

Whose are these snow-covered mountains [=the Himalayas] in their greatness; **whose is the sea together with the world-stream, they say**; whose are these directions, whose (their) two arms [=the zenith and nadir?]
 —Who is the god to whom we should do homage with our oblation? (transl. Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1593)

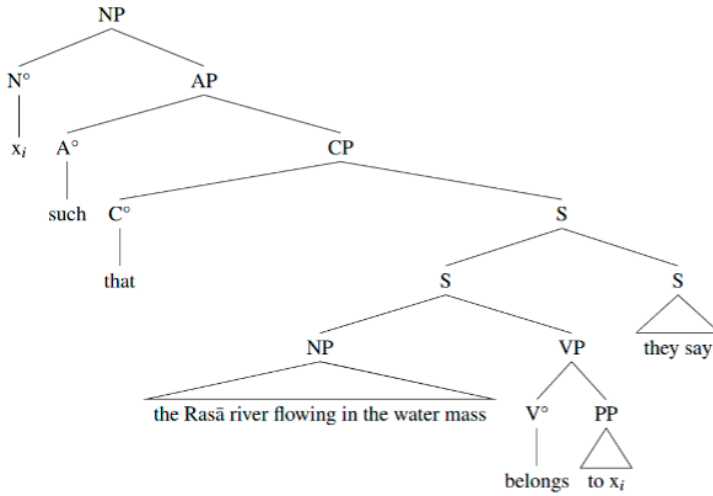
Moreover, both (15d) and (15e) interpret the third person plural subject of *āhúḥ* as a generic agent: 'they say', 'it is said' (Kümmel 2000, p. 116). However, (15d) is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it does not do justice to the presence of the pitch accent on *āhúḥ*: as explained in §4, the pitch accent forces us to consider *āhúḥ* as the predicate of a subordinate clause. Since *yásya* is the sole subordinator figuring in (15a), it is natural to take *āhúḥ* as the predicate of the relative clause introduced by *yásya*. This is incompatible with the analysis in (15d), which instead treats *āhúḥ* as the predicate of a matrix (qua parenthetical) clause.

The second reason why (15d) is problematic concerns case marking. To better visualize this point, let us translate the parenthetical status of *āhúḥ* 'they say' into formal terms, thereby yielding (16) (based on Heim, Kratzer 1998, p. 114)¹⁷. Here *āhúḥ* serves as an adjunct to the S which immediately dominates the NP subject *samudré rasām id* 'the Rasā river flowing in the water mass' and the predicative NP/PP consisting of (a silent instance of) variable *x*¹⁸.

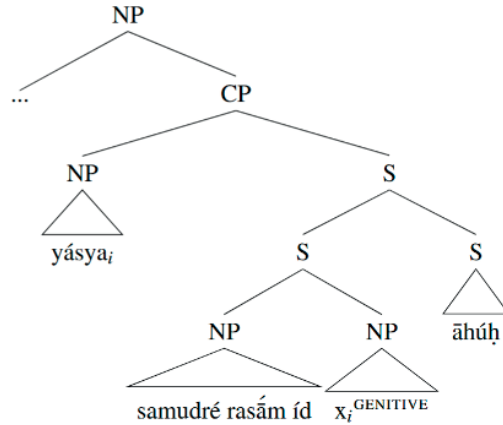
¹⁷ Following Chomsky 2013, p. 39 and Manzini 2017, p. 237, phrase markers are meant to codify dominance relations, as opposed to relations based on linear ordering such as precedence.

¹⁸ The phrase labels are to be read as follows: S = sentence; NP = noun phrase; AP = adjectival phrase; CP = complementizer phrase; VP = verb phrase; PP = prepositional phrase; N° = nominal head; A° = adjectival head; C° = complementizer head; V° = verbal head. The triangles underneath the phrase labels indicate that the internal structure of the phrase is omitted for convenience.

(16a)



(16b)



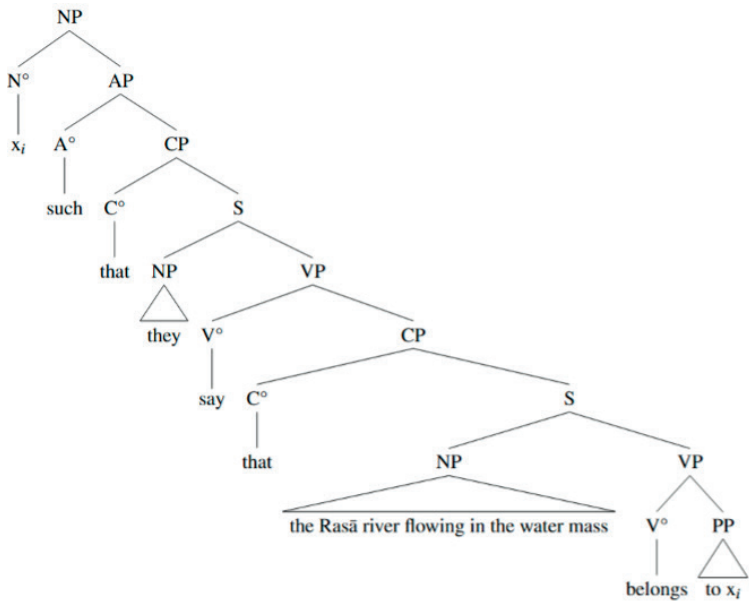
Now, in generative grammar, the subject takes on different case endings depending on the nature of the head (technically dubbed as “probe”) with which the subject enters a local relation¹⁹. In particular,

¹⁹ This local relation was identified with government in Chomsky 1993 [1981]. As a first approximation, a head H governs a phrase P when P is the specifier of H, or when H is the closest head that c-commands P in a sentence. See Rizzi, Shlonsky 2007, p. 139 for a refined definition of local relation couched in terms of intervention locality.

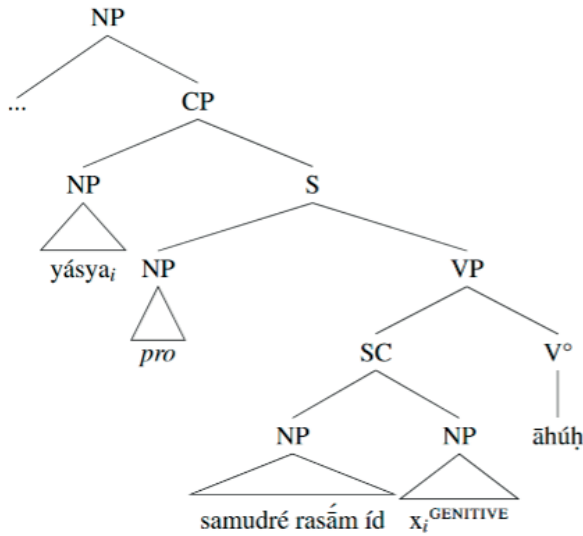
the subject is accusative-marked when the probe is a transitive verb (Chomsky 2000, pp. 123–124; Chomsky 2001, pp. 16–17). In this perspective, the accusative marking on *rasām* requires that *rasām* be in a local relation with the only transitive verb figuring in (16), namely *āhúḥ*. However, such a relation is far from being local in (16), inas-much as two clausal boundaries intervene between *āhúḥ* and *rasām*: the S that immediately dominates *āhúḥ*, as well as the S (made up of two segments) immediately dominated by CP. Accordingly, the accusative marking on *rasām* is further confirmation that the analysis of *āhúḥ* as a parenthetical clause – reflected in (16) – cannot be correct.

Now, the difficulties that rule (15d) out do not extend to (15e). Thus, the fact that *āhúḥ* bears the pitch accent straightforwardly follows in (15e) from *āhúḥ* ('they say') being the predicate of a subordinate (qua relative) clause, introduced by *yásya*. Moreover, *āhúḥ* is treated in (15e) as a transitive verb taking as a complement the S made up of the NP subject *samudré rasām íd* and of variable *x*, which serves as its predicate. This point is made graphically explicit with the aid of the following phrase markers, where *pro* is a silent pronominal standing for a generic third person plural subject 'they'.

(17a)



(17b)



Here the accusative marking on *rasām* naturally follows from it being in a local relation with a transitive verb, namely with *āhúḥ*: only one clausal boundary – i.e., the small clause (SC) – intervenes between *rasām* and *āhúḥ* in (17b)²⁰. Accordingly, both the pitch accent properties of *āhúḥ* and the case marking properties of *rasām*, which were problematic under an analysis like (15d), fall out from (15e) without stipulation. I therefore conclude that (15e) is the correct analysis of *samudré yásya rasām íd āhúḥ* (15a).

Now, (15a) satisfies the definition of long-distance dependency under the analysis in (15e). Let us consider how. Due to the non-distinctness of the formula *the god x such that* and the variable-binding operator *yásya*, the scope of *yásya* can be identified with the scope of *the god x such that*, i.e., with the largest clause introduced by *the god x such that* in (15e). The largest clause introduced by *the god x such that* in (15e) is *they say that the Rasā river flowing in the water mass belongs to x*, which corresponds to *samudré yásya rasām íd āhúḥ*. Accordingly, *samudré yásya rasām íd āhúḥ* falls under the scope of the operator denoted by *yásya*, just as *they say that the Rasā river flowing in the water mass belongs to x* falls under the scope of *the god x such that*. In this way, we reach the conclusion that *āhúḥ* also falls under the scope of *yásya*:

²⁰ See Moro 1997; 2000; 2019 on small clauses.

see (17). This conclusion is directly confirmed by the pitch accent on *āhúh*, on the assumption that verbal accent is a scope marker. Crucially, now, the clause in which *yásya* fulfills its grammatical function (as the predicate of the NP *samudré rasām íd*) is the SC *samudré yásya rasām íd* (corresponding to *the Rasā stream flowing in the water mass belongs to x* of [15e]). Since the clause scoped over by *yásya* is larger than the clause in which *yásya* fulfills its grammatical function, the relative clause introduced by *yásya* is a long-distance relative clause.

7. Long-distance relative clauses in early Vedic: *yád*

The last text I will be considering is taken from book 10 of the *Ṛgveda*:

ṚV 10.74.6

yád vāvāna purutámam purāṣā!
ā vṛtrahéndro námāny aprāḥ |
āceti prāsáhas pátis túviṣmān
yád īm uśmási kártave kárat tát ||

When the previous victor won the latest of many, Indra the Vṛtra-smasher fulfilled his names: he appeared as the powerful lord of victory. What we wish him to do, that he will do. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1504)

In *pāda* d of this stanza, the relative pronoun *yád* triggers the pitch accent on *uśmási* ‘we wish’. Accordingly, the scope of *yád* is expected to coincide with the clause headed by *uśmási* (see above, §4). This expectation is borne out, as the following paraphrase makes it clear:

- (18) a. *yád īm uśmási kártave*
 b. The *x* such that **we wish him to do *x***.

Indeed, the scope of *yád* in (18a) is non-distinct from the scope of the formula *the x such that* in (18b). The scope of *the x such that* is the largest clause introduced by *the x such that*. This clause is *we wish him to do x*, directly corresponding to *īm uśmási kártave*, i.e., to the clause headed by *uśmási* in (18a). Hence, *īm uśmási kártave* falls under the scope of *yád* in (18a) just as *we wish him to do x* falls under the scope of *the x such that* in (18b). This is in line with our expectation.

Now, crucially, *yád* performs its grammatical function not in the clause headed by *uśmási*, but rather in the infinitival clause headed by

the infinitive *kártave* ‘to do’, where it is understood as the direct object of *kártave*. Put another way, *yád* refers to that which is done (i.e., the patient of *kártave*), not to that which is wished for (i.e., the patient of *uśmási*)²¹. In this way, the clause scoped over by the relative pronoun interpreted as an operator (i.e., *īm uśmási kártave* ‘we wish him to do x’) results as being larger than the clause in which the relative pronoun – now interpreted as a variable *x* – fulfills the grammatical function of direct object (*īm...kártave* ‘him to do x’). As a consequence, the relative clause in (18a) qualifies as a long-distance relative clause.

8. Concluding remarks

Vedic relative clauses have received much attention in modern scholarship (Hettrich 1988). Nonetheless, a subtype of relative clause, namely long-distance relative clauses, has so far gone unnoticed in Vedic studies. In this type of relative clause, the relative pronoun scopes over a larger clause than the one where the relative pronoun performs its grammatical function (as a direct object, predicate, etc.). In the present contribution I have provided formal and textual arguments in favor of the existence of long-distance relative clauses in the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*.

Several questions arise that are worth exploring. For example, in long-distance relative clauses the relative pronoun is said to pass through an embedded complementizer phrase (CP) before landing in a higher CP (see Manzini, Rugna 2024 for an updated discussion). This implies the presence of a well-developed system of sentence embedding already at the chronological height of the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, which may require some remodulation of contentions to the effect that subordination is weak in early Vedic (Viti 2007). Another question concerns the distribution of long-distance relative clauses across the *Ṛgveda*: under the hypothesis that this text consists of several compositional layers dating back to different historical stages (Witzel 1995, p. 310; Pontillo 2017; 2019), the attestation of long-distance relative clauses in *Ṛgveda* book 10 and the *Atharvaveda* is in line with the postulation of an Atharvavedic substratum for this *Ṛgvedic* book

²¹ The role of patient of *uśmási* (that which is wished for) is already played by the subordinate clause *īm...kártave*, i.e., by the fact that Indra does *x* (*x* being the operator-bound variable denoted by the relative pronoun *yád*).

(Witzel 1997, p. 280). The question then arises as to whether long-distance relative clauses are also found in other Ṛgvedic books, and what this can tell us on the stratification of Vedic poetry.

These questions will not find any answer in this short contribution. However, I hope that the depth of these questions testifies to the importance of studying long-distance dependencies in early Vedic.

References

- BELTRAME, Francesco, KRIEGER, Svenja, CHESI, Cristiano, and Georg KAI-SER (2025), *Focus and negation in Italian and German why-questions*, in “Glossa: a journal of general linguistics”, 10, 1, pp. 1–31. <<https://doi.org/10.16995/glossa.11125>>.
- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice (1897), *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda: Together with Extracts from the Ritual Books and the Commentaries*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- BUSSMANN, Hadumod (1996), *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, translated and edited by Gregory Trauth, Kerstin Kazzazi, Routledge, London.
- CHOMSKY, Noam (1973), *Conditions on transformations*, in Stephen R. Anderson, Paul Kiparsky (eds.), *A Festschrift for Morris Halle*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, pp. 232–286.
- CHOMSKY, Noam (1977), *On wh-movement*, in Peter Culicover, Adrian Wasow, Thomas Akmajian (eds.), *Formal syntax*, Academic Press, New York, pp. 71–133.
- CHOMSKY, Noam (1993) [1981], *Lectures on Government and Binding: The Pisa Lectures*, 7th edition, de Gruyter Mouton, Berlin.
- CHOMSKY, Noam (2000), *Minimalist inquiries: the framework*, in Roger Martin, David Michaels, Juan Uriagereka, Samuel Jay Keyser (eds.), *Step by step: Essays On Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik*, MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 89–155.
- CHOMSKY, Noam (2001), *Derivation by phase*, in Michael Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 1–52.
- CHOMSKY, Noam (2013), *Problems of projection*, in “Lingua”, 130, pp. 33–49. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2012.12.003>>.
- CRANE, Gregory R. (2025), *Perseus Digital Library*, Tufts University. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>>.
- ELIZARENKOVA, Tatyana Y. (1995), *Language and style of the Vedic Ṛṣis*, Edited with a Forward by Wendy Doniger, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- HEIM, Irene, and Angelika KRATZER (1998), *Semantics in Generative Grammar*, Blackwell, Malden–Oxford.

- HETTRICH, Heinrich (1988), *Untersuchungen zur Hypotaxe im Vedischen*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin–New York.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (transl.) (2014), *The Rigveda: The earliest religious poetry of India. An English translation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- KIM, Jeong-Soo (2021), *Atharvavedasaṃhitā der Śaunakaśākhā: Eine neue Edition unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Parallelstellen der Paippalādasamhitā*. <<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:20-opus-277038>>.
- KÜMMEL, Martin J. (2000), *Das Perfekt im Indoiranischen: Eine Untersuchung der Form und Funktion einer ererbten Kategorie des Verbums und ihrer Weiterentwicklung in den altindoiranischen Sprachen*, Reichert, Wiesbaden.
- MANZINI, M. Rita (2017), *Passive, smuggling and the by-phrase*, in Nicholas LaCara, Keir Moulton, Anne-Michelle Tessier (eds.), *A Schrift to Fest Kyle Johnson*, Linguistics Open Access Publications, pp. 233–244. <<https://doi.org/10.7275/R57D2S95>>.
- MANZINI, M. Rita, and Giuseppe RUGNA, *Wh-copying and wh-scope marking by External Merge*, in “Rivista di Grammatica Generativa/ Research in Generative Grammar”, 46, 1, pp. 1–32. <<https://lingbuzz.com/j/rgg/2024/2024.01/>>.
- MAY, Robert (1985), *Logical Form: Its Structure and Derivation*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- MORO, Andrea (1997), *The raising of predicates: Predicative noun phrases and the theory of clause structure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- MORO, Andrea (2000), *Dynamic Antisymmetry*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- MORO, Andrea (2017), *A Brief History of the Verb to Be*, Translated by B. McClellan-Broussard, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- MORO, Andrea (2019), *The geometry of predication: A configurational derivation of the defining property of clause structure*, in “Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B”, 375, 1791, pp. 1–7. <<https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2019.0310>>.
- PONTILLO, Tiziana (2017), *Ipotesi di applicazione al lessico indoario della versione ‘Pisani’ della linguistica areale*, in Mario Negri, Giovanna Rocca, Marta Muscariello (eds.), *L’opera scientifica di Vittore Pisani nel quadro della glottologia indeuropea fra Ottocento e Novecento*, in “Alessandria. Rivista di Glottologia”, pp. 64–82.
- PONTILLO, Tiziana (2019), *When a tatpuruṣa turns into a dvandva in order to meet the “brahmanical reform”: The case-study of iṣṭāpūrtām*, in “Rivista degli Studi Orientali”, 92, 3–4, pp. 37–63.
- RAINBOW MISSIONS Inc. (2000–2024), *World English Bible*, Revision of the American Standard Version of 1901. <<https://scaife.perseus.org/library/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0031/>>.
- RENOU, Louis (1956), *Hymnes spéculatifs du Vēda*, Gallimard/Unesco, Paris.
- RIZZU, Luigi (1982), *Issues in Italian Syntax*, Foris, Dordrecht.

- RIZZI, Luigi, and Ur SHLONSKY (2007), *Strategies of subject extraction*, in Uil Sauerland, Hans-Martin Gärtner (eds.), *Interfaces + recursion = language? Chomsky's minimalism and the view from syntax-semantics*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin–Boston, pp. 115–160.
- THIEME, Paul (1964), *Gedichte aus dem Rig-Veda*, Reclam, Stuttgart.
- VAI, Massimo (2018), *Nuove ricerche di sintassi vedica*, Ledizioni, Milan.
- VAN NOOTEN, Barend A., and Gary B. HOLLAND (1994), *Rig Veda: A Metrically Restored Text*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- VITI, Carlotta (2007), *Strategies of subordination in Vedic*, Franco Angeli, Milan.
- WEBER, Albrecht (1858), *Indische Studien: Beiträge für die Kunde des indischen Alterthums*, Vierter Band, Dümmler, Berlin.
- WESTCOTT, Brooke Foss, and Fenton John Anthony HORT (1881), *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, American edition with an introduction by Philip Schaff, Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, New York.
- WHITNEY, William Dwight (1905), *Atharva-Veda Samhitā: Translated with a critical and exegetical commentary*, revised and brought nearer to completion and edited by Charles Rockwell Lanman, Vol. 1: *Introduction. Books I to VII*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- WITZEL, Michael (1995), *Ṛgvedic history: Poets, chieftains and politics*, in George Erdosy (ed.), *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity*, de Gruyter, Berlin–New York, pp. 307–352.
- WITZEL, Michael (1997), *The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu*, in Michael Witzel (ed.), *Inside the Texts, Beyond the Texts: New approaches to the Study of the Vedas*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp. 257–348.

3. On the informative structure of the sentence in Vedic

Massimo Vai

Abstract

This paper examines information structure in Vedic Sanskrit, focusing on the sentence-initial domain, or left periphery. Adopting a cartographic approach, the study treats the left edge of the clause as a structured space associated with discourse-related functions such as topic and focus.

The analysis concentrates on three constructions: left dislocation, the placement of correlative clauses (especially in the *diptyque normal*), and constituents occurring to the left of the complementizer *yád*. These patterns raise questions about the organization of the Vedic clause and the syntactic encoding of information structure. Using both prose and poetic data from the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, the paper evaluates whether constraints on the ordering of topic and focus proposed for other languages also apply to Vedic Sanskrit. The findings contribute to a better understanding of Vedic clause structure and offer comparative insights into information structure across Indo-European languages.

Keywords

Left Periphery; Left Dislocation; Correlative Constructions; Vedic Syntax; Pre-*yád* Positioning.

1. The left periphery and the informative structure of the Vedic sentence

The information structure of the sentence in Vedic has already been the subject of investigation by a substantial group of syntacticians. In addition to Delbrück's pioneering study 1878 which was recently analysed by Vai (2024), the topic has been extensively revisited over the past several decades by scholars who have applied the methods of generative syntax (such as Krisch 2017, Hale 2018, Keydana 2011; 2018, and Ram-Prasad 2022). In this work, the information structure of the Vedic sentence will be analysed in light of studies on the left periphery of the clause, following the approaches of Cinque (1977), Rizzi (1997), Benincà (2001), and Benincà and Poletto (2004).

The *left periphery of the sentence* refers to a concept from generative syntax – introduced in particular by Rizzi (1997) through the Split-CP theory – which designates the initial portion of the sentence, that is the area to the left of the verb. This domain can host elements that have been fronted for informational or pragmatic reasons. According to the Split-CP hypothesis, the left periphery comprises a finely articulated structure within the Complementizer Phrase (CP), consisting of an ordered set of functional projections (as adapted here from the schema proposed by Benincà [2001] and Benincà, Poletto [2004]):

$$1) \{_{\text{Disc}} [\text{HT}]\}_{\text{Force}} \text{C} \{_{\text{Topic}} [\text{LD}][\text{LI}]\}_{\text{Focus}} [\text{contrast. Foc}][\text{inform. Foc}] / [\text{Interr } wh-]\}_{\text{FinP}} \text{C}$$

In this work, I will examine some phenomena relevant to the cartographic analysis of the left periphery in Vedic, specifically:

- 1) left dislocation;
- 2) the placement of correlatives in the so-called *diptyque normal* (a term introduced by Minard in 1936); and
- 3) cases where elements are positioned to the left of *yád* functioning as a complementizer.

1.1 Left Dislocation

Cartographic studies on the left periphery have paid much attention to the syntax of dislocated constituents. According to Alexiadou (2006):

The phenomenon referred to as ‘left dislocation’ (LD) ... is characterized by the presence of a phrase in the first position of the clause which is connected with that clause through the intermediary of some anaphoric element referred to as the *resumptive element*... the resumptive element can be either a regular personal pronoun as in English, or a demonstrative pronoun as in Dutch or a clitic pronoun as in languages such as Italian, Romanian, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek.

The dislocated element and the resumptive pronoun can have the same case; otherwise, the dislocated element is in the nominative case and the resumptive pronoun can appear in any case: in the latter example we speak of a *Hanging Topic*, a further type of *Left Dislocation*, which corresponds to the classic *Nominativus pendens*.

Interestingly, Oertel 1926 deals with case syntax in *Brāhmaṇas* prose. In particular, his attention is drawn to the disjunct use of certain cases, i.e. “*Prolepsis with Resumption by a Demonstrative Pronoun*”.

Here follow some of his examples:

2) TS 2.4.1.1

[*devā manuṣyāḥ pitāras*]; *tē*; ‘*nyāta āsann [āsura rākṣāṇsi piśācās]*’ *tē* ‘*nyātaḥ*

Gods, men, Fathers, – **they** were on one side; Asuras, Raksases, Piśacas, – **they** (were) on the other Side. (Oertel 1926, p. 2)

3) KS 31.5.12t (Schroeder, v. III, p. 6, l. 12)

[*prāṇam vyānam apānam*]; *tān*; *eva yajamāne dadhāti*

In-breathing, through-breathing, out-breathing, – **these** he places into the sacrificer. (Oertel 1926, p. 2)

4) TS 2.6.9.3

[*yajñāya yajamānāyātmāne*]; *tēbhya*; *evā āśiṣam ā sātē*

For the sacrifice, for the sacrificer, for himself, – for **them** he asks a blessing. (Oertel 1926, p. 93)

Note that in these examples the nominal groups placed at the beginning of the sentence [*devā manuṣyāḥ pitāras*], [*prāṇam vyānam apānam*], [*yajñāya yajamānāyātmāne*] are in the same case as the respective resumptive pronouns *tē*, *tān*, *tēbhyaḥ*.

In the last example, the resumptive pronoun is followed by the focus particle *evā*, which marks the focus of the proposition – a point to which I will return later.

Other cases reported by Oertel consist of a group of words in the nominative case, resumed by a demonstrative pronoun in any case and therefore corresponding to the structure of a *nominativus pendens*:

5) KS 21.2 (p. 38, l. 14)

[*devā vai svargaṃ lokaṃ yantas*]; **teṣāṃ**; *yāni cchandāṃsy aniruktāni svargyāṇy āsan* | **tais** *saha svargaṃ lokam āyan* |

The gods going to the heavenly world, – what **their** unexpressed heavenly metres were, with **them** they went to the heavenly world.

6) ŚBM 3.4.2.1

[*ātithyéna vai devā iṣṭvā*]; **tānt**; *samād avindat*

The gods having sacrificed with the guest-offering, – **them** discord befell. (Oertel 1926, p. 36)

It is worth noting that, in addition to the cases identified by Oertel in the prose of the *Brāhmaṇas*, similar instances can also be found in the ŚS – and notably, not in its prose sections. Thus, what in Oertel's study appeared to be a distinctive feature of Vedic prose also seems to characterize the poetry of the AV. The following are examples found during the survey of the *Atharvaveda Śaunakīya* conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 project:

7) ŚS 3.1.3

[*amitrasenāṃ maghavannn
asmāṃ chatrūyatīm abhi*] |
yuvāṃ tān; *indra vṛtrahann
agniś ca dahataṃ prāti* ||

The army of the unallied, O Liberal one, those who engage in hostilities against us – you two, O Indra Vṛtra-killer, and Agni, burn **them**.

8) ŚS 2.12.7

[*saptā prāṇān aṣṭāu majjñās*];
tāṃs; *te vṛścāmi brāhmaṇā* |
*āyā yamāsya sādānam
agnidūto āraṃkṛtaḥ* ||

Seven breaths, eight marrows: I cut **them** for you with my spell; you will go to the seat of Yama, sent by Agni, made satisfactory.

9) ŚS 2.12.1

[*dyāvāprthivī urv āntárikṣaṃ
kṣétrasya pátny urugāyó 'dbhutaḥ* |

*utāntārikṣam urú vātagopaṃ];
tā; ihā tapyantāṃ māyī tapyāmāne ||*

Heaven and earth, the wide atmosphere, the lady of the field, the marvellous wide-striding one, and the wide atmosphere sheltered from the wind, let **these** be kindled here while I am inflamed.

The Left Dislocation is also attested in the RV:

10) RV 3.5.6
*ṛbhúś cakra ṛḍyaṃ cāru náma
viśvāni devó vayúnāni vidvān |
[sasāsya cārma ghṛtāvat padāṃ vés];
tād; id agnī rakṣaty āprayuchan ||*

(He acquired the precious name of Ṛbhu, the god who knows all the ritual patterns). The lard-rich skin of food, the trail of the bird, Agni constantly guards **all of this**.

In all these examples, the phrases resumed by *tād* have the informational function of Topic.

Moreover, in some cases the resumptive pronoun *tād* is followed by certain focus particles, as in the last example *id* and other examples already mentioned: for this kind of LD, I refer to Westbury (2016, p. 37), who observes that LD is also used to announce the focus of a proposition¹:

11) KS 31.5.12t
[prāṇaṃ vyānam apānaṃ]; tān; eva yajamāne dadhāti

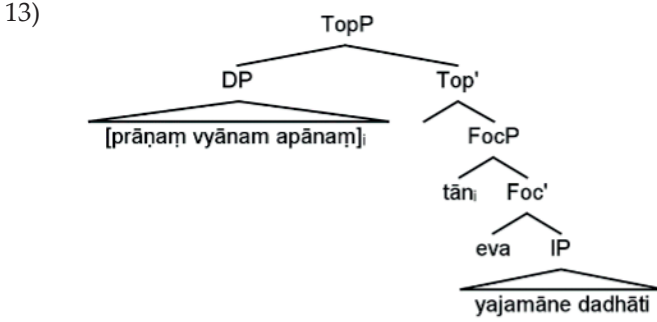
In-breathing, through-breathing, out-breathing, – *right these* he places into the sacrificer.

12) TS 2.6.9.3
[yajñāya yajamānāyātmāne]; tébhya; evā āśiṣam ā śāsté

For the sacrifice, for the sacrificer, for himself, – *just for them* he asks a blessing.

¹ Westbury proposes that LD may also be used to announce a focal relation, without the dislocated constituent itself being focal, in what he terms focus-announcing left-dislocation. Importantly, even under these revised accounts, the dislocated element does not constitute the locus of focus marking, see e.g. Lambrecht 2001, p. 1072.

In such cases, the co-occurrence of both topicalized and focalized elements within the same sentence can be observed, as shown below²:



1.2 The placement of correlatives in the so-called *diptyque normal*

There is another very common structure in the *Ṛgveda*, in which *tād* functions as a resumptive pronoun. According to Cinque (2020, p. 128, but also previous works), correlative RCs are DPs rather than CPs. In my opinion, this might be indicated by the fact that the correlative can be co-indexed with the resumptive pronoun *tād*, which, as we have seen, also functions as a resumptive pronoun for left-dislocated DP constituents.

Moreover, Cinque's analysis found that all relative constructions ('free' relatives included) are double headed (i.e. they have both an external and an internal head in the underlying structure). Thus, taking into account simple correlatives e.g. in modern Indo-Aryan languages, the following sentence:

- 14) *jo laṛkī khaṛī hai, vo (laṛkī) lambī hai*
 which girl is standing, she/that (girl) is tall

can be analysed in Cinque's terms as:

- 15) [VO LARKĪ [jo laṛkī khaṛī hai]], vo laṛkī lambī hai

where VO LARKĪ is a silent external head.

² This hypothesis was proposed by Kiparsky 1995, p. 153, but later questioned by Keydana 2011, pp. 111–112; 2018, p. 2200.

(However, Cinque reports that this structure, which corresponds to the underlying structure, has been marginally accepted by some informants).

In Vedic, this type of correlative construction is the so-called *dip-tique normal*, as identified by Minard (1936, p. 9), i.e., a type of relative clause in which the correlative clause precedes the main clause, e.g.:

16) RV 1.41.5

[*yáñi yajñáñi náyathā narah-*
ādityā ṛjúnā pathā́]_i |
prá vahḥ sá_i dhítáye naśat ||

The sacrifice that you lead along the straight path, o superior men, Ādityas, that will reach you for insight. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 150)

In this case, the preposed correlative [*yáñi... pathā́*] is left dislocated and resumed by the demonstrative pronoun *sá*.

Probert (2015, pp. 311–312) argues that correlative clauses in Ancient Greek also represent a topicalization strategy, e.g.:

17) Il. 1.547–550

ἀλλ' ὃν μὲν κ' ἐπεικὲς ἀκουέμεν οὔ τις ἔπειτα
οὔτε θεῶν πρότερος τὸν εἴσεται οὔτ' ἀνθρώπων:
ὃν δέ κ' ἐγὼν ἀπάνευθε θεῶν ἐθέλωμι νοῆσαι
μή τι σὺ ταῦτα ἔκαστα διείρεο μηδὲ μετάλλα.

What it is right for you to know, no one will know before you – neither man nor god. But what I wish to ponder alone, apart from the other gods, you must neither ask about nor seek to uncover.

In this case, in the first correlative clause ὃν is followed by μὲν, and in the second by δέ: the μὲν...δέ sequence typically marks topics in the List Interpretation Projection in Ancient Greek (Dal Lago 2011, p. 40; Benincà, Poletto 2004, p. 67), and thus the two correlatives function as topics. Moreover, in the case of the first correlative, the topic is followed by the focus οὔ τις.

Several scholars have sought to determine the structural level within the main clause where the correlative is adjoined. (cf. Ram-Prasad 2022, p. 39). According to Hock (1989), correlative structures in Sanskrit are formed of two adjoined CPs (just as happens in other ancient IE languages), since RC and MC have the same structure, as they both contain sentence-oriented particles.

In some cases, the theory that posits a left periphery articulated into multiple projections allows for a more precise placement of the correlative clause within the previous CP projection, e.g.:

18) ṚV 10.154.1.cd

yēbhyo mādhu pradhāvati tāṁś cid evāpi gachatāt ||

Those for whom honey flows forth – right to them let him go now.

(Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1638)

where *cid* is a focus particle (Lühr 2017).

And also:

19) ṚV 1.1.4

a *ágne yáṁ yajñám adhvarám*

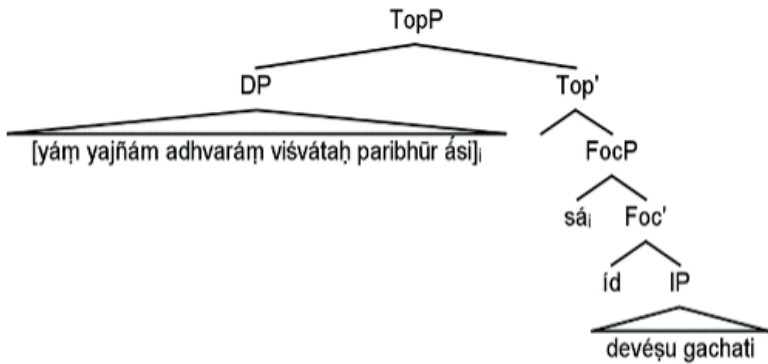
b *viśvátaḥ paribhūr ási |*

c *sá id devēṣu gachati ||*

O Agni, the sacrifice and rite that you surround on every side – it alone goes among the gods. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 89)

In this sentence, the relative [*yáṁ yajñám... ási*] is left dislocated and the resumptive pronoun *sá* is focalised by the clitic focus particle *id* (Lühr 2017), so this sentence could have the following representation:

20)



1.3 On V-*yád* order in the ṚV

The ṚV contains instances of topicalized or focalized elements appearing to the left of the complementizer *yád* (cf. Vai 2021), e.g.:

21) RV 1.158.5cd

c *śīro yád asya traitanó vitákṣat*
d *svayám dāsá úro āṁsāv āpi gdha* | |

When Traitana cut off his head, the Dāsa himself ate his own chest and shoulders. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 337)

In this regard, Keydana (2011) argues that Vedic has a discourse functional slot (Df-slot) to the left of [Spec, CP]. This slot is usually filled with only one word, and a filled Df-position may coexist with a *wh*-word, e.g.:

22) RV 6.27.1b

índrah kím asya sakhyé cakāra |

Indra, What did he create in the fellowship of it?

The Df-slot, therefore, must be distinct from [Spec, CP]. According to Keydana, the C-system in Vedic differs significantly from the one proposed by Rizzi (1997), as the Df projection marks the end of the entire system. Keydana contends that Rizzi's assumption – that the topic-focus field is necessarily “sandwiched” between Force (i.e., C) and Finiteness – is not universally valid, as it is contradicted by the Vedic data.

Keydana's proposal is as follows:

23) [_{DP} Spec [_{DP} Df° [_{CP} Spec [_C C° [IP]]]]]

This is similar to Benincà's schema (2001, p. 62), although her analysis only applied to Hanging Topics.

A different idea for similar structures was suggested by Danckaert (2012, p. 107) on the basis of Rizzi (2001). In his opinion, in these cases in Latin, subordinating conjunctions like *cum* ‘when’ and *si* ‘if’ are merged in FinP; see also Krapova (2010, p. 1257) on the Bulgarian *that*-complementizer *deto*, and Roussou (2020), who observes that topic and focus constituents may occur on either side of the Greek complementizer *oti*.

There are, however, other cases in Vedic in which the complementizer *yád* is preceded on its left by the inflected form of the verb that the complementizer is supposed to introduce, e.g.:

24) RV 5.4.6c

píparṣi yát sahasas putra devān |

Since you bring the gods safely across, o child of strength. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 666)

Using a strictly syntactic approach, one can assume that the complementizer *yád* is also located in this case in the head of FinP.

Zyman and Kalivoda (2020) propose the same analysis for similar cases in Latin poetry, where the verb word can move to the left of the complementizers *ut* ‘so that’, *sī* ‘if’, *cum* ‘when’ e.g.:

25) Ov. *Ars Amatoria* 1.99

Spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsae

They come to watch, they come to be watched themselves.

It can be assumed that the inflected verb moves to the left of the complementizer; however, this raises the question of why it is not blocked by the Head Movement Constraint (HMC).

Zyman and Kalivoda (2020) propose a different solution to this problem, but one could alternatively assume that the movement takes place at the level of the V' (or I'), which contains the inflected verb and the trace of the object, after the object has moved to a functional projection, which Zyman and Kalivoda (2020, p. 21), following Devine and Stephens (2006, p. 108), call *Scr(ambled)P*, between FinP and TP.

In this way, the XP category containing the inflected verb and the trace of the moved object can move to the left of the complementizer, e.g., into SpecTop (without incurring in a violation of the HMC):

26) [_{FinP} [_{Fin°} yád [_{IP} [_{I'} devān píparši]]]] →

[_{Top} [_{I'} t_i píparši]_j] [_{Top} [_{FinP} [_{Fin°} yád [_{ScrP} devān_i [_{IP} [_{I'} t_i t_j]]]]]

The V-C° order also appears in Hittite, e.g., in Sideltsev 2015, p. 85:

27) KBo 2.5+ iii 34–35

nu ^mAparru-š lú ^{KUR}[Kal]ašma kūruriaḫ-ta kuit

conn Aparru-nom.sg.c man Kalasma get-hostile-3sg.pst as

As Aparru, the man of Kalasma, started hostilities, ...

The superficial structure of this example is similar to:

28) ṚV 5.3.1a

tvám agne váruṇo jāyase yát |

You, o Agni, are Varuṇa when you are born. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 664)

According to Sideltsev (2015, p. 85 fn. 47), in this Hittite sentence the verb functions either as a topic or as part of a broad informational focus. It can therefore be concluded that determining the landing site of the verb to the left of the complementizer is not straightforward.

However, there is also a very different explanation based on cliticization: Watkins (1963) and more recently and systematically Lowe (2014) argue that the relative pronouns could be enclitic, appearing in the ‘second position’ clitic cluster. Since the complementizer *yád* derives from the neuter form of the relative pronoun, this type of explanation would account for the fact that it can also appear within a clitic cluster (as in the following examples):

29) RV 1.51.10a

tákṣad yát ta uśánā sáhasā sáho |

When Uśanā fashions might with might for you. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 165)

30) RV 2.31.5c

stuṣé yád vām prthivi návyasā vácaḥ |

When, (o Heaven and) Earth, I will praise you two with a newer speech. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 446)

Here, the occurrences of *yád* may appear in clusters ending with the clitic forms of the personal pronouns *te* and *vām*.

According to many scholars, these uses of *yád* are comparable to certain relative forms found in Celtic, where relative clauses can be introduced by a relative particle **-io* < **-iod* (Ziegler 1992, p. 257, fn. 22) cliticized to the verb, as in Gaulish *dugiiontiio* < *dugiionti-io* ‘who honor’; *toncsiiontiio* ‘who will swear’³. Moreover, Old Irish relative verb forms are analysed in a similar way, with a clitic relative particle *-e* < PIE *-io*, e.g. *bertae* ‘who bear’ < *beronti-io*, the 3pl. relative form of *beirid* ‘to bear’.

³ See e.g. Thurneysen, Binchy, Bergin 1946, p. 323; Watkins 1963; Ziegler 1992, pp. 254–258.

2. Conclusions

This paper has examined how information is structured in the left periphery of the Vedic sentence, following the cartographic approach developed in generative syntax. The left periphery refers to the part of the clause that precedes the main verb, often used for pragmatic purposes such as topicalization or focalization. Three main phenomena were analysed: (1) left dislocation, (2) correlative constructions, and (3) the placement of constituents before the complementizer *yád*.

2.1 Left Dislocation (LD)

Noun phrases in Vedic are commonly placed at the beginning of the sentence and then resumed later by a demonstrative pronoun, typically *tad*. These dislocated elements generally function as topics. In many examples of RV and AV, the case of the resumptive pronoun matches that of the fronted noun phrase. While such constructions have traditionally been associated with prose texts, similar examples are also attested in poetic texts such as the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*.

In several instances, focus particles (e.g., *evá*, *íd*) follow the resumptive pronoun, indicating that LD may also serve to anticipate focal elements. This fact shows that topic and focus can co-occur in the Vedic sentence (contrary to what is claimed in Keydana 2011; 2018).

2.2 Correlative Constructions

Vedic makes extensive use of correlatives, where a relative clause precedes the main clause and is resumed by a demonstrative pronoun (*tad*). This structure, often referred to as the *diptyque normal*, is particularly frequent in the *Rgveda*. According to Cinque's analysis (2020), these relative clauses are treated as DPs rather than CPs, a view supported by the fact that *tad* is able to resume both correlatives and dislocated noun phrases.

2.3 Pre-*yád* Positioning

The presence of discourse elements to the left of the complementizer *yád* in Rgvedic texts suggests the existence of a functional position

outside the traditional CP field. Keydana (2011) proposes a *Df-slot* (discourse-functional slot) in this position, which does not align with Rizzi's (1997) model, where topic and focus projections are sandwiched between Force and Fin; however, this analysis is fully compatible with that of Rizzi (2001) and Danckaert (2012). In some cases, the finite verb appears before *yád*, raising questions about how this movement occurs without violating syntactic constraints such as the *Head Movement Constraint*. One proposal is that the verb moves as part of a larger phrase (XP), allowing it to precede *yád*. An alternative argument suggests that *yád*, derived from a relative pronoun, behaves as a second-position clitic (in line with Lowe's assumption that the pronoun *yad* can behave as a syntactic clitic). This phenomenon is comparable to relative constructions in Celtic, which are constructed using verb forms that can be traced back to prototypes containing the enclitic particle **-io*.

In conclusion, the left periphery model proposed by Rizzi appears to be applicable to Vedic clauses as well.

References

- ALEXIADOU, Artemis (2006), *Left Dislocation (including CLLD)*, in Martin Everaert, Henk van Riemsdijk (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, pp. 668–699. <<https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996591.ch37>>.
- BENINCÀ, Paola (2001), *The position of topic and focus in the left periphery*, in Guglielmo Cinque, Giampaolo Salvi (eds.), *Current Studies in Italian Syntax Offered to Lorenzo Renzi*, Elsevier-North Holland Academic Graphics, Amsterdam, pp. 39–64.
- BENINCÀ, Paola, and Cecilia POLETTI (2004), *Topic, Focus, and V2: Defining the CP Sublayers*, in Luigi Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP – The Cartography of Syntactic Structures*, Vol. 2, Oxford Academic, Oxford–New York, pp. 52–75.
- CINQUE, Guglielmo (1977), *The Movement Nature of Left Dislocation*, in “Linguistic Inquiry”, 8, 2, pp. 397–341.
- CINQUE, Guglielmo (2020), *The Syntax of Relative Clauses. A Unified Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- DAL LAGO, Nicoletta (2011), *Costituenti contrastati in Tito Livio: indagine su {TOPIC [LI]} in un campione delle Storie*, in “Padua Working Papers in Linguistics”, 4, pp. 37–69.
- DANCKAERT, Lieven (2012), *Latin Embedded Clauses: the Left Periphery*. *Linguistik aktuell* (Linguistics today, 184), John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam–Philadelphia.

- DEVINE, Andrew, and Laurence STEPHENS (2006), *Latin Word Order*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York.
- HALE, Mark (2018), *The syntax of Indo-Iranian*, in Jared Klein, Brian Joseph, Matthias Fritz (eds.), *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics*, Vol. 3, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin–Boston, pp. 1924–1942.
- HOCK, Hans Henrich (1989), *Conjoined we stand: theoretical implications of Sanskrit relative structures*, in “Studies in The Linguistic Sciences”, 19, pp. 93–126.
- KEYDANA, Götz (2011), *Wackernagel in the Language of the R̥gveda. A Reassessment*, in “Historische Sprachforschung / Historical Linguistics”, 124, pp. 106–133.
- KEYDANA, Götz (2018), *The syntax of Proto-Indo-European*, in Jared Klein, Brian Joseph, Matthias Fritz (eds.), *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics*, Vol. 3, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin–Boston, pp. 2195–228.
- KIPARSKY, Paul (1995), *Indo-European origins of Germanic syntax*, in Adrian Battye, Ian Roberts (eds.), *Clause Structure and Language Change*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 140–169.
- KRAPOVA, Iliyana (2010), *Bulgarian relative and factive clauses with an invariant complementizer*, in “Lingua”, 120, pp. 1240–1272.
- KRISCH, Thomas (2017), *Proto-Indo-European syntax*, in Mate Krapović (ed.), *The Indo-European Languages, Second Edition*, Routledge, Abingdon–New York, pp. 111–152.
- LAMBRECHT, Knud (2001), *Dislocation*, in Martin Haspelmath, Ekkehard König, Wulf Oesterreicher, Wolfgang Raible (eds.), *Language Typology and Language Universals*, Vol. 2, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin–Boston, pp. 1050–1078.
- LOWE, John (2014), *Accented clitics in the R̥gveda*, in “Transactions of the Philological Society”, 112, 1, pp. 5–43.
- LÜHR, Rosemarie (2017), *Stressed and unstressed particles in Old Indic*, in Josef Bayer, Volker Struckmeier (eds.), *Discourse Particles: Formal Approaches to their Syntax and Semantics*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin–Boston, pp. 281–303.
- OERTEL, Hanns (1926), *The Syntax of Cases in the Narrative and Descriptive Prose of the Brāhmaṇas. The Disjunct Use of Cases*, Carl Winter Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg.
- RAM-PRASAD, Krishnan J. (2022), *The Syntax of Relative Clauses and Related Phenomena in Proto-Indo-European*, PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge.
- RIZZ, Luigi (1997), *The fine structure of the left periphery*, in Liliane Haegeman (ed.) *Elements of Grammar: Handbook in Generative Syntax*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, pp. 281–337.

- RIZZI, Luigi (2001), *On the position Int(errogative) in the left periphery of the clause*, in Guglielmo Cinque, Giampaolo Salvi (eds.), *Current Studies in Italian Syntax: Essays Offered to Lorenzo Renzi*, Elsevier-North Holland Academic Graphics, Amsterdam, pp. 287–296.
- ROUSSOU, Anna (2000), *On the left periphery Modal particles and complementisers*, in “Journal of Greek Linguistics”, 1, pp. 65–94.
- SIDELTSEV, Andrej V. (2015), *Hittite clause architecture*, in “Revue d’Assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale”, 109, pp. 79–112.
- THURNEYSEN, Rudolf (1946), *A Grammar of Old Irish*, revised and enlarged edition translated from the German by Daniel A. Binchy and Osborn Bergin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin.
- VAI, Massimo (2021), *Some questions about yád in Vedic*, in Ghanshyam Sharma, John J. Lowe (eds.), *Trends in South Asian Linguistics*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin–Boston, pp. 23–42.
- VAI, Massimo (2024), *The relevance of B. Delbrück’s work on Indo-European syntax (a century after his death)*, in Savina Raynaud, Enrica Galazzi, Maria Paola Tenchini (eds.), *History of Linguistics 2021: Selected papers from the 15th International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHoLS 15), Milan, 28 August - 1 September*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam, pp. 179–197.
- WATKINS, Calvert (1963), *Preliminaries to a Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Syntax of the Old Irish Verb*, in “Celtica”, 6, pp. 1–49.
- WESTBURY, Josh (2016), *Left Dislocation: a typological overview*, in “Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus”, 50, pp. 21–45.
- ZIEGLER, Sabine (1992), *Zur Entwicklung der Relativsätze mit dem Relativpronomen jo- in den keltischen Sprachen*, in “Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft”, 53, pp. 251–270.
- ZYMAN, Erik, and Ničl KALIVODA (2020), *XP- and X0-movement in the Latin verb: Evidence from mirroring and anti-mirroring*, in “Glossa: a journal of general linguistics”, 5, 1, art. 20. <doi: <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.1049>>.

4. The Vedic Prose Corpus

Oliver Hellwig

Abstract

This paper introduces the Vedic Prose Corpus (VPC), a comprehensive digital resource designed to facilitate computational and philological research on ancient Vedic texts. The VPC addresses gaps in existing digital collections by providing standardized, linguistically annotated versions of Vedic prose texts, including newly digitized materials. The corpus offers multiple representations of each text: original, sandhi-resolved, and lemmatized versions, alongside machine and human translations where available. Additionally, the paper introduces a complementary intertextuality database that systematically documents parallel passages across different Vedic schools, with initial focus on the Soma ritual. This parallel corpus has the potential to enable novel approaches to cultural and sociolinguistic research on Vedic by facilitating the correlation of linguistic variations with historical and geographical metadata. Both resources will be made open source, enabling collaborative improvement.

Keywords

Vedic prose; Digital corpus; Intertextuality; Computational linguistics.

Vedic prose constitutes one of the most significant ancient text corpora. While predominantly focused on describing and explaining Vedic rituals, this corpus provides unique insights into the cultural and linguistic landscape preceding classical South Asian civilization. Despite its extraordinary linguistic and historical significance, researchers currently lack a comprehensive digital resource that offers unified access to Vedic prose in a format equally suited for linguistic and text-historical analysis, and equipped with cross-references between similar text passages.

Previous digitization efforts have yielded only partial solutions. The TITUS website¹ hosts numerous Vedic prose texts, but its presentation mimics printed editions, impeding automated processing. The GRETEL collection², while better aligned with computational workflows, encompasses only a fraction of the relevant sources. The Digital Corpus of Sanskrit (DCS)³ offers linguistic analysis, standardized citations, and metadata, but its manual curation process creates a data input bottleneck. Moreover, it lacks a platform-independent interface for data management. Finally, none of the mentioned resources provides reliable intertextuality information.

To address these limitations and meet the growing demand for computationally accessible resources, a group of scholars from Kyoto (Kyoko Amano⁴), Poznan (Sven Sellmer), and Zurich (the author of this paper) has initiated the development of a comprehensive Vedic prose corpus. This resource is specifically designed to integrate with quantitative methodologies and provides the structured data necessary for computational linguistic analysis. This paper presents the current state of this resource, called the Vedic Prose Corpus (VPC). Its first part introduces the data architecture and describes data coverage. In addition, it will give an idea of how this new corpus can be employed to answer practical research questions through prompting Large Language Models (LLM), using Keśava's commentary on the KauśS as a concrete example. Its second part describes a collection of textual parallels built on top of the VPC and their potential for linguistic research.

¹ <<https://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/>>.

² <<https://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel.html>>.

³ <<http://sanskrit-linguistics.org/dcs/index.php>>; source data available at <<https://github.com/OliverHellwig/sanskrit/tree/master/dcs/data>>.

⁴ In collaboration with Makoto Fushimi, Kyoto.

1. Design and structure of the corpus

The VPC aims to collect all existing Vedic texts, as listed, for example, in Gotō 1987, pp. 355–372, and their commentaries in a standardised format, supplemented with a linguistic analysis and text-external metadata. The corpus building process consists of three main steps: collecting digital texts, data cleaning and reformatting, and data augmentation. This section describes these steps and provides statistics on the resulting resource.

The first step in our work was to compile the available Vedic texts. Most significant texts have already been digitised by other scholars; we invested time collecting them from various websites and repositories including GRETIL, TITUS, and others. We also digitised and corrected several Vedic texts and commentaries in classical Sanskrit that were previously unavailable in digital form; see **Table 1**. A significant gap in the VPC is the absence of Vādhūla texts which we hope to include in the future, starting with the available partial editions of the VādhŚS (Ikari 1997; Voegeli 2022).

Table 1: Newly digitised (parts of) Vedic texts in the VPC

Text	Edition	Coverage
ŚB	Sharma 1967	complete
MaitrU	Cowell 1870	complete
LāṭŚS	Vedāntavāgīśa 1872	complete
BhārŚS	Kashikar 1964	13.13–15.3
VaikhŚS	Caland 1941	8–9, 11–15.21
Dhanvin on DrāhŚS	Vira 1934	DrāhŚS 11–15
Agnisvāmin on LāṭŚS	Vedāntavāgīśa 1872	LāṭŚS 1–3, 8–10
Varadattasuta on ŚāṅkhŚS	Hillebrandt 1981	ŚāṅkhŚS 5–9
Devapāla on KāṭhGS	Shāstrī 1928, 1934	KāṭhGS 1–44

Each text is stored in a separate plain text file named according to the abbreviation system established in Griffiths 2009, pp. 453–456. These text files are organized following the indigenous genre classification, labelled as Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and so forth. All text files belonging to one genre are collected in a directory labelled with the genre title. Commentaries on Vedic texts are stored in separate sub-directories named according to the pattern '[genre] commentaries'. Meta-information for each text file, including the edition details and

the person(s) responsible for digitization, is provided in markdown documents stored in the corpus subdirectories. Metadata about Śākhā affiliation as well as coarse chronological and geographical assignments will be provided in a central XML file, using text abbreviations (i.e. file titles) as keys.

While TEI-XML represents the current standard format for text editions in Digital Humanities, we deliberately chose not to use it for several reasons. Primarily, we wanted to maintain readability and allow direct access to the source data. TEI-XML requires additional processing steps when using the data for computational analysis, as well as dedicated editing interfaces. As the files will be shared in a public `github` repository, other scholars will be able to perform corrections directly in the text files, thus improving the text quality on the long run. Furthermore, our organizational structure (see below) facilitates straightforward conversion of the data into other formats; it requires only minor adaptations to our data creation and maintenance scripts to produce alternative outputs such as XML.

After collecting the text files, we perform comprehensive data cleanup procedures. This primarily involves removing all annotations that previous scholars may have incorporated into the texts. While this process is partially automated using regular expressions, inconsistencies in many encoding schemes prevent full automation, thus necessitating significant manual intervention. Particularly problematic in this regard were the ĀśvŚS and the ŚāṅkhŚS. M. Tokunaga, who digitized these texts, chose to mark both resolved sandhis and regular spaces between strings with the same symbol, making rule-based reconstruction of the unsandhied forms impossible. S. Sellmer and the author of this paper manually restored the sandhied versions of these texts.

Subsequently, we standardize the reference system for each file. When the editor of a text has established an accepted citation system, we maintain that system. This is the case for the majority of our texts; most Sūtra texts, for example, are clearly structured into (multiple levels of) chapters and then into sūtras. We standardize such structures by using increasing numbers for each chapter level, separated by dots, and finally appending the sūtra number. This results in reference keys such as “1.5.3” or “3.4.3.22” that are well established in Vedic Studies and Indology. These keys serve to uniquely identify one line or sūtra of a Vedic text across different representations (e.g. lemmatized versions), and to link it with translations and Sanskrit commentaries. In

particular, the complete commentary on one text line is prefixed with this key, and sentence breaks in the commentary text itself are indicated by slashes. We are still in the process of discussing whether this representation is optimal; at least it facilitates the retrieval of a text line's commentaries, though breaking the "one sentence, one line" principle used for the Vedic sources.

More challenging are the numerous cases where editors have split the text into numbered chapters but refrained from numbering at subordinate (sentence, *sūtra*) levels. We can broadly identify three scenarios. Some editions, such as Varma 1940 (*ĀgñiveśyaGS*), are numbered at the chapter level but indicate sentence or *sūtra* breaks only by (double) *daṇḍas*. We represent each such *daṇḍa*-terminated sequence as a separate numbered line in our text files. Other editions, such as Caland 1941 (*VaikhŚS*) or Schroeder 1881 (*MS*; on which see Amano 2009, p. 9), structure the text within a single chapter by small editorial marks without resolving sandhi or inserting *daṇḍas*. Interpreting these marks as sentence breaks, we resolve sandhi and again store the resulting sentences as individual numbered lines. We acknowledge that this practice has raised concerns among some scholars (see, for example, Hoffmann 1960, p. 2 on Raghu Vira's edition of the *JB*). However, long weakly structured text segments, while intelligible to trained human readers, pose significant challenges for automatic text processing and would, moreover, not be considered acceptable in editions of modern Western texts.

The most problematic cases arise in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature, where several major texts are edited without even such editorial marks, for example, the *ŚBM* (Weber 1855). While sentence-split versions of the Yajurvedic *Samhitās* were made available to us by K. Amano, splitting the *ŚBM* remains work in progress at the time of writing this paper, performed by M. Fushimi (8), S. Sellmer (7, 9) and the author of this paper (3, 4). For this task, we generally follow the English translation of Eggeling 1882–1900. Before starting the sentence split in the *ŚBM*, our group intensively discussed critical cases and arrived at the following decisions:

- Text lines should contain complete sentences but not indicate syntactic units of a sentence. In particular, this implies that subordinate clauses (e.g. relative or causal clauses) do not occupy independent lines but are joined with their governing clause. The main exception to this rule are *yad* phrases introducing a

topic, e.g. ŚBM 7.5.2.3: *yad v eva paśuśīrṣāṇy upadadhāti*, which we interpret as independent clauses.

- Particular attention is paid to connect direct speeches with their containing clauses, a decision made in response to issues arising during the annotation of the Vedic Treebank (Hellwig et al. 2020). This includes even cases with elided speech verb as at ŚBM 3.1.1.7: *tasmād u ha na pratīcīnaśīrāḥ śayīta ned devān abhiprasārya śayā iti*, where the syntactic head of the direct speech *ned ... śayai* is not expressed; this kind of speech verb elision is rather frequent with ritual actions accompanied by a mantra, but without an appropriate speech verb. Moreover, this rule occasionally serves to connect a direct speech with a sentence that is typically interpreted as independent, due to the presence of enclitic particles in second (and third) position; e.g. ŚBM 9.1.2.14: *āsīnaḥ kurvītety u haika āhuḥ*. If more than one sentence in direct speech depends from one speech verb, all but the first sentence of the speech are written in new lines. If the particle *iti* simply marks the end of a mantra that is explained in the subsequent text, we do not connect the cited mantra with the subsequent text.

After converting the source materials into well-structured text files devoid of extraneous annotations, we process each file with a linguistic analysis model. This model is a character-level sequence-to-sequence transformer trained on data from the Digital Corpus of Sanskrit (Nehrdich, Hellwig, Keutzer 2024). Evaluation indicates that the model approaches human performance in lexical and morpho-syntactic analysis, while it achieves performance comparable to human inter-annotator agreement for syntactic dependencies (on which see Biagetti et al. 2021). For each source text, we generate two analyzed versions: one with resolved sandhis, and another with lemmatized forms. These analyses are stored in separate files that maintain the structure of the source file, preserving the same sentence keys. The analyzed files are organized in the **lemma** and **unsandhied** subdirectories within the genre directory, using identical file names as their source texts.

One current focus of our work is collating scholarly translations of Vedic texts. Most of these translations require digitization before they can be aligned at the sentence level with their source texts. We employ a prompt-based methodology for the alignment, providing a generative LLM with the sentence-segmented source text alongside its

unsegmented translation, then instructing it to divide the translation into segments corresponding to the Vedic sentences. This approach has proven remarkably effective, demonstrating how AI models can successfully manage tasks that traditionally demand specialized philological knowledge. Following alignment, the line-by-line translations are prefixed with their corresponding line keys and stored in the appropriate `translation` subdirectories, again maintaining the same file naming conventions as the source texts. **Table 2** gives an overview of the translations aligned so far, and their coverage of the source texts. Additionally, we provide machine translations of all texts generated using the Dharmamitra API⁵.

As with Sanskrit commentaries, aligned scholarly translations significantly enhance comprehension of the texts. Furthermore, we intend to utilize these – predominantly English – translations as pivots for advanced computational applications. Most deep learning systems are optimized for English language processing, and we anticipate that existing models for text similarity or information retrieval will perform more effectively on these translations than custom models developed specifically for Vedic data. To demonstrate that these applications are not merely theoretical claims, we present two practical examples of how current prompt-based LLMs can extract specific information from texts in the VPC. The VPC includes Keśava’s complete commentary on the KauśS (provided by Arlo Griffiths). Philological research frequently requires locating passages addressing specific topics – a potentially time-consuming endeavour when working with extensive texts such as Keśava’s Paddhati. These tasks can be significantly expedited by utilizing LLMs with English (machine) translations as pivot texts.

In our first experiment, we prompted two LLMs to identify all passages where Keśava describes the digging of a hole in the ground, specifically distinguishing this action from mentions of holes in objects. While traditional keyword searches could locate all mentions of ‘hole’ in the text, they would struggle to distinguish between such contextually different uses. LLM-based approaches demonstrate clear superiority over keyword search in this regard, as they can distinguish these semantic nuances based on contextual understanding, a capability evidenced by the following results (the Sanskrit source passages were supplied manually):

⁵ <<https://dharmamitra.org/>>.

3.1.2	C	<i>śāpeṭaṃ gartaṃ nikhanet</i>
3.1.12	C	<i>śāpeṭaṃ nikhanet</i>
3.1.15	C	<i>śāpeṭaṃ nikhanet</i>
3.1.16	C	<i>nāvyāyā dakṣiṇāvarte śāpeṭaṃ nikhanet</i>
3.7.25	C	<i>khadāyāṃ bhūmau</i>
4.9.16	G	<i>oṣadhikhananam</i>
5.3.8–9	C	<i>vrajati kṛtyānikhananasthānam</i>
5.5.10	C	<i>gartaṃ khanati tūṣṇīm</i>
5.5.12–13	C	<i>pūrvāṣādhāsu gartaṃ khanati</i>
5.10.51	C, G	<i>yatra kvacit khanati ...</i>
9.1.9	G	<i>bhūmiṃ dagdhāṃ samutkhāya</i>
9.3.9–11	G	<i>dagdhaṃ khātva</i>
11.6.18–19	C	<i>gartaṃ khanati</i>

The first LLM(C) demonstrated superior performance in this task, retrieving 11 relevant passages compared to only 3 identified by the second model (G). This substantial difference in retrieval efficacy illustrates the varying capabilities among current LLMs. It should be noted that this represents only a snapshot of current technological capabilities, and future LLMs may significantly outperform these results.

To evaluate an LLM on a more complex task, we conducted a second experiment in which we instructed the first LLM to compile all statements Keśava makes regarding materials used in constructing sacrificial implements. We additionally requested a preliminary classification of these materials, with results formatted as a nested LaTeX list. The beginning portion of this automatically generated list is reproduced in the following without modifications:

- Metal
 - Copper: 1.3.2, 1.9.7, 3.6.12, 4.5.19, 4.6.7, 4.10.15
 - Bronze: 1.7.9, 11.8.6, 11.8.17, 11.8.23–24, 13.2.15
 - Iron: 2.7.29, 3.1.18, 3.3.21, 4.7.7, 7.3.3
 - Gold: 8.1.29, 10.2.18
- Wood
- ...

During manual verification of the results, we observed that entries labelled as ‘copper’ typically correspond to Sanskrit *kāṁśya-*, which more accurately translates to ‘bronze’ (Hellwig 2009, p. 92). This terminological discrepancy does not reflect a failure in the LLM’s text parsing capabilities but rather stems from limitations in the underlying machine translation. This observation underscores the importance of further training these models with high-quality aligned data as provided by the VPC.

In addition to their use in information retrieval which we just demonstrated with two basic examples, aligned translations are valuable for the footnotes they contain, which discuss difficult terms or point out parallel passages. Whenever possible, we retain these footnotes during translation alignment, applying a simple markup scheme. While not currently leveraged, we plan to train custom question-answering systems with this data, thus making the valuable philological insights contained in footnotes more readily accessible to researchers. – As becomes apparent from **Table 2**, some digitized translations are still under copyright. We will use these translations in our internal workflows, e.g. for information retrieval, but will not make them publicly available.

Table 2: Digitised and aligned translations in the VPC

Text	Translation	Coverage
JB 1.66–364	Bodewitz 1990	complete
PB	Caland 1931	4, 6–10
GB	Patyal 1969	1.1–3
ŚāṅkhŚS	Caland 1953	complete
BaudhŚS	Kashikar 2003	6–9
BhārŚS	Kashikar 1964	complete
MānŚS	Gelder 1963	1–5
ĀśvŚS	Mylius 1994	complete
VaitS	Caland 1910	complete

To summarise this section, **Table 3** illustrates the levels of information provided by the VPC for the sūtra ŚāṅkhŚS 5.1.3. The source text of the sūtras is supplemented with sandhi-resolved and lemmatized versions. Moreover, we have Caland’s English translation and the machine translation at our disposal, the latter not being markedly inferior to the human one in our opinion. Since Varadattasuta’s comment on

this part of the ŚāṅkhŚS is integrated in the VPC (see **Table 1**), its text is provided together with a lemmatized version and a machine translation. – **Table 4** gives an overview of the corpus coverage, reflecting our focus on the Brāhmaṇa and Sūtra literature, which currently contribute most to the VPC data set.

Table 3: Information currently available in the VPC for ŚāṅkhŚS 5.1.3. Elements in round brackets are not part of the VPC

Source text	5.1.3 <i>candramā me daivo brahmety upāṁśu tvaṁ mānuṣa ity uccaiḥ</i>
Unsandhied	5.1.3 <i>candramāḥ me daivaḥ brahmā iti upāṁśu tvam mānuṣaḥ iti uccaiḥ</i>
Lemmatized	5.1.3 <i>candramas mad daiva brahman iti upāṁśu tvad mānuṣa iti uccaiḥ</i>
Translation	5.1.3 “The moon is my divine brahman” whisperingly, “Thou art my human (brahman)” loudly. (Caland 1953)
Machine translation	5.1.3 “Candramā is my divine brahman,” he says in a whisper, “you are my human one,” he says aloud.
Commentary (Varadattasuta)	
Source text	5.1.3 <i>candramā me daivo brahmā etadupāṁśu / tvaṁ mānuṣa etaduccairbrūyāt / evaṁ brahmāṇaṁ vṛṇīte mantraliṅgāt /</i>
Lemmatized	5.1.3 <i>candramas mad daiva brahman etad upāṁśu tvad mānuṣa etad uccaiḥ brū evam brahman vṛ mantra liṅga</i>
Machine translation	5.1.3 The moon is my divine Brahman; this [formula] one should recite in a low voice. You are human; this [formula] one should recite loudly. Thus, one chooses the Brahman according to the indication of the mantra.

Table 4: Current composition of the corpus

Genre	Texts	Lines	Words	Transl. lines
Brāhmaṇas	11	86,525	666,106	6,327
Āraṇyakas	1	1,528	12,773	875
Upaniṣads	1	279	6,138	
Śrautasūtras	14	72,706	645,355	16,389
Gṛhyasūtras	17	15,877	169,157	
Śulbasūtras	1	565	3,527	
Dharmasūtras	4	3,527	32,260	2,575
Śrauta. (comm.)	4	2,407	63,409	
Gṛhya. (comm.)	3	1,810	50,921	
Total	56	185,224	1,649,646	26,166

2. Intertextual links

In parallel to compiling the VPC, we create a second resource describing intertextuality in Vedic prose, which is tightly linked to the primary corpus. For the *Samhitā* texts intertextuality is a widely recognized phenomenon studied since the 19th century, for which high-coverage and high-quality resources are available (Bloomfield 1906; Hellwig, Sellmer, Amano 2023). However, our interest in studying intertextuality in Vedic prose goes beyond the mere (near) literal repetitions collected in these resources. Instead, we aim to collect parallel passages that are similar in terms of content, but not necessarily in terms of language. In our opinion, Vedic prose is a worthwhile corpus for assembling such data: while scholars working with these texts recognize the high number of intertextual connections, there has been no effort to collect these links in a format that benefits both philology and linguistics.

To build a high-quality database of parallel passages, we currently concentrate on the Soma ritual whose parallel descriptions in the main Śrautasūtras were analyzed in Caland, Henry 1906–07. We have OCRed this book and transformed the original text into an XML format that links to the sentences in the prose corpus. Currently, this XML file is supplemented with descriptions of individual steps from texts not covered by Caland and Henry; this is especially relevant for links between the Śrauta and the Brāhmaṇa literature where we can expect interesting differences in terms of content and language. The following listing shows a small extract from this XML file, namely step 130 of the Agniṣṭoma according to the numbering used in Caland, Henry 1906–07. The XML resource retains the original numbering as well as the title and summary of the ritual step. At a deeper level of the hierarchy, the occurrences recorded by Caland and Henry were mapped manually onto a format that is compatible with the VPC sentence keys (see **Section 2**). Occasional errors in the book have been corrected during this mapping process:

```
<step number="130">
<description>Installation du kalaça (dronakala-
çasthāpanam).</description>
<citations>
  <citation text="LāṭṢ">
    <lines>
```

```

        <line source="Caland and Henry (1906-
07)">1.9.20-26</line>
        <line source="Caland and Henry (1906-
07)">1.10.1-20</line>
    </lines>
</citation>
...
<citation text="PB">
    <lines>
        <line source="Caland (1931)">6.5.3</line>
        ...
    </lines>
</citation>
<citation text="JB">
    <lines>
        <line source="Bodewitz (1990)">1.73.13-22</
line>
    </lines>
</citation>
<citation text="BhārŚS">
    <lines>
        <line source="OH">13.12.11-14</line>
    </lines>
</citation>
</citations>
</step>

```

In addition to the original attestations, the XML version includes steps from the Jyotiṣṭoma description in JB 1.66–364 (extracted from Bodewitz 1990), the complete ritual in the BhārŚS, steps 1–98 in the VaikhŚS, as well as casual mentions in other scholarly works (Caland 1931 in the example). At the moment, we are integrating the Agniṣṭoma description in ŚBM 3–4. Details about the current coverage of this intertextuality resource are presented in **Table 5**.

In addition to the Agniṣṭoma, we are planning to integrate parallel information for other Vedic rituals, in particular for the Agnyādhāna (Krick 1982) and the animal sacrifice (Schwab 1886). To reduce the extent of manual annotation, we are developing a deep learning intertextuality detection system which we hope to describe in a future publication.

Table 5: Current composition of the intertextuality data set

Number of steps	401
Number of citations	2,101
Main secondary sources	
Caland, Henry 1906–07	1,880
This project	504
Other sources	28
Main primary sources	
BhārŚS	288
VaikhŚS	83
JaimŚS	23
ŚBM	17

We anticipate two important use cases for this new intertextuality resource. First, we can directly observe how different schools performed the same ritual and may use this data for cultural studies; see the idea of building a ritual grammar in Michaels 2016, especially p. 81ff. Second, we believe that the parallel data is highly relevant for sociolinguistic research: In sociolinguistics, researchers aim to understand how various factors interact with language. To this end, statements about the same fact are elicited from different speakers. After collecting additional information about each speaker, the parallel data are related to speaker metadata. The Vedic prose provides an excellent collection of such parallel statements. Different schools and traditions recording the same ritual steps function analogously to different speakers describing the same event in sociolinguistic studies of modern languages.

The school affiliations, chronological relationships, and geographical distributions of these texts serve as the equivalent of speaker metadata, allowing us to correlate linguistic variations with these socio-historical factors. This makes the collection of ritual parallels, in association with the VPC data, particularly suitable for sociolinguistic studies of Vedic dialects and thus opens relevant perspectives for future research.

References

- AMANO, Kyoko (2009), *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā I–II. Übersetzung der Prosapartien mit Kommentar zur Lexik und Syntax der älteren vedischen Prosa* (Münchener Forschungen zur historischen Sprachwissenschaft, Vol. 9), Hempen Verlag, Bremen.
- BIAGETTI, Erica, HELWIG, Oliver, SCARLATA, Salvatore, ACKERMANN, Elia, and Paul WIDMER (2021), *Evaluating Syntactic Annotation of Ancient Languages. Lessons from the Vedic Treebank*, in “Old World”, pp. 1–32.
- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice (1906), *A Vedic Concordance* (Harvard Oriental Series Vol. 10), Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- BODEWITZ, Hendrik Wilhelm (1990), *The Jyotiṣoma Ritual. Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I*, 66–364, E.J. Brill, Leiden.
- CALAND, Willem (1910), *Das Vaitānasūtra des Atharvaveda*, Johannes Müller, Amsterdam.
- CALAND, Willem (1931), *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa. The Brāhmaṇa of Twenty Five Chapters*, Asiatic Society, Calcutta.
- CALAND, Willem (1941), *Vaikhānasa-śrautasūtram*, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.
- CALAND, Willem (1953), *Śāṅkhāyana-śrautasūtra*, The International Academy of Indian Culture, Nagpur.
- CALAND, Willem, and Victor HENRY (1906–1907), *L’Agniṣoma. Description complète de la forme normale du sacrifice de soma dans le culte védique*, Ernest Leroux, Paris.
- COWELL, Edward Byles (1870), *The Maitri or Maitrāyaṇīya Upanishad*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, London.
- EGGELING, Julius (1882–1900), *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa According to the Text of the Mādhyandina School*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- GELDER, Jeanette M. van (1963), *The Mānava śrautasūtra (English Translation)*, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi.
- GOTŌ, Toshifumi (1987), *Die “I. Präsensklasse” im Vedischen*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien.
- GRIFFITHS, Arlo (2009), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda. Kāṇḍas 6 and 7. A New Edition with Translation and Commentary*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen.
- HELLWIG, Oliver (2009), *Wörterbuch der mittelalterlichen indischen Alchemie*, Barkhuis, Eelde.
- HELLWIG, Oliver, SCARLATA, Salvatore, ACKERMANN, Elia, and Paul WIDMER (2020), *The Treebank of Vedic Sanskrit*, in *Proceedings of the Twelfth Language Resources and Evaluation Conference*, edited by Nicoletta Calzolari, Frédéric Béchet, Philippe Blache, Khalid Choukri, Christopher Cieri, Thierry Declerck, Sara Goggi, et al., ELRA, Marseille, pp. 5137–5146. <<https://aclanthology.org/2020.lrec-1.632/>>.

- HELLWIG, Oliver, SELLMER, Sven, and Kyoko AMANO (2023), *The Vedic Corpus as a Graph. An Updated Version of Bloomfield's Vedic Concordance*, in *Proceedings of the Computational Sanskrit & Digital Humanities: Selected Papers Presented at the 18th World Sanskrit Conference*, Association for Computational Linguistics, Canberra, pp. 188–200. <<https://aclanthology.org/2023.wsc-csdh.13/>>.
- HILLEBRANDT, Alfred (1981), *Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, Meharchand Lachhmandas Publications, New Delhi.
- HOFFMANN, Karl (1960), *Textkritisches zum Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa*, in “Indo-Iranian Journal”, 4, 1, pp. 1–36.
- IKARI, Yasuke (1997), *Vādhūla śrautasūtra 1.5–1.6*, in “Zinbun”, 31, pp. 1–64.
- KASHIKAR, Chintaman Ganesh (1964), *The Śrauta, Paṭyamedhika, and Pariśeṣa Sūtras of Bharadvāja*, Vaidika Saṁśodhana Mandala, Poona.
- KASHIKAR, Chintaman Ganesh (2003), *The Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi.
- KRICK, Hertha (1982), *Das Ritual der Feuergründung (Agnyādheya)*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien.
- MICHAELS, Axel (2016), *Homo Ritualis: Hindu Ritual and Its Significance to Ritual Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- MYLIUS, Klaus (1994), *Āśvalāyana-śrautasūtra. Erstmalig vollständig übersetzt, erläutert und mit Indices versehen*, Institut für Indologie, Wichtach.
- NEHRDICH, Sebastian, HELLWIG, Oliver, and Kurt KEUTZER (2024), *One Model Is All You Need: ByT5-Sanskrit, a Unified Model for Sanskrit NLP Tasks*, in *Findings of the Association for Computational Linguistics: EMNLP 2024*, edited by Yaser Al-Onaizan, Mohit Bansal, and Yun-Nung Chen, Association for Computational Linguistics, Miami, pp. 13742–51. <<https://aclanthology.org/2024.findings-emnlp/>>.
- PATYAL, Hukam Chand (1969), *Gopatha-Brāhmaṇa*, PhD Thesis, Poona University.
- SCHROEDER, Leopold von (1881), *Maitrāyaṇī-Saṁhitā*, Brockhaus, Leipzig.
- SCHWAB, Julius (1886), *Das Altindische Thieropfer*, Verlag von Andreas Deichert, Erlangen.
- SHARMA, Belikoth Ramachandra (1967), *Ṣadvimśa Brāhmaṇa with Vedārtha-prakāśa of Sāyana*, Kendriya Sanskrit, Tirupati.
- SHĀSTRĪ, Madhusūdana Kaula (1928), *The Laugākṣi-Gṛhya-Sūtras, Volume I*, Nirṇaya Sagar Press, Bombay.
- SHĀSTRĪ, Madhusūdana Kaula (1934), *The Laugākṣi-Gṛhya-Sūtras, Volume II*, Nirṇaya Sagar Press, Bombay.
- VARMA, V.L.A.R. (1940), *Āgñiveśyagrhyasūtra*, Bhaskara Press, Trivandrum.
- VEDĀNTAVĀGĪŚA, Ānandachandra (1872), *Śrauta Sūtra of Lāṭyāyana with the Commentary of Agniswāmī*, Valmiki Press, Calcutta.
- VIRA, Raghu (1934), *Drāhyāyana-Śrautasūtra. With the Commentary of Dhanvīn. Patalas 11–15*, in “Journal of Vedic Studies”, 1, 1, pp. 13–80.

- VOEGELI, François (2022), *The Fifth Prapāṭhaka of the Vādhūla Śrautasūtra*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- WEBER, Albrecht (1855), *The White Yajurveda. Part II*, Ferd. Dümmler's Verlagsbuchhandlung, Berlin.

PART II

LEXICON

5. The meaning and etymology of Skt. *sūkará-*

Alexander Lubotsky

Abstract

This essay re-examines the meaning and etymology of the Sanskrit word *sūkará-*, traditionally glossed as ‘boar, pig’. Through detailed textual and comparative analysis, the study shows that in early Vedic sources *sūkará-* refers not to a domesticated pig but to a wild, animal, later associated with the boar of the cosmogonic myth. Challenging the common derivation from Proto-Indo-European *suH-* ‘pig’, the author argues instead for a connection with Middle Persian *hūkar* ‘porcupine’, reconstructing a Proto-Indo-Iranian form *suHkara-* meaning ‘porcupine’. The article situates this term within a broader network of Indo-Iranian animal names of likely Central Asian origin, illustrating how semantic shifts and folk etymology shaped the later Indo-Aryan development of *sūkará-* into the ordinary word for ‘pig’.

Keywords

Boar; Pig; Porcupine; *sūkará*.

For Proto-Iranian, we can reconstruct two terms for domestic pigs, both of Indo-European origin:

- Plr. **huH-* ‘pig’ (YAv. *hū-* m., BMP *hwk /xūg/*, Oss. *x^wy / xu*, etc.) < PIE **suH-* (Gr. *ūs* m./f. ‘pig’, Lat. *sūs* m./f. ‘pig’, OHG and OE *sū* f. ‘sow’);
- Plr. **part^sa-* ‘piglet’ (YAv. **parsa-* m. ‘piglet’, Khot. *pā’sa-* ‘pig, hog’) < PIE **porkō-* (Lat. *porcus* m. ‘pig’, OIr. *orc* m. ‘id.’; Lith. *pařšas* ‘barrow, piglet’; CS *praře* n. ‘piglet’; OE *fearh* m. ‘farrow, pig’).

In contrast to Iranian, Indo-Aryan lacks the original Indo-European vocabulary for domestic pigs, a gap that may be explained by differing migration routes. On their journey from Central Asia through the Hindukush into the Swat Valley, the Indo-Aryans were unable to bring pigs with them and did not practice pig husbandry for a period of time. This interruption possibly led to the loss of the inherited words for ‘pig’ and ‘piglet’¹.

At first sight, however, this account seems to be contradicted by the Sanskrit word *sūkará-*, which is repeatedly linked in the scholarly literature to the Indo-European term for ‘pig’. As we shall see, this connection raises several problems, but let us begin by considering the meaning of the word itself.

1. The meaning of *sūkará-*

Our major dictionaries unanimously assign to it the meaning ‘boar, pig, hog’, cf.:

- Böhtlingk/Roth 1855–1875: ‘Schwein, Eber’;
- Grassmann 1873: ‘Schwein’;
- Monier-Williams 1899: ‘a boar, hog, pig, swine’;
- Mayrhofer 1986–1996: ‘wilder Eber, wildes Schwein’.

1.1. In the earliest Vedic texts, the meaning of *sūkará-* is somewhat elusive. In the ṚV, the word appears only once, in 7.55.4ab, where a dog is urged not to bark at “us” but instead to chase a *sūkará-*:

¹ In a forthcoming paper, Asko Parpola draws attention to the important fact that pigs are absent from the Sintashta culture, presumably because (unlike in the Abashevo culture) there were no oaks and thus no acorns to feed them (see Koryakova, Epimakhov 2007, pp. 65, 88). This would suggest that the Indo-Aryans must have abandoned the vocabulary associated with pig husbandry at a considerably earlier stage.

RV 7.55.4

tvám sūkarásya dardṛhi²
tāva dardartu sūkarāḥ |
stotṛñ índrasya rāyasi
kīm asmān duchunāyase
ní śú svapa ||

Keep tearing at the boar; let the boar keep tearing at you. You are barking at the praisers of Indra. Why do you torment us? Go to sleep! (Transl. Jamison, Brereton 2014)

It is quite possible, of course, that *sūkará-* here refers to a boar, but it can likewise be any wild animal, usually chased by dogs³, so that the RV passage is not very helpful.

Things become better in the AV, where *sūkará-* refers to a mythological animal, who digged up the Earth in a cosmogonic myth:

PS 6.7.2⁴

yāṁ suparṇaḥ paryapaśyad
antar mahat y arṇave |
tāṁ sūkara tvaṁ māyayā
*triḥ samudrād ud *ābharaḥ ||*

You, o *sūkará*, with [your] extraordinary power, three times brought up from the ocean this [Earth], which the eagle spotted, inside the great swell. (Transl. after Griffiths 2009, pp. 90–91)

The myth is well known from all schools of the Yajurveda and is summarized in Kuiper 1970 as follows: “[A] cosmogonic boar brought some mud upward from the bottom of the Waters, which then became the beginning of the Earth. Originally it was as small as the boar’s snout, but soon, while still floating on the surface of the Waters, it began to grow.” (pp. 101–102)

² For the genitive object in this construction see Gaedicke 1880, p. 44: “Der Genitiv nach *dar* R.V. 7,55,4 ... bezeichnet nicht das Ziel sondern das Object und findet seine Analogie an dem griechischen Genitiv nach ἀπτεσθαι, θιγγάνειν etc.” The root *dṛ̥-* ‘to crack, split, break, burst’ (RV+) is otherwise always transitive with a sole exception of RV 6.27.5cd *vṛcivato yád dhariyūpṛīyāyāṁ | hán pūrve árdhe bhiyásāparo dārt ||* “...when at the Hariyūpiyā (River) he [Indra] smashed the Vṛcivants in the front division, and the rear (division) shattered from fear.” (Jamison, Brereton 2014).

³ Anticipating the etymological discussion below, we may even consider that *sūkará-* is another, older word for a porcupine. It is certainly for a reason that the Sanskrit name for a porcupine is *śvāvīdh-* (= ‘dog-piercer’), attested since the *Atharvaveda*.

⁴ Almost identical to PS 6.7.3ab *yāṁ samudrād udabharo bhūmiṁ sūkara māyayā*.

The same myth is hinted at when the AV describes the discovery of a medicinal plant:

ŚS 2.27.2ab (= 5.14.1ab, PS 2.16.2ab, 7.1.1)

suparṇās tvā_a nv avindat

sūkarās tvākhanaṇ nasā́ |

The eagle discovered you [the medicinal plant], the *sūkará* dug you with its snout. (Translation after Griffiths 2009, p. 259; cf. also Griffiths 2009, pp. 90–91 for a discussion of these passages).

This cosmogonic boar has no name in the *Yajurveda*, but simply called *varāhá*- ‘wild boar’, and the same term is used already in the AV, in very similar contexts, cf., for instance,

PS 3.15.2a

yāṇi tvā varāho akhanad

You (o Earth), whom the wild boar dug up...

Also the compound *varāhamanyu*- ‘boar’s wrath’ in the PS hymn to Surā (5.10) refers to the cosmogonic myth (Lubotsky 2002, p. 59).

PS 5.10.4cd

varāhamanyur ajan_y

uttānapādam ardaya | |

Boar’s wrath has arisen: shake the one with her feet upwards (= the Earth).

Given this parallelism, it is only natural to assume that *varāhá*- and *sūkará*- function as synonyms—a view already suggested by Kuiper (1970, p. 102: “the cosmogonic boar, who seems to be identical with the ‘hog’ (*sūkará*) of the Atharva-Veda”). Nevertheless, there is one passage in the AV where the two terms are explicitly contrasted:

ŚS 12.1.48

malvāṇ bibhratī gurubhṛd

bhadrāpāśya nidhānaṇ titikṣūh |

varāhēṇa prthivī saṃvidānā

sūkarāya ví jihīte mṛgāya | |

While she (the Earth) bears a wise (*gurú*) one, she is bearing a silly one [as well]; she endures the dwelling of a good one [as well as] of a bad one; the earth, who is united with the boar, opens up for the wild *sūkará*.

Interestingly enough, *sūkará*- and *varāhā*- are inverted in the parallel PS passage:

PS 17.5.6cd

sūkareṇa pṛthivī saṃvidānā

*varāhāya vi *jihīte mṛgāya*

the earth, who is united with the *sūkará*, opens up for the wild boar. (Cf. also Selva 2014, p. 57)

Obviously, *varāhā*- and *sūkará*- cannot refer to the same animal here, since they form an antonymical pair, but both are called *mṛgá*- ‘a wild, forest animal’.

In the PS, we once encounter the female *sūkarī*-. The passage reads:

PS 10.1.8

kaṇvā yā gardabhīva

nibhasat⁵ sūkarīva |

tasyai pratipravartaya

taptam aśmānam āsani ||

The Kaṇvā with her hanging butt like a jenny, like a *sūkarī* – hurl a hot stone into her mouth!

The image underlying the simile in the first two *pādas* is not entirely clear. However, the Kaṇvās / Sadānvās are frequently depicted as women with sagging breasts (*lambanastanī*-, PS 6.8.4, 10.1.1), so the passage fits well within that tradition. In any case, it demonstrates that the Indo-Aryans were well acquainted with the *sūkará*-; otherwise, there would not have been a distinct term for the female of the species.

For the *Samhitās*, then, we may conclude that *sūkará*- denotes a wild, forest-dwelling animal, one that appears in similar contexts with a wild boar, but is not identical with it.

1.2. In the *Yajurveda*, *sūkará*- appears only in the lists of wild animals to be bound to the sacrificial stakes during the Aśvamedha ritual. Within these lists, which are organized in groups of eleven, the *sūkará*- is ded-

⁵ For *nibhasad*- ‘with buttocks hanging down’, cf. further PB 13.11.6 *somāḥ pavanta indava ity anuṣṭubho nibhasado bhavanti pratiṣṭhāyai* “(The verses beginning:) ‘The somas, the drops, are being clarified’ are *anuṣṭubh*(-verse)s with their hinderpart directed netherward.” (Transl. Caland 1931, p. 342, who adds the following comment, however: “The word *nibhasadaḥ* is left unexplained by Sāyaṇa; its exact meaning is not clear.”).

icated to Indra. Two textual variants are attested: one in the VS and the MS, and the other in the TS and the KSA:

VS 24.40 (~ MS 3.14.21:177.4–5)

*khaṇḡo vaiśvadevāḥ śvākṛṣṇāḥ kaṇḡo gardabhās tarākṣus té rākṣasām indrāya
sūkarāḥ siṁhó mārutāḥ kṛkalāsāḥ pippakā śakúnis té śaravyāyai viśveśāṃ devā
nāṃ prṣatāḥ*

A rhinoceros belongs to the All-Gods; a black dog, a long-eared one, a donkey, a hyena – these are of the Rakṣasas; a *sūkará*- is for Indra; a lion belongs to the Maruts; a chameleon, a Pippakā-bird, a Śakuni-bird – these are for the Arrow; a spotted antelope is of the All-Gods.

TS.5.5.11 ~ KSA V.7.1:179.6–9

*indrāya rājñe sūkaró, vāruṇāya rājñe kṛṣṇo, yamāya rājña ṛśya, ṛṣabhāya rājñe
gavayāḥ, śārdūlāya rājñe gaurāḥ, puruṣarājāya markāṭaḥ, kṣipraśyenāsya
vārtikā, nīlaṅgoḥ krīmīḥ, sómasya rājñāḥ kulumgāḥ, sindhoḥ śimśumāro,
himāvato hastī.*

To Indra, the king, a *sūkará*-; to Varuṇa, the king, a black antelope; to Yama, the king, a deer; to the bull, the king, a Gayal; to the tiger, the king, a Bos Gaurus; to the king of men a monkey; for the swift falcon a quail; for the Nīlaṅgu a worm; for Soma, the king, a gazelle; for the Sindhu a crocodile; for the snowy mountain an elephant.

The reason for the association of *sūkará*- with Indra in these Aśvamedha lists remains unclear. While both are connected, in a general sense, to the creation of the world, this explanation is too abstract to account for the specific dedication. It seems likely that a mythological rationale underlies the link, but if so, it has not survived in the textual record. A potential reference to this myth appears in an ĀpŚS mantra, yet it provides little clarification:

ĀpŚS 5.26.5

*yās te agne saṃbhṛtīr indraḥ sūkara ābharat |
tāsu śociṣu śīdeha bhasma vaiśvānarasya yat*

Deine Zusammensetzungen, o Agni, die Indra in den Eber hineinrug, sitze du auf diesen leuchtenden, auf der Asche des Vaiśvānara. (Transl. Caland 1921 I, p. 171)⁶

⁶ The mythological story behind the passage was unclear for Caland, too, since he adds a footnote: “Worauf bezieht es sich?”.

1.3. It is only from the Upaniṣads onwards that *sūkará-* becomes synonymous with *varāhā*, and both seem to refer to domesticated pigs. Here are two typical passages:

ChU 5.10.7

atha ya iha kapūyacaraṇā abhyāśo ha yat te kapūyāṇi yonim āpadyerañ śvayonim vā sūkarayoniṇi vā caṇḍālayoniṇi vā

But those who are of stinking conduct here – the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of swine, or the womb of an outcast (*caṇḍāla*). (Transl. Hume 1921)

ManuS 239

cāṇḍālaśca varāhaśca kukkuṭaḥ śvā tathaiva ca | rajasvalā ca śaṇḍhaśca naikṣerann aśnato doijān [...] 241 ghrāṇena sūkaro hanti pakṣavātena kukkuṭaḥ | śvā tu dṛṣṭinipātena sparśeṇāvaravarṇajāḥ

A Cāṇḍāla, a pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman, or a eunuch must not look at the Brahmins while they are eating. [...] A pig spoils with its breath, a cock with the waft from its wings, a dog with its gaze, and a low-caste man with his touch. (Transl. Olivelle 2005)

The passage in the *Manu-smṛti* makes it particularly clear that, for the author, *sūkará-* and *varāhā-* are synonymous and that neither term denotes a wild animal – a wild boar, after all, could hardly render a Brahmin's food impure by its breath.

1.4. In later Indo-Aryan, reflexes of *sūkará-* generally come to mean 'pig', while those of *varāhā-* tend to denote a wild boar. There are, however, notable exceptions: on the one hand, Sinhalese (*h*)ūrā (< *sūkará-*) means 'boar, wild pig', and, on the other, Assamese *barā* (< *varāhā-*) means 'boar' next to 'sow, pig' (see Turner 1969–1985).

2. The etymology of *sūkará-*

2.1. To my knowledge, there are two etymological proposals for *sūkará-* in the scholarly literature: 1) that it continues the Indo-European word for 'pig', PIE **suH-*, and 2) that it is an onomatopoeic formation, meaning '[an animal] producing sound *sū*'. In practice, however, these two approaches are often combined.

The onomatopoeic explanation was already given by Böhtlingk and Roth (1855–1875): "Vielleicht in *sū-kara-* den Laut *sū* hervorbrin-

gend zu zerlegen". Wackernagel and Debrunner (1954) seem to follow this line on p. 64 ("sū-karā- "Schwein" ["sū- machend"])", yet on p. 541 they give the IE etymology.

Today, most scholars are inclined to connect Skt. *sūkarā-* with MP *hwk* /*xūg*/ 'pig', NP *xūg* 'id'⁷ (for instance, Mayrhofer 1986–96 II, p. 738 and Wodtko et al. 2008, p. 684, the latter simply referring to the former, however). This approach, however, gives rise to a number of problems:

- Suffixation. The *-ka-* suffix of MP *hwk* /*xūg*/ 'pig' is highly productive in Iranian. Since no other cognates point to PIE **suH-ko-*, the Indo-Iranian age of this formation cannot be ascertained. Neither the suffix *-kara-* nor a combination of *-ka-* and *-ra-* has any parallel in Sanskrit.
- Sibilant alternation. As noted by Böhtlingk and Roth (1855–1875), various Sanskrit texts attest the alternation *sūkarā-* / *śūkarā-*, which is atypical for inherited words.
- Accentuation. For **sūka-ra-*, one would expect root accentuation, so the final stress requires explanation.
- Nasalization. Modern Indo-Aryan reflexes of *sūkarā-* exhibit nasalization, e.g., West Pahārī *śūgar* 'pig', Nepālī *śūgar*, *śūgur* 'domesticated pig'.

The first two points are hardly ever addressed⁸, whereas the latter two are often attributed to "volksetymologische Umformungen⁹ und die Nachahmung von Lockrufen (nhd. *suk suk* usw.)" (Mayrhofer 1986–96 II, p. 738). In other words, the prevailing view is that the word is originally inherited, but subsequently modified in various ways under the influence of onomatopoetic associations.

⁷ As indicated in Kroonen 2013, p. 490, OE *sū*, *sugu*, MDu. *soge* go back to acc.sg. of the root noun **suuun*, and do not contain a velar suffix (pace Mayrhofer 1956–1980 III, p. 490, Mayrhofer 1986–96 II, p. 738).

⁸ Occasionally, scholars refer to Latin *sūcula* 'a windlass' as a parallel formation (e.g., Pokorny 1959, pp. 1038–1039). However, the Latin diminutive suffix *-culum*, *-cula* derives from PIE *-tlo-*, making the comparison tenuous. The only parallel cited by Wackernagel and Debrunner (1954, p. 541) for the Sanskrit suffix *-kara-* is *puṣkalā-* '±splendid' (AV+), supposedly derived from the root *puṣ-* 'to thrive'. In my view, this derivation is highly problematic.

⁹ Mayrhofer refers to Wackernagel (1905, p. 37), who in turn cites an older proposal by Osthoff (1881, p. 220) suggesting that the accent in *sūkarā-* reflects a folk-etymological analysis as *sū-karā-* 'making the sound *sū*'.

2.2. It is evident that the currently popular derivation of Skt. *sūkará-* from PIE **suH-ko-* requires numerous additional assumptions, most of them unverifiable, and involves considerable special pleading. A different approach is therefore warranted. I propose connecting Skt. *sūkará-* with Middle Persian (Pahlavi) *hwkl* /*hūkar*/ ‘porcupine’. Although the connection is conceptually straightforward —many languages describe a porcupine as a ‘pig with needles’, cf. Italian *porco-spino* (from *porcus* ‘pig’ + *spina* ‘thorn’) or German *Stachelschwein* – it has not been seriously considered, largely because the Middle Persian word was only included by MacKenzie in the “Addenda” to the 1986 edition of his *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, where it reads (MacKenzie 1986, p. XXII):

hūkar(ag) | *hwkl*(*k'*) | N *xūkara* | porcupine. (not hedgehog)

The meaning ‘porcupine’ is secure, as in the Pahlavi translation of the *Vidēvdād* 5.31 and 13.16 – the only attestations in the Pahlavi corpus known to me – *hwkl* renders Avestan *sukurəna-* ‘porcupine’. The form of the word, however, is more contested, as the editions vary.

In his edition of the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād*, Jamasp (1909 I) edits *hkl* in 5.31 and *hwkl* in 13.16, noting in a footnote that some manuscripts attest *hkwł* in the latter passage. In the glossarial index to the edition, Jamasp (1909 II, p. 115) gives *hūkar* [*hkl*] ‘porcupine’. Anklesaria (1946) writes *hūkūr* in both passages, while Moazami (2014) writes *xūgar* (translated as ‘hedgehog’) and *xūkar* [*hwkl*(*k'*)] in the index¹⁰.

In the first critical edition of the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād* (covering chapters 10–15), Andrés-Toledo (2016, p. 173) records the word in 13.16 as *hkwł*, transcribed *xūkur*, with *-u-* in the second syllable. In response to my inquiry regarding manuscript readings, Andrés-Toledo (e-mail, 20 August 2025) noted that the Pahlavi word is unanimously written *hkwł* in the three oldest manuscripts of the Pahlavi *Wīdēwdād* (4600 [Geldner’s L4], 4610 [Geldner’s K1] and 4000 [Iranian *Wīdēwdād* Sāde with interlinear Pahlavi translation]), and since 4000, which belongs to a different transmission branch, also attests it, the reading *hkwł* seems more likely.

¹⁰ Moazami provides no *variae lectiones* for her readings. The transcriptional issues (*x-/h-*, *-k-/g-*) are dependent on various traditions and are irrelevant for our argument.

Given the other evidence pointing to the original *hūkar* (see the next two subsections), the *-u-* in the second syllable may be secondary, likely influenced by Avestan *sukurəna-*, the very word that *hūkar* translates. 2.3. It is possible, though unverifiable, that the Middle Persian proper name *Hukar* (see Zimmer 1991, p. 122) ultimately derives from the appellative *hūkar* ‘porcupine’.

2.4. Middle Persian *hūkar* ‘porcupine’ survives in Modern Persian as *xūkara* ‘badger’ (< **hūkaraka-*), albeit with very limited attestation. It occurs only in the 18th-century pharmacological treatise *Maḥẓan al-ad-wiya*, where it is recorded as an Isfahan dialect word for Arabic *zabzab* “a certain beast resembling cat; it is an animal black and white, short in fore and hind legs” (Lane) – undoubtedly a badger (Garnik Asatryan, p.c.). Among modern dialects, only Gilaki preserves *xūkar*, referring to a black-and-white wild goose, likely named for the color pattern of a badger’s head.

2.5. Let us recapitulate our findings so far. In the oldest Sanskrit texts, *sūkarā-* designates a wild animal, chased by dogs. In later usage, however, it comes to denote the pig in general, and more specifically the domesticated pig. On the Iranian side, we encounter **hūkaraka-* ‘porcupine’, attested only in Middle and Modern Persian. Despite the limited Iranian evidence, the formal parallelism between the two formations seems sufficient to posit a Proto-Indo-Iranian (PIIr.) word **sūkara-* or **suHkara-*. What kind of animal did this PIIr. term designate? Since the meaning of the Sanskrit word remains ambiguous in the earliest texts, the most economical assumption is that the Iranian meaning ‘porcupine’ should be projected back to the PIIr. stage.

In Iranian, we find another word for ‘porcupine’ that closely resembles PIIr. **suHkara-*, namely Late Avestan *sukurəna-* and Modern Persian *sugur(na)* < Proto-Iranian *tsūkurna-*¹¹. As already noted by Szemerényi (1970, pp. 502f.), **tsūkurna* is most likely a compound, with **tsuHk-* ‘needle’ (cf. YAv. *sūkā-* ‘needle’, Pahlavi *swcn /sōzan/* ‘id’, etc.) as its first member. Szemerényi was unable to identify the second member because he assumed the compound to be an (Indo-)Iranian forma-

¹¹ Pash. *škun*, Bal. *sikū(n)*, *sīnkur*, which point to **šikurna-*, may go back to the same proto-form, if we assume labial dissimilation; for a discussion, see Korn 2005, p. 145, fn. 364.

tion. Yet the word for ‘needle’ itself is a loanword from a Central Asian substratum (cf. Lubotsky 2001, p. 306 and *passim*), which suggests that the compound as a whole may also have been borrowed from the same source. In this case, the second member *-ur-na-* can be related to PIIr. **uar-āḡa-* ‘boar’ (Skt. *varāhā-*, PIr. **uarādʰa-*), yielding the interpretation of **tʰsūk-ur-na* as ‘needle-boar’ in that language.

We may therefore add the word for ‘porcupine’ (PIIr. **ćūkurna* > PIr. **tʰsūkurna*) to the list of animal names borrowed by the Indo-Iranians from a Central Asian substratum:

- PIIr. **j^(h)uḡaka-* ‘hedgehog’: Skt. *jāhakā-*, PIr. **jaḡaka-* / **juḡaka-* (YAv. *dužaka-* with a folk-etymological adaptation)
- PIIr. **uštra-* ‘camel’: Skt. *uṣṭra-*, PIr. *uštra-*
- PIIr. **kHara-* ‘donkey’: Skt. *khara-*, PIr. **xHara-*
- PIIr. **kaćiapa-* ‘turtle’: Skt. *kaśyāpa-*, PIr. **kaṭiapa-*
- PIIr. **kapauta-* ‘pigeon’: Skt. *kapóta-*, PIr. **kapauta-*
- PIIr. **matsia-* ‘fish’: Skt. *mātsya-*, PIr. **matʰia-*
- PIIr. **mrga-* ‘game’: Skt. *mṛgá-* ‘wild animal’, PIr. **mrga-* ‘bird’
- PIIr. **uarāḡa-* ‘wild boar’: Skt. *varāhā-*, PIr. **uarādʰa-*

2.6. We thus arrive at the remarkable situation that Proto-Indo-Iranian possessed two similar words for ‘porcupine’: **ću(H)kurna-* (> PIr. **tʰsūkurna*) and **suHkara-*. The following scenario to account for this duplication seems most promising to me. As we have seen, the borrowed PIIr. **ću(H)kurna-* can be analyzed as **ću(H)k-ur-na-* ‘needle boar’ and therefore represents the original designation of the animal. PIIr. **suHkara-*, by contrast, is best understood as a folk-etymological reshaping of **ću(H)kurna-*. After encountering the animal and its foreign name in Central Asia, the Indo-Iranians adapted it into a more transparent form, **sū-kara-*, which could be interpreted as ‘producing the sound *sū*’¹².

Presumably, both terms – the original **ću(H)kurna-* and the folk-etymological **suHkara-* – coexisted in Indo-Iranian for some time. Iranian preserved both terms (with **suHkara-* only attested in West Iranian), while Sanskrit abandoned the former. When Sanskrit coined a new

¹² In theory, it can also be understood as *sūka-rá-* ‘with needles’ (type Skt. *muṣka-rá-* ‘with testicles’), but it would require additional assumptions (the existence of an *a*-stem and an initial **s-* already in PIIr.).

word for ‘porcupine’, *śvāvīdh-*, literally ‘dog-piercer’, *sūkará-* gradually shifted in meaning, first denoting a kind of wild boar and later the domesticated pig.

References

- ANDRÉS-TOLEDO, Miguel Ángel (2016), *The Zoroastrian Law to Expel the Demons: Widēwād 10–15, Critical Edition, Translation and Glossary of the Avestan and Pahlavi Texts*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.
- ANKLESARIA, Behramgore Tehmurasp (1946), *Pahlavi Vendidad (Zand-ī Jvīt-Dēv-Dāt). Transliteration and Translation in English*, K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay.
- BÖHTLINGK, Otto, and Rudolph ROTH (1855–1875), *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, St. Petersburg.
- CALAND, Willem (1921), *Das Śrautasūtra des Āpastamba aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt*, 1.-7. Buch, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen–Leipzig.
- CALAND, Willem (1931), *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa. The Brāhmaṇa of Twenty-Five Chapters*. Translated by Dr W. Caland. Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta.
- GAEDICKE, Carl (1880), *Der Accusativ im Veda*, Wilhelm Koebner, Breslau.
- GRASSMANN, Hermann (1873), *Wörterbuch zum Rig-veda*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.
- GRIFFITHS, Arlo (2009), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda. Kāṇḍas 6 and 7. A New Edition with Translation and Commentary*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen.
- HUME, Robert Ernest, (1921), *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads, Translated from the Sanskrit with an Outline of the Philosophy of the Upanishads and an Annotated Bibliography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- JAMASP, Dastoor Hoshang (1907), *Vendidād, Avesta Text with Pahlavi Translation and Commentary, and Glossarial Index*, 2 Vols., edited with the assistance of Mervanji Manekji Gandevia, Bombay.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (2014), *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, Vols. I–III, Oxford University Press, New York.
- KORYAKOVA, Ludmila, and Andrej Vladimirovich EPIMAKHOV (2007), *The Urals and Western Siberia in the Bronze and Iron Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- KORN, Agnes (2005), *Towards a Historical Grammar of Balochi*, Reichert, Wiesbaden.
- KROONEN, Guus J. (2013), *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, E. J. Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- KUIPER, Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus (1970), *Cosmogony and Conception: a Query*, in “History of Religions”, 10, pp. 91–138.

- LANE, Edward William (1863–93), *An Arabic–English Lexicon*, ed. by Stanley Lane-Poole, 8 Vols., Williams and Norgate, London.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2002), *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda, Kāṇḍa Five. Text, Translation, Commentary*, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- MACKENZIE, David Neil (1986), *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (reprinted with corrections), Oxford University Press, London.
- MAYRHOFER, Manfred (1956–1980), *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen* = *A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*, Winter, Heidelberg.
- MAYRHOFER, Manfred (1986–1996), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, Vols. I–II, Winter, Heidelberg.
- MOAZAMI, Mahnaz (2014), *Wrestling with the Demons of the Pahlavi Widēwād. Transcription, Translation, and Commentary*, E. J. Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- MONIER-WILLIAMS, Monier (1899), *A Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- OLIVELLE, Patrick (2005), *Manu’s Code of Law. A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- OSTHOFF, Hermann (1881), *Morphologische Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen* 4, Hirzel, Leipzig.
- SELVA, Umberto (2014), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda. Kāṇḍa 17. First Anuvāka (PS 17.1–6) “To the Earth.” A New Critical Edition with Metrical Analysis, Translation and Commentary*, Research MA Thesis, Leiden University.
- SZEMERÉNYI, Oswald (1970), *Iranica IV* (Nos. 44–58), in “Orbis”, 19, pp. 500–519.
- TURNER, Ralph Lilley (1962–1085), *A Comparative Dictionary of Indo-Aryan Languages*. Oxford University Press, London, 1962–1966 (three supplements were published 1969–1985).
- WACKERNAGEL, Jakob (1905), *Altindische Grammatik II,1. Einleitung zur Wortlehre. Nominalkomposition*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- WACKERNAGEL, Jakob (1954), *Altindische Grammatik II,2. Nominalsuffixe*, herausg. v. A. Debrunner, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- WODTKO, Dagmar S., IRSLINGER, Britta, and Caroline SCHNEIDER (2008), *Nomina im Indogermanischen Lexikon*, Winter, Heidelberg.
- ZIMMER, Stefan (1991), *Zur sprachlichen Deutung sasanidischer Personennamen*, in “Altorientalische Forschungen”, 18, pp. 109–150.

6. On the meaning of *gaṇá-* in the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda**

Duccio Lelli

Abstract

As has long been noted, in both the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, the term *gaṇá-* ‘flock, troop’ refers predominantly to the troop of the Maruts, a group of male deities who are mentioned exclusively in the plural. On naturalistic grounds, these gods are the embodiment of the thunderstorm, being associated with rain, roaring wind, lightning, and storm clouds. On the other hand, in their social dimension, they represent the divine counterpart of the ancient Indian male sodalities that developed from the Indo-European institution of the *Männerbund*. Indeed, on close scrutiny, it appears that also the non-Marutian contexts in which the word *gaṇá-* occurs in the two *saṃhitās* hearken back to the same socio-political phenomenon, or retain some of the main features of the cultic warrior brotherhood of the *Männerbund*. This contribution aims at investigating all the contexts in which the term *gaṇá-* occurs in the *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda*, in order to elucidate its original meaning and semantic development. As I shall try to demonstrate, in early Vedic, the word still preserves a pregnant sense, one which is consistent with the aforementioned Indo-European legacy. A decisive clue for understanding the meaning of *gaṇá-* are stanzas 4 to 9 of the important hymn *Atharvaveda Paippalāda* 19.54, which contain some rare and significant occurrences of the word and the earliest attestation of the compound *gaṇápati-* ‘lord of the troop’. Finally, I shall discuss the compounds formed with *gaṇá-* and derivatives of the word, which ultimately confirm the scenario sketched above.

Keywords: *gaṇá-*; *Ṛgveda*; *Atharvaveda*; troop; ancient sodality; *Männerbund*.

* This research was funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU (Mission 4, Component 2, Investment 1.1, CUP B53D23023280006) under the PRIN PNRR 2022 project “Entangled chronotopes: language, power, bodyscapes and religion in the first ten books of the Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā [ŚŚ]” (PI: Tiziana Pontillo), within the Rome Research Unit coordinated by Marianna Ferrara.

1. Introduction

In the *Ṛgveda*, the word *gaṇá-* ‘troop, flock, throng’ occurs 41 times, most often referring to the troop of the Maruts. In 30 of these occurrences, with only one possible exception¹, it clearly denotes the Marutian flock that accompanies Indra in many of his exploits and supports his deeds. The term is used eight times to refer to groups of people, once to a flock of wild geese, once to a bunch of dice, and once to the throng of the gods.

In the *Atharvaveda*, *gaṇá-* is attested 17 times. Accounting for repetitions in parallel passages from the two recensions, it occurs 12 times. In eight of these instances (four of which have parallels in the *Ṛgveda*), it clearly refers to the troop of the Maruts. In one case, the referent is ambiguous². The remaining three occurrences of *gaṇá-* are found in PS 19.54.4–9, which concerns the gaining of leadership over a group of people denoted by this term.

The tables below show the distribution of the attestations of *gaṇá-* in the two *saṃhitās* and their percentage in relation to the referent.

<i>Ṛgveda</i> 41x	
30x (73.17%)	Marutian flock
8x (19.51%)	People
1x (2.44%)	Gods
1x (2.44%)	Wild geese
1x (2.44%)	Dice

<i>Atharvaveda</i> 12x (17x)	
8x (66.67%)	Marutian flock
3x (25%)	People
1x (8.33%)	?

¹ At RV 7.9.5 *ágne yāhí dūtyām máriṣaṇyo devāñ áchā brahmakṛtā gaṇéna | sárasvatīm marúto áśvínāpó yáksi devān ratnadhéyāya víśvān* “O Agni, travel on your mission toward the gods – intend us no harm! – along with the band that creates poetic formulations. Sacrifice to Sarasvatī, to the Maruts, to the Áśvins, and to the Waters, and to all the gods so that they grant wealth” (Jamison, Brereton 2014), the referent of the phrase *brahmakṛtā gaṇéna* is ambiguous. It may refer to the Maruts, who accompany Agni in his journey to the gods. This interpretation is supported by RV 3.32.2cd *brahmakṛtā mārutenā gaṇéna sajoṣā rudraís trpád á vṛṣasva* “Joined in pleasure with the formulation-making flock of Maruts, with the Rudras, drench yourself (in it), to satiety” (Jamison, Brereton 2014), where the same phrase is extended with the name of the Maruts. Alternatively, the expression could refer to All Gods (see Geldner 1951–1957, 189, with Sāyaṇa’s interpretation) or to the poet-priests; in these cases, the attestation of *gaṇá-* would fall under one of the following categories.

² ŚS 19.22.16 *gaṇébhyaḥ svāhā* ‘to the troops, hail!’ . For the discussion of this puzzling stanza, see below.

It is noteworthy that in both the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* the word predominantly refers to the troop of the Maruts, with a similar percentage in both texts. The second most frequent referent, by number of attestations, is people, also with a comparable percentage. The remaining referents are isolated.

It is well known that the Maruts, a group of male deities always mentioned in the plural, are, on a naturalistic level, the embodiments of the thunderstorm. They are associated with rain, roaring wind, lightning, and storm clouds. On the other hand, in their social dimension, they represent the divine counterpart of the ancient Indian male sodalities that evolved from the Indo-European institution known as the *Männerbund*, which Jamison & Brereton have described as

[...] an association of young men, usually at a stage of life without significant other social ties (such as wife and children), who band together for rampageous and warlike pursuits. The violence of the thunderstorm is akin to the violence of these unruly age-mates, raiding and roistering. It is not unlikely that Vedic society contained and licensed such groups among its young men, given the frequent warfare depicted in the *Ṛgveda*, and the divine Maruts provide the charter for this association and behavior³.

Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that, in reference to the Maruts, the word *gaṇá-* describes a specific age-set group of young, unmarried warriors, a cultic brotherhood with distinct features that have been investigated in detail. Indeed, upon closer scrutiny, it appears that the non-Marutian contexts in which the word *gaṇá-* occurs in the *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda* harken back to the same socio-political phenomenon, retaining key elements of the cultic warrior brotherhood of the *Männerbund*. This contribution aims to analyse these non-Marutian contexts in the two *saṃhitās* in order to demonstrate that, in early Vedic texts, *gaṇá-* preserves a rich, pregnant sense that is consistent with the Indo-European legacy mentioned above.

³ Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 49. On the *Männerbund* and the most relevant literature on the subject, see Selva 2019, pp. 329ff. On the Maruts as divine counterpart of this social institution, see e.g. Bollée 1981, p. 188; Falk 1986, p. 64; Vassilkov 1989–1990, pp. 396f.; Kershaw 2000, pp. 213ff.; Sadovski 2024, pp. 13f.

2. Gaṇá- in the Ṛgveda

Among its 41 occurrences in the *Ṛgveda*, the word *gaṇá-* refers 30 times to the Marut flock. The remaining 11 occurrences, at first glance, appear unrelated and incongruous. To determine the meaning and significance of *gaṇá-* in these instances, we will examine the relevant passages within their respective contexts.

Let us begin with ṚV 1.87.4

*sá hí svasít pṛṣadaśvo yúvā gaṇò
'yá isānás táviṣibhir ávṛtaḥ |
ási satyá ṛṇayāvānedyo
'syá dhiyáḥ prāvitáthā vṛṣā gaṇáh ||*

For such is the flock: youthful, self-propelling, possessing dappled horses, irrepressible, showing mastery, swathed in powers. And you are a real, irreproachable requiter of debts, a furtherer of this insight here. Therefore you [= Gotama Rāhūgaṇa] are (also) a bullish flock. (Jamison, Brereton 2014)

While it is clear that *gaṇá-* in *pāda* a refers to the Maruts, the shift in person at the beginning of the second half of the stanza creates some ambiguity. Most interpreters take the second hemistich as another address to the Marut flock; if this is correct, the stanza would contain two instances of the term *gaṇá-* referring to the divine group. However, I find the interpretation of Jamison and Brereton more convincing. They note that the hymn is attributed to the poet Gotama Rāhūgaṇa, whose patronymic includes the word ‘flock’ as its second element (Rāhūgaṇa). They argue that “on the basis of this shared verbal designation, Gotama seems to be addressing himself and identifying himself with the Maruts, particularly as the ‘furtherer of this insight,’ that is, as a producer of sacral poetry arising from inner insight”⁴. Gotama’s identification with the Marut flock – based on shared qualities, among which poetic inspiration and singing skills – is again emphasised in the following stanza. Therefore, in *pāda* d of this stanza, *gaṇá-* alludes, via wordplay, to the personal name of a mythical *ṛṣi* (and his family), who aligns himself with the Maruts by virtue of his ability to produce sacral poetry. As we shall see, when the term *gaṇá-* is applied to people, it is predominantly associated

⁴ Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 218.

with priestly-poetic activities, which were among the main concerns of the young men belonging to the *Männerbund*⁵.

Another *ṛṣi* is encountered at RV 1.117.3:

*ṛṣiṇṇ narāv aṇhasaḥ pāñcajanīyam
ṛbīsād ātrim muñcatho gaṇéna |
minántā dásyor áśivasya māyá
anupūrvám vṛṣaṇā codáyantā ||*

You free Atri, the seer of the five peoples, from narrow straits, from the earth cleft along with his band, o men—confounding the wiles of the merciless Dasyu, driving them out, one after another, o bulls.

In this stanza, *gaṇá-* refers to the tribe or followers of Atri, whom the Ásvins free from an earth cleft. The interpretation of the myth of Atri's rescue is highly controversial; among the many challenging issues, it remains unclear exactly where Atri and his followers were trapped, and in some versions of the myth, Atri is even alone⁶. However, at least according to RV 1.116.8 and 1.117.3, he is accompanied by a group of people who are reasonably assumed to be his clan. Thus, the word again refers to a *ṛṣi* and his family, specifically to an environment associated with poetic and priestly practices. It is worth noting that the majority of the attestations of *gaṇá-* referring to the Maruts are found in the fifth maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda*, which is precisely the family book of the Atris. Furthermore, it is in this same maṇḍala that we find the longest sequence of hymns dedicated to the Maruts in the *Ṛgveda* (RV 5.52–61), a cycle attributed to Śyāvāśva Ātreya.

At RV 5.1.3 and 5.79.5 (again, in two hymns of the Atris), the word refers to the priestly troop:

*yád īṇ gaṇásya raśanám ájīgaḥ
śúcir aṅkte śúcibhir góbhir agnīḥ |
ād dākṣiṇā yujyate vājayánty
uttānám ūrdhvó adhayaḥ juhúbhiḥ ||*

⁵ The members of the *Männerbund*, who lived in ritual union with their ancestors, were trained to be the leaders of their society. In order to complete their education, they also had to learn the traditional sacred lore of their tribe, including its history, rituals and poems. Moreover, they had to become valiant speakers and versed in the art of poetry. See Lelli 2023, p. 28.

⁶ See Houben 2010, with further references.

When he has awakened the bridle [= the hymn] of the (priestly) troop, blazing Agni is anointed with blazing cows [= milk]. Then Reward is harnessed, racing toward the prize. Tall, with his tongues he suckled upon her [= the Ladle], who is stretched out. (Jamison, Brereton 2014)

*yác cid dhí te gaṇá imé
chadáyanti maghátaye |
pári cid váṣṭayo dadhur
dádato rádho áhrayaṃ
sújāte áśvasūnrte ||*

For whenever these throngs appear to you (fit) for the giving of bounties, eager, they surround those who give immoderate benefit [= patrons]— o well-born lady, liberal with horses. (Jamison, Brereton 2014)⁷

At RV 6.56.5, *gaṇá-* also refers to the poets praising Pūṣan, a god who is said to help the thoughts of the poets reach their goal and enable men to win the prize of cattle: *imāṃ ca no gavéṣaṇaṃ sātāye sīśadho gaṇám | āráṭ pūṣann asi śrutáḥ* “And make this cow-seeking troop of ours reach its goal for winning. From afar, Pūṣan, you are famed” (Jamison, Brereton 2014). The qualification of the poet’s clan as *gavéṣaṇa-* ‘cow-seeking’ is noteworthy. While the adjective could simply refer to the prize patrons were expected to bestow as a reward for priestly service, I would not rule out the possibility that the expression *gavéṣaṇa-* *gaṇá-* might also evoke the cattle raids conducted by bands of young warriors during their seasonal expeditions.

Indeed, a distinctive feature of these bands was their extended mobility, often involving travel over several consecutive months. This may be alluded to at RV 8.46.31:

*ádha yác cárathe gaṇé
śatám úṣtrāñ ácikradat |
ádha śvítneṣu vimśatīṃ śatá ||*

Then when in a roving band [= caravan] a hundred camels roared, then (I took) twenty hundreds from the Śvitnas.

The expression *cárathe- gaṇá-* perfectly fits the group of young members of the *Männerbund*.

⁷ On the difficult interpretation of the stanza RV 5.79.5, see Jamison and Brereton’s commentary *ad locum*.

At RV 2.23.1, the word occurs within one example of the famous formula discussed by Watkins (1995, pp. 241ff.):

*gaṇānāṃ tvā gaṇāpatiṃ havāmahe
kavīṃ kavīnām upamaśravastamam |
jyeṣṭharājāṃ brāhmaṇām brahmaṇas pata
ā naḥ śṛṇvānn ūtibhiḥ sīda sādhanam ||*

We call upon you, the troop-lord of troops, the most famous poet of poets, the preeminent king of sacred formulations, o lord of the sacred formulation. Hearing us, sit down upon your seat together with your help. (Jamison, Brereton 2014)

The stanza RV 10.112.9 features a simplified variant of the formula: *nī śū sīda gaṇapate gaṇēṣu tvām āhur vipratamaṇi kavīnām | ná rté tvāt kriyate kīṇi canāré mahām arkām maghavañ citrām arca ||* “Sit down, Lord of Throngs, amid the throngs. They call you the most inspired of the wise poets. Without you, at a distance from you, nothing whatever is accomplished. Chant a great brilliant chant, bounteous one” (Jamison, Brereton 2014). In both cases, *gaṇāpati-* refers to Indra/Bṛhaspati, and *gaṇá-* to the folk the poet speaks for. Aside from the ritual use of the formula, which implies lofty diction in a solemn context, it is notable that in both stanzas, *gaṇá-* and *gaṇāpati-* occur alongside words like *kavī-*, *upamaśravas-*, *brāhmaṇ-*, *vīpra-*, and *arká-*, all of which are highly evocative and significant terms that pertain to the sphere of inspired poetry and sacred formulations. This connection helps make these attestations of *gaṇá-* coherent with the others.

The stanza RV 9.32.3 is challenging:

*ād īṇi haṃsó yáthā gaṇám
vīśvasyāvīvaśan matīm |
átyo ná góbhir ayyate ||*

Then, just as (the lead) wild goose (sets) its flock (to honking), he has made the thought of everyone bellow. Like a steed he is anointed [/driven together] with the cows.

Apparently, in this stanza, which belongs to a Soma hymn, there is no reference to the Maruts or the *Männerbund*. However, as noted by Jamison and Brereton (2014, p. 1262), the imagery, ingenious similes and the “expert handling of the constricted form of *gāyatrī* soma hymns may lend credence to the *Anukramaṇī*’s attribution to

Śyāvāśva Ātreya, the ingenious poet of the Marut cycle in Maṇḍala V.” Thus, we are once again dealing with a hymn composed by one of the bards closely connected with the Maruts and their cult. Aside from this observation, a closer examination of the simile involving the wild geese reveals a deeper connection with the Maruts and the band of ecstatic young warriors they represent. In fact, in the *Ṛgveda*, the Maruts are frequently compared to birds and are described as flying across the sky⁸. The stanza RV 2.34.5 provides compelling evidence that the simile between the geese and the Maruts must have been part of the poets’ repertoire:

*īndhanvabhir dhenúbhī rapśádūdhabhir
adhvasmābhiḥ pathībhir bhrājadṛṣṭayaḥ |
ā haṃśāso ná svāsarāṇi gantana
mādhora mādaya marutaḥ samanyavaḥ ||*

(Come here) with your enflaming (?) milk-cows with teeming udders [= clouds?], along unbesmirched paths, o you with glinting spears—like geese to good pastures come here for the exhilaration of the honey, you Maruts of equal spirit.

There are two other aspects that deserve attention: at 5.59.7ab, the description of the Maruts flying ‘like birds in formation’⁹ highlights their martial character, an attitude they share with the youths of the *Mannerbund*. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the image at 9.32.3 suggests the presence of a leader who guides a compact group of companions and makes them shout in unison. This is consistent with a band of warriors led by a leader (*grhāpati*-, *gaṇāpati*-) and rushing noisily into warlike or hunting expeditions.

At RV 10.34.12, *gaṇā*- refers to the troop of the dice:

*yó vaḥ senānīr mahatō gaṇāsya
rājā vrātasya prathamō babhūva |
tasmai kṛṇomi ná dhānā ruṇadhmi
dāsāhām prācis tād ṛtām vadāmi ||*

⁸ See, e.g., RV 1.85.6ab, 1.85.7d, 1.87.2ab, 1.88.1cd, 1.104.7cd (?), 2.34.4cd, 5.41.13cd, 5.52.9ab, 5.53.3, 5.59.7ab, 8.7.35ab, 10.77.5cd, 10.92.6b.

⁹ RV 5.59.7ab *vāyo ná yé śréṇīḥ paptūr ójasāntān divó bṛhatāḥ sānunas pári* “They who, like birds in formation, have flown with their strength to the ends of heaven from (heaven’s) lofty back” (Jamison, Brereton 2014).

He who has become the general of your great throng, the foremost king of the troop, to him I put forth my ten (fingers): “I withhold no money. This truth I speak”. (Jamison, Brereton 2014)

In this stanza of the famous ‘Gambler hymn’, the dice are personified and metaphorically compared to an army led by a general, against which the player is fighting. The bunch of dice is referred to as *gaṇá-* and *vrāta-*, two terms that are also paired in reference to the Marut flock at

RV 3.26.6ab

*vrātaṃ vrātaṃ gaṇāṃ gaṇaṃ suśastibhir
agnér bhāmam marútām ója imahe |*

We beg (the Maruts)—cohort upon cohort, band upon band—with our good chants for the radiance of Agni and the power of the Maruts. (Jamison, Brereton 2014)

~ RV 5.53.11ab

*śárdhaṃ śárdhaṃ va eṣāṃ
vrātaṃ vrātaṃ gaṇāṃ gaṇaṃ suśastibhiḥ |*

Your every troop of these (chariots), every swarm, every flock, with good chants. (Jamison, Brereton 2014)

As in the case of the geese, the presence of a leader guiding the *gaṇá-* is noteworthy. In fact, aside from the metaphor of the dice as an army, the dice hold particular significance in connection with the *Männerbund*. As has been convincingly demonstrated, the bands of youths used to choose a leader among their members by means of a game of dice¹⁰. Thus, this attestation is also consonant with the others.

The last occurrence that requires discussion is RV 4.35.3:

*vy àkṛṇota camasāṃ caturdhā
sákhe ví śikṣéty abravīta |
áthaita vājā amṛtasya pánthāṃ
gaṇāṃ devánām ṛbhavaḥ suhastāḥ | |*

You divided the cup fourfold; you said, “O companion, work to cut it apart!” Then, o Vājas, you went along the path of the immortality to the throng of gods, o Ṛbhus of skilled hands.

¹⁰ See Falk 1986, pp. 73ff.; Kershaw 2000, pp. 244ff.

The word *gaṇá-* here may merely refer to the gods to whom the Ṛbhus go, without necessarily carrying any Marutian connotation or alluding to aspects of the *Männerbund*. However, I believe that the use of *gaṇá-* in this context is more nuanced, and that there must be a specific reason why the poet chose to refer to the gods as a *gaṇá-*. The stanza belongs to a hymn to the Ṛbhus, the three itinerant priest-poets who are said to have attained immortality and entered among the gods as a result of their wondrous deeds¹¹.

As noted by Brereton,

Because their divine acts signify also priestly acts, the Ṛbhus represent not only gods who receive the *soma* but also the humans who prepare it. By their acts and through the *soma*, ritual participants attain immortality [...]. In the same way, through their acts, signifying ritual acts, the Ṛbhus also attain immortality and entry among the gods [...]. The Ṛbhus were imagined as priests who became gods because as priests, they composed hymns, performed sacrifice, and thereby attained immortality. (Brereton 2012, pp. 131–132)

As a matter of fact, many characteristics of the Ṛbhus align them closely with the Maruts, and, by extension, with members of the *Männerbund*: most notably, their priestly activities, the production of poetry, and their sodality with Indra¹². Another factor that has been underestimated in this comparison is the manner in which the Ṛbhus attain immortality. It is undeniable that the ritual dimension and the religious significance of their deeds constitute the primary element in the apotheosis of the human brothers. However, the attainment of immortality appears also as the result of hard-earned merit, following numerous challenges that resemble an initiation process. In ṚV 4.35, the humanity of the Ṛbhus is pointed out multiple times; it is only through their miraculous feats that they are granted a specific divine status. Thus, the Ṛbhus undergo a liminality comparable to that of the youths in the *Männerbund*, who, after a period of trials, entered into ritual union with their ancestors, underwent initiation, and were ultimately admitted to the community of adults. Given the parallelism between the Ṛbhus/Maruts and the youths of the *Männerbund*, as well as between the gods among whom the Ṛbhus

¹¹ On the Ṛbhus and their five great deeds mentioned in the RV, see Brereton 2012.

¹² Cf. Pisano 2023, pp. 378ff. It is also worth noting that, according to Bergaigne 1878–1883 II, p. 409, the Ṛbhus are reminiscent of the deified forefathers.

are welcomed and the deified ancestors with whom the young warriors reunite, I believe the use of the word *gaṇá-* in this context is highly significant and evokes the meanings associated with the *Männerbund*.

3. *Gaṇá-* in the *Atharvaveda*

In the *Atharvaveda*, the term *gaṇá-* is attested 17 times. Accounting for repetitions in parallel passages across the two recensions, the word appears 12 times; in 8 of these instances, 4 of which have a parallel in the RV, it clearly refers to the troop of the Maruts¹³.

As stated above, at ŚS 19.22.16 *gaṇébhyaḥ svāhā* ‘to the troops, hail!’, the referent is ambiguous; however, the preceding stanza, ŚS 19.22.15 *śikhībhyaḥ svāhā* ‘to the crested ones, hail!’, contains the word *śikhín-* ‘crested’, a typical epithet of Rudra, the father of the Maruts, which seems to suggest a Marutian context as well¹⁴.

The remaining three occurrences of *gaṇá-* appear in a single hymn, PS 19.54.4–9, which aims at securing leadership of a group. The hymn, which Bhattacharya captions “Leadership of people”, consists of two *tṛcas* composed in a *yajus*-style prose intended for recitation aloud¹⁵. Below, I present the text and a translation of the hymn¹⁶.

PS 19.54.4

*gaṇapate gaṇapatiṃ mā
kṛṇu tasmān mā yavam ||*

O lord of the troop, make me lord of the troop. That way, do not let me be excluded¹⁷.

¹³ The attestations in parallel passages in the two recensions are ŚS 4.13.4b ~ PS 5.18.5b, ŚS 4.15.4a = PS 5.7.5a, ŚS 19.13.4b = PS 7.4.4b, ŚS 19.45.10a = PS 15.4.10a, ŚS 20.40.2c = PS 20.70.4c; the term is attested in the ŚS only at 13.4.8a, 19.22.16a, 20.88.5a; in the PS, only at 6.17.10a, 19.54.7a, 8a, 9a. The attestations with clear reference to the Maruts are ŚS 4.13.4ab ~ PS 5.18.5ab (~ RV 10.137.5ab), ŚS 4.15.4ab = PS 5.7.5ab, ŚS 19.13.4 (= RV 10.103.3) ~ PS 7.4.4ab, ŚS 19.45.10 = PS 15.4.10, ŚS 20.40.2c = 20.70.4c (= RV 1.6.8), ŚS 13.4.8a, ŚS 20.88.5ab (= RV 4.50.5ab), PS 6.17.10a.

¹⁴ On these stanzas, see below.

¹⁵ See Bhattacharya 2016, p. xliii. On this type of prose, see Renou 1955, pp. 74–80 and Selva 2021, pp. 123–124.

¹⁶ The text is based on Bhattacharya’s edition of PS 19 (Bhattacharya 2016, pp. 1614–1615). The translation is mine.

¹⁷ Tucker (2016, p. 94) translates the second part of the verse as “Prevent me from staying away from him”, interpreting *tasmān* as a ‘real’ ablative. However, it is unclear to whom or what the pronoun refers, and I prefer to interpret *tasmān* adverbially, as is common from the *Atharvaveda* onwards, especially in prose passages (see e.g.

PS 19.54.5

apigaṇāpigaṇaṁ mā kṛṇu
*tasmān mā *chitsi* ||

O you who are near the troop, make me one who is near the troop. That way, do not let me be cut off.

PS 19.54.6

sagaṇa sagaṇaṁ mā kṛṇu
tasmān mā naśam ||

O you with a troop, make me one with a troop. That way, do not let me be lost.

PS 19.54.7

gaṇavardhana gaṇaṁ me vardhaya |
gavām aśvānām puruṣāṇām brahmacāriṇām bhūtyā annādyasya ||

O you who increase the troop, increase my troop of cows, horses, men, brahmacārins, prosperity, food.

PS 19.54.8

gaṇābhivardhana gaṇam me 'bhi vardhaya |
[gavām... annādyasya] ||

O you who increase the troop more and more, increase more and more my troop of cows, horses, men, brahmacārins, prosperity, food.

PS 19.54.9

gaṇapravardhana gaṇam me pra vardhaya |
gavām aśvānām puruṣāṇām brahmacāriṇām bhūtyā annādyasya ||

O you who further increase the troop, further increase my troop of cows, horses, men, brahmacārins, prosperity, food.

The interpretation of the hymn poses some challenges, as it contains numerous *hapax legomena*, the addressee of the invocation is not explicitly identified, and the mythical setting of the ritual is not mentioned. Nevertheless, it clearly centres on the concept of *gaṇá-*, and its content suggests that it was employed in a ritual for elevating a client to the rank of chieftain.

Delbrück 1888, 218–219; Wackernagel, Debrunner 1930, p. 500; Bhattacharya 2004, pp. 189, 191). The use of *tasmād* in the two following stanzas confirms this interpretation. On the root aorist injunctive *yavam*, see Tucker 2016, p. 94, who, however, does not quote the parallel passage PS 16.51.9d, where the same phrase *tasmān mā yavam* occurs, nor PS 18.45.1, where the expression *mā yavam* is again attested.

Since it is not possible to address all the issues raised by the hymn within the scope of this discussion, I will concentrate on two aspects that are most directly relevant to our topic.

The first aspect to consider is the linguistic variation on the term *gaṇá-*, which emerges from the sequence of quasi-synonymous terms at the beginning of each stanza. The hymn opens with the unique attestation of the compound *gaṇápati-* in the AV, clearly identifying the recipient and protagonist of the ritual. It is less immediately evident who the divine ‘lord of the troop’ is with whom the speaker seeks to identify, but I would suggest that it refers to Indra or, more probably, to Rudra, the god of the ecstatic *Männerbund*¹⁸. In fact, in its two *Ṛg*-vedic occurrences (*ṚV* 2.23.1a and *ṚV* 10.112.9a), the compound refers to Indra/Bṛhaspati, and then it appears in the *Śatarudrīya* section of the *Yajurveda* (VS 16.25, MS 2.9.4, KS 17.13, KapKS 27.3, TS 4.5.4). This is consistent with the fact that Indra and Rudra were the two deities specifically worshipped by the members of the *Männerbund*¹⁹. The term *gaṇá-* here refers to the group led by the god and, by extension, to the people whom the aspiring leader seeks to govern or control. If my interpretation is correct, this term thus pertains to the Maruts, led by Rudra, as well as to the sodality conceived as a political entity. Whereas at *ṚV* 2.23.1a and *ṚV* 10.112.9a, the referent of *gaṇá-* remains unspecified and is primarily associated with the domain of inspired poetry and sacred formulations, in this *Atharvavedic* hymn the term acquires a clear socio-political meaning. This shift in usage provides a solid foundation for the subsequent semantic development of the word²⁰.

The compounds *apigaṇa-*, *sagaṇa-*, *gaṇavardhana-*, *gaṇābhivardhana-*, and *gaṇapravardhana-* convey similar meanings, each pointing to the importance of the *gaṇá-* for the aspiring leader²¹.

Another interesting aspect of the hymn is the list of entities that the would-be ruler wishes to stimulate and increase within his *gaṇá*²². The

¹⁸ On Rudra as *gaṇápati-*, see Kershaw 2000, p. 212.

¹⁹ See Lelli 2023, pp. 26f.

²⁰ The term *gaṇá-* has a clear political meaning already in the epic texts (see e.g. MBh 12.108 passim).

²¹ For the meaning of these compounds, see below.

²² The list *gavām aśvānām puruṣāṇām brahmacāriṇām bhūtyā annādyasya* occurs identical at PS 19.53.16c, 18c.

first three elements constitute a fixed phrase and frequently recur in Vedic texts as prominent symbols of prosperity and wealth²³.

Among the other three elements in the list, *bhūti*- and *annādya*- emphasise the same concept of abundance and prosperity. On the other hand, the mention of the *brahmacārín*- is of the utmost interest. As Kajihara explains, the mention of the *brahmacārín*- here as part of the ruler's possessions, treated on par with livestock and servants, may suggest that his status is relatively diminished in contrast to what is depicted in the AV "Hymn to Brahmacārín" (ŚS 11.5 ~ PS 16.153–155), where his status is so elevated that his activities are praised and equated with the movement of the Sun. Nevertheless, it is likely that the ruler reciting this PS mantra is a patriarch of a family. Since the guru who teaches the Vedas to students is typically a married patriarch, this *brahmacārín*- can be interpreted as a Vedic student who is subordinate to the patriarchal guru. Therefore, rather than a decline in status, it may be that Vedic students came to occupy a defined role within Brahmin society, with their status becoming more clearly established²⁴.

I would also propose an additional reason for the inclusion of the *brahmacārín*- in the list of the ruler's possessions. In fact, a profound connection exists between the *gaṇā*- and the *brahmacārín*-, as one of the primary responsibilities of the sodality was the education of the youth. The sodality oversaw the education of its members at various stages and across numerous fields, with a central focus on initiating them into adulthood. The lifestyle of the later Vedic student, the *brahmacārín*, bears notable resemblances to that of the *vrātya* – the historical continuation of the *Männerbund* in India – suggesting the persistence of these cultural models across centuries²⁵.

In conclusion, it is clear that both *gaṇā*- and its compounds in PS 19.54.4–9 can be best interpreted in the *Männerbund* milieu.

²³ Limiting ourselves to the AV, see e.g. ŚS 1.16.4ab; ŚS 3.28.3ab; ŚS 5.29.1d = PS 12.18.2d; ŚS 8.2.25b = PS 16.5.5b; ŚS 8.7.11d = PS 16.13.1d; ŚS 10.1.17b = PS 16.36.7b; ŚS 10.1.29b = PS 16.37.10b; ŚS 11.2.9d ~ PS 16.104.9d; ŚS 12.1.19cd = PS 17.2.10cd; ŚS 12.2.16ab ~ 17.45.5ab; ŚS 20.127.12 ~ PS 19.21.10cd. Additional examples from the PS include PS 2.18.2b; 5.36.7d; 8.2.11d ~ 9.9.2cd; 10.11.9ab; 16.40.4d–5a; 16.106.1ab. Cf. also Rau 1957, pp. 24, 46–47.

²⁴ See Kajihara 2019, pp. 68f.

²⁵ See e.g. Hauer 1927, pp. 324ff.; Heesterman 1962; Falk 1986, pp. 67ff.; Kershaw 2000, pp. 62f., 82, 205f., 209f., 217, 251.

4. Derivatives and compounds with *gaṇá-* in the *R̥gveda* and *Atharvaveda*

Below, I list and discuss the derivatives and compounds with *gaṇá-* in the *R̥gveda* and *Atharvaveda*²⁶. The analysis demonstrates that the contexts in which these words appear are consistent with those in which the simplex is attested, the referents are the same, and the semantics align perfectly. The terms are arranged in alphabetical order, with the exception of the four *hapax legomena* occurring in PS hymn 19.54. The *RV* attestations are listed first, followed by those from the *AV*.

apigana-, ganapravardhana-, ganavardhana-, gaṇābhivardhana-; AV 1x

All these compounds are *hapax legomena* occurring in the PS hymn 19.54 discussed above. The first is a prepositional compound, while the other three are quasi-synonymous, with *gaṇá-* as the first member and *vārdhana-* ‘increaser’, also slightly modified by the preposition *prá* or *abhi*, as the second²⁷. As has been noted, these emphasise the leader’s role in guiding the tribe and promoting its prosperity.

gaṇápati- ‘lord of troops’; RV 2x, AV 2x

The compound occurs twice in the *RV*, at 2.23.1a *gaṇánāṃ tvā gaṇápatiṃ havāmahe kavīṃ kavīnām upamásravastamam | jyeṣṭharájām bráhmaṇām brahmaṇas pata á naḥ śṛṇvānn ūtibhiḥ sīda sádanam ||* “We call upon you, the troop-lord of troops, the most famous poet of poets, the preeminent king of sacred formulation. Hearing us, sit down upon your seat together with your help” (Jamison, Brereton 2014), where it refers to Bṛhaspati/Indra, and at *RV* 10.112.9 *ní śú sīda gaṇapate gaṇéṣu tvām āhur vípratamaṃ kavīnām | ná rté tvát kriyate kíṇ canāré mahám arkám maghavañ citráṃ arca ||* “Sit down, Lord of throngs, amid the throngs. They call you the most inspired of the wise poets. Without you, at a

²⁶ I will not treat here the derivatives and compounds found in the other *saṃhitās* or in post-*saṃhitā* texts. However, it may be pertinent to mention at least the term *gāṇikā-* ‘(girl) belonging to a *gaṇá*, prostitute’, which refers to the female counterpart within the age-group organisation of the sodality (see Vassilkov 1989–1990, pp. 397f.).

²⁷ On nominal formations with *ápi* as the first member, see Schneider 2013, pp. 48f. On *vārdhana-*, see Kim 2010, pp. 309f.

distance from you, nothing whatever is accomplished. Chant a great brilliant chant, bounteous one” (Jamison, Brereton 2014), where it refers to Indra. In the AV, it is attested only in the stanza PS 19.54.4 *gaṇapate gaṇapatiṇ mā kṛṇu | tasmān mā yavam ||* ‘O lord of the troop, make me lord of the troop. That way, I shall not stay away’, analysed above.

***gaṇaśrī-* ‘having/being splendour in a flock’; ṚV 3x**

The compound is attested three times in the ṚV: 1.64.9ab *ródasī ā vadatā gaṇaśriyo nṣācaḥ śūrāḥ śávasāhimanyavaḥ |* ‘Salute the two world-halves [= *ródasī*], you who are splendour in a flock, who accompany the superior man [= Indra], champions with a snake’s fury in your strength’; 5.60.8ab *ágne marúdbhiḥ śubháyadbhir íkvabhiḥ sómam piba mandasānó gaṇaśrībhiḥ |* ‘O Agni, with the Maruts, the versifiers in their beauty, drink the soma, you exulting along with those who are splendour in a flock’; 8.23.4 *úd asya sócīr asthād dīdīyúšo vy àjāram | tápurbhambhasya sudyúto gaṇaśríyah | |* ‘His flame has stood up and outward, the unaging flame of the shining one, of the very bright one of scorching fang, the glory of a warrior band.’ It refers twice to the Marut flock and once to Agni. The attestations are consistent both among themselves and with that of the simplex, as in Vedic texts, the connection between Agni and Rudra/Maruts often emerges with the characteristics of a true homology²⁸.

***gānya-* ‘belonging to a troop’; ṚV 1x**

ṚV 3.7.5cd *divorúcaḥ surúco rócāmānā īlā yéśāṇi gānyā máhinā gíḥ | |* “They [= the seers?], the shining ones, shining from heaven and brightly shining, to whose flock belong the milk-libation and the great song” (Jamison, Brereton 2014). The derivative occurs only once in the ṚV. The referent is not explicit, but if we follow Jamison and Brereton in taking it as ‘the seers’, this attestation is consistent with those of the simplex.

***marúdgana-* ‘having the Maruts as troop’; ṚV 5x; AV 1x**

ṚV 1.23.8ab = 2.41.15ab *índrajyeṣṭhā márudgaṇā dévāsaḥ pūṣarātayaḥ |* “Having Indra as chief, the Maruts as troop, and the gifts of Pūṣan”;

²⁸ On the connection between Agni, Rudra, and the Maruts, see Kershaw 2000, p. 221 n. 26 and Renou 1962, p. 94.

RV 6.52.11 *stotrám índro marúdgāṇas tvāṣṭrmān mitró aryamá | imā havyā juṣanta naḥ ||* “Let Indra along with his Marut-flock, let Mitra and Ar-yaman along with Tvaṣtar, enjoy the praise song and these oblations of ours”; RV 8.89.2 *ápādhmad abhíśastīr áśastiháthéndro dyumny ábhavat | devās ta índra sakhyāya yemire bríhadbhāno mārudgāṇa ||* “The smiter of mal-ediction blew away the interdictions. Then brilliant Indra was at hand. The gods yielded themselves to partnership with you, Indra—you of lofty radiance, with the Maruts as your flock”; RV 10.66.2 *índraprasūtā varuṇaprasīṣṭā yé súryasya jyótiṣo bhāgám ānásūḥ | marúdgāṇe vṛjāne mánma dhīmahi mághone yajñāṇi janayanta sūráyaḥ ||* “Who, thrust forth by Indra, directed forth by Varuṇa, attained a share of the light of the sun. We would set our thoughts on the community having the Maruts as their troop. In their generosity, they begot the sacrifice as its patrons”; PS 8.12.2ab (~ 17.28.26a) *yām asiñcan saudhanvanā | viśve devā marudgāṇāḥ |* ‘That (*surā*) whom the Saudhanvanas, the All Gods, together with the troop of Maruts, sprinkled.’ The compound, which is self-explanatory, qualifies all the gods (4x) and Indra (2x).

***mahāgaṇá-* ‘large troop’, ‘accompanied by a large troop’; AV 2x**

ŚS 19.22.17 *mahāgaṇēbhyāḥ svāhā* “To the large troops, hail!”; PS 4.27.4cde *abhīvardham abhībhavam abhīṣeṇaṃ mahāgaṇam | viśas tvā sarvā ā yantu ||* “Let all the clans come to you, the surpassing, overpowering one, who is surrounded by an army, accompanied by a large troop” (Zehnder, Leach, Hellwig 2022). This compound is attested twice in the *Atharvaveda*. While at ŚS 19.22.17, it must be considered a *karmadhāraya* meaning ‘large troop’, at PS 4.27.4d, as Vishva Bandhu (1992 [VWC I, 4], 2394b) suggests, it is to be regarded as a *bahuvrīhi* (‘having a large troop, accompanied by a large troop’).

As regards the ŚS attestation, the context is problematic. ŚS 19.22–23 are two hymns that contain an homage to the various parts of the *Atharvaveda*, identified by numerical labels. At the end of hymn 19.22, the text reads, *ṛṣībhyāḥ svāhā || śikhībhyāḥ svāhā || gaṇēbhyāḥ svāhā || mahāgaṇēbhyāḥ svāhā || sárvebhyó ’ngirobhyo vidagaṇēbhyāḥ svāhā*. Whitney renders, “To the seers, hail! To the peaked ones (? *ṣikhín*), hail! To the *gaṇás*, hail! To the great *gaṇás*, hail! To all the *gaṇá*-knowing Aṅgirasas, hail!”, and comments on *vidagaṇá-*, “It is altogether likely that *vidagaṇá* either never meant anything or is a corrupt reading; the translation is given merely in order not to leave the word untranslated.” The hymn

is indeed partly obscure, and it is not easy to determine which portions of the *saṃhitā* are hinted at here. Renou (1955, p. 78) observes:

La mention des Aṅgiras rappelle sans doute le fait qu’une partie des hy. est place sous le patronage de ces Sages. Celle des *gaṇá* (*mahāgaṇá*, *vidagaṇá*) évoque-t-elle la division de certains hy. en prose [...] ? auquel cas, l’expression *gaṇá* pourrait viser le *gaṇāvasānare*, et *mahāgaṇá* les *gaṇa* de la théorie.

The fact that the two items *gaṇá*- and *mahāgaṇá*- are inserted between names of people could suggest that they also refer to human beings involved in the production and recitation of sacred formulas. This would be consistent with what we have said about the members of a *gaṇá*-. The presence of the word *śikhandín*- gives this hypothesis some support, as it is an epithet typical of Rudra, the god of the *Männerbund*. However, the compound *vidagaṇá*- applied to the Aṅgiras rather points to concrete knowledge, as that of Atharvavedic poetry. If we concede that the three words *gaṇá*-, *mahāgaṇá*-, and *vidagaṇá*- refer to the (prose) sections of the AV *saṃhitā*, we should consider them as the earliest attestations of the technical meaning ‘portion of a *pariyāya*’, which is in fact not surprising in the late *kāṇḍa* 19.

As noted by Zehnder, Leach, and Hellwig (2022), the hymn PS 4.27, in which *mahāgaṇa*- appears as a *bahuvrīhi*, “can best be interpreted as accompanying a ritual that aims at raising an as yet powerless (*ānujāvará*-, 1c) client to the rank of a chieftain”. This would-be chieftain, who in the first stanza is said to enjoy the protections of ‘the fifty honey-dispensing birds at the top of the sky’, i.e. the Maruts, is surrounded by a host of supporters who are also indirectly identified with the divine troop of the Maruts (also by means of the epithet *mahāgaṇa*-).

***rāhūgaṇa*- PN; RV 1x**

RV 1.78.5ab *āvocāma rāhūgaṇā agnáye mādhumad vācaḥ* ‘We Rāhūgaṇas have spoken a honeyed speech to Agni’. For this personal name, cf. RV 1.87.4, discussed above.

***vidagaṇá-* ‘?’; AV 1x**

ŚS 19.22.18 *sárvebhyó ’ngirobhyo vidagaṇébhyaḥ svāhā* “To all the gaṇá-knowing (?) Aṅgirasas, hail!” (Whitney). See above.

***vṛṣagaṇa-* ‘a bullish flock’; RV 1x**

RV 9.97.8b *prá haṁsāsas trpálam manyúm áchāmád ástaṁ vṛṣagaṇā ayāsuḥ | āṅgūṣyām pávamānaṁ sákhāyo durmárṣaṇi sākám prá vadanti vāṇám* ‘The geese have journeyed forth to (Soma’s) sharp battle-fury, from nearby to their home, in a bullish flock. The comrades speak in unison to the self-purifying one a songful music difficult to forget.’ See Jamison and Brereton’s commentary:

In the standard tr. the geese of pāda a are in an unmarked simile, and the real subj. is *vṛṣagaṇāḥ*, which is either a PN (Ge[ldner]) or a descriptor of officiants (Re[nou]: “Les (officiants formant) un groupe mâle”). But again, nothing stands in the way of taking the geese as the sub-[ject], modified by *vṛṣagaṇāḥ*; after all, geese come in flocks! In my view the geese are, metaphorically, the singers (so not too far from Re[nou]), who attend the ritual in a flock. The point of comparison is the noise they make; cf., e.g., IX.32.3 *ád īṇi haṁsó yáthā gaṇám, víśvasyāvīvaśan mátim* “just as (the lead) wild goose (sets) its flock (to honking), he has made the thought of everyone bellow.”

Remarkably, Jamison and Brereton refer to the same passage discussed above, in which the wild geese appear. The presence of the word *gaṇá-* in both passages confirms the consistency of the two contexts, particularly with regard to the Maruts and their troop.

***ságaṇa-* ‘being in troops, in joint throng (+ instr. with)’; RV 6x; AV 5x**

RV 1.101.9 *tvāyéndra sómaṁ suśumā sudakṣa tvāyá havís cakṛmā brahma-vāhaḥ | ádhā niyutvaḥ ságaṇo marúdbhir asmín yajñé barhíṣi mādayasva | |* ‘With desire for you we have pressed soma, o very skilful Indra; with desire for you we have made an oblation, o you whose vehicle is the sacred formulation. So, you with your teams, flocking with the Maruts – reach exhilaration at this sacrifice here, on this ritual grass’;
RV 3.32.3 *yé te śúṣmaṇi yé táviṣīm ávardhann árcanta indra marútas ta ójaḥ |*

mādhyamdine sāvane vajrahasta pibā rudrēbhiḥ sāgaṇaḥ suśipra || ‘They who increased your tempestuousness, who increased your power, the Maruts, hymning your strength, Indra – at the Midday Pressing, you with mace in hand, drink in a flock with the Rudras, you of good lips’; RV 3.47.2 *sajōṣā indra sāgaṇo marúdbhiḥ sómam piba vṛtrahā śūra vidvān* | *jahí śátrūñr ápa mṛdho nudasvāthābhayaṁ kṛṇuhi viśvāto naḥ* || ‘In joint enjoyment, Indra, in joint throng with the Maruts, drink the soma, o champion, as Vṛtra-smasher and knowing one. Smash the rivals, push away the despisers. Then make fearlessness for us on all sides’; RV 3.47.4 *yé tvāhihátye maghavann ávardhan yé sāmbaré harivo yé gáviṣtau* | *yé tvā nūnám anumádanti víprāḥ píbendra sómam sāgaṇo marúdbhiḥ* || ‘Those who strengthened you at the serpent-smashing, bounteous one, who in the fight with Śambara, who at the quest for cattle, o you of the fallow bays, who as inspired poets applaud you now – o Indra, drink soma in joint throng with the Maruts’; RV 3.52.7 *pūṣaṇvāte te cakṛmā karambhāṁ hárivāte háryaśvāya dhānāḥ* | *apūpām addhi sāgaṇo marúdbhiḥ sómam piba vṛtrahā śūra vidvān* || ‘We made gruel for you who are accompanied by Pūṣan, roasted grains for you of the fallow bay horses, accompanied by your fallow bays. Eat the cake; in joint throng with the Maruts drink the soma, o hero, as Vṛtra-smasher and knowing one’; RV 10.157.3 *ādityaír indraḥ sāgaṇo marúdbhir asmākam bhūtv avitā tanúnām* || ‘Along with the Ādityas, let Indra, flocking with the Maruts, be the helper of our bodies’; ŚS 7.77.3ab (~ PS 20.32.6ab) *samvatsarīṇā marútaḥ svarkā urúksayāḥ sāgaṇā mānuṣāsaḥ* | ‘The Maruts of the year, of beautiful chant, having a wide dwelling place, in joint throng, belonging to men’; ŚS 20.63.2 = ŚS 20.124.5 (RV 10.157.3) *ādityaír indraḥ sāgaṇo marúdbhir asmākam bhūtv avitā tanúnām* || “Along with the Ādityas, let Indra, flocking with the Maruts, be the helper of our bodies” (Jamison, Brereton 2014); PS 19.54.6 *sagaṇa sagaṇam mā kṛṇu tasmān mā naśam* || ‘O you with a troop, make me one with a troop. That way, I shall not perish.’

In all of its RV attestations and in the ŚS attestation taken from the RV, the word occurs with an instrumental, which is always represented by the name of the Maruts (once their byname ‘Rudras’ is used, as the Maruts are Rudra’s sons). Only at ŚS 7.77.3ab (~ PS 20.32.6ab) and PS 19.54.6 it occurs alone. Each time it is connected with the Maruts, with the exception of PS 19.54.6, where it refers to the god leading the troop (i.e. Indra/Rudra) and, by extension, to the aspiring leader of the sodality.

***sárvagaṇa-* ‘having a whole flock’; R̥V 2x; AV 1x**

R̥V 1.116.8 *himénāgnīm ghraṃsám avārayethām pitumátim ūrjam asmā adhattam | ṛbīse átrim ásvināvanītam ún ninyathuh sárvagaṇam svastí ||* ‘With snow you two kept away fire and scorching heat. You placed the nourishment of solid food for him. You brought Atri up to well-being, who had been brought down into the earth cleft together with his whole band’; R̥V 5.51.12 *svastáye vāyúm úpa bravāmahai sóman svastí bhúvanasya yás pátiḥ | bṛhaspátim sárvagaṇam svastáye svastáya ādityāso bhavantu naḥ ||* ‘For well-being we shall call upon Vāyu, on Soma; well-being (let him mete out) who is lord of creation. On Bṛhaspati with his whole flock (we shall call) for well-being. For well-being let the Ādityas be there for us’; ŚS 16.4.6 = PS 18.47.1 *svasty ādyóśaso doṣásaś ca sárva āpaḥ sárvagaṇo ásīya ||* ‘Safely, O waters, may I, whole [and] with my whole train, attain dawns and evenings.’

In all three of its attestations, *sárvagaṇa-* refers to human beings; at R̥V 1.116.8, it alludes to Atri’s band, mentioned also at R̥V 1.117.3, discussed above. The interpretation of Bṛhaspati’s whole flock at R̥V 5.51.12 is more ambiguous, but following Jamison and Brereton, we could understand it as a reference to the Aṅgirasas; in this case, the term would once again be linked to the seers.

The context of ŚS 16.4.6 = PS 18.47.1 is difficult to precisely determine, but the term refers to the speaker’s clan, suggesting a possible socio-political nuance. It is noteworthy that in all three passages, the word appears next to a form of *svastí-*, reinforcing the notion of having a wholly safe and unified group at one’s side.

***sumádgaṇa-* ‘being in troop, flocking (+ instr. with)’; R̥V 1x**

R̥V 2.36.3 *améva naḥ suhavā ā hí gántana ní barhīsi sadatanā ráṇiṣṭana | áthā mandasva jujuṣāṇó ándhasas tváṣṭar devébhīr jánibhiḥ sumádgaṇaḥ ||* ‘As if to home, come to us here, all you of easy call; then sit on the ritual grass and take pleasure. Then, o Tváṣṭar, become exhilarated on the stalk, having delighted in the call, flocking with the divine ones, (namely) the Wives (of the Gods).’ The term is synonymous with *ságaṇa-*, and is likewise found with an instrumental. As in R̥V 4.35.3, here *gaṇá-* refers to a group of divinities, i.e. the wives of the gods.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the attestations of *gaṇá-* in the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* indicates that the term predominantly refers to the Marut flock, the divine counterpart of the *Männerbund*. In both *saṃhitās*, the second most frequent referent, by number of attestations, is people. The human groups denoted by *gaṇá-* exhibit Marutian (i.e., ‘*männerbundisch*’) characteristics, with a significant distinction between the two *saṃhitās*. In the *Ṛgveda*, the groups referred to as *gaṇá-* are primarily associated with priestly and poetic activities, whereas in the *Atharvaveda*, the political dimension predominates. The occurrences of *gaṇá-* with isolated referents further suggest that the term retains its Marutian (i.e., ‘*männerbundisch*’) characteristics even in non-Marutian contexts. The same observation applies to derivatives and compounds of *gaṇá-* in both the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, which almost always share the same referents as the simplex form and appear in analogous contexts. As a result, the corpus of attestations demonstrates remarkable consistency.

It seems plausible that the term originally indicated the group of young warriors of a sodality. This interpretation aligns with the broader concept of the *Männerbund*, a traditional warrior assembly characterised by its cohesive, ritualistic, and often liminal role within ancient societies. The vast majority of attestations in the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* appear to reflect this foundational meaning, the term being predominantly applied to the divine realm in reference to the Marut flock, the divine counterpart of the *Männerbund*. Nonetheless, traces of the original connotation as a human warrior group are preserved in all occurrences of the word within both *saṃhitās*. This persistence suggests that the term retained its underlying meaning even when used metaphorically or in contexts that extended beyond its initial scope. In the *Ṛgveda*, these traces manifest primarily through the alignment of *gaṇá-* with priestly and poetic activities, which were integral to the ritual and cultural functions of such sodalities. Conversely, in the *Atharvaveda*, the term adopts a more pronounced political dimension, reflecting the text’s focus on societal governance and power structures. These shifts in emphasis between the two *saṃhitās* likely result from the differing priorities and contexts of their compositions. The *Ṛgveda*, deeply rooted in ritual concerns, naturally frames *gaṇá-* within a sacrificial and ceremonial framework, whereas

the *Atharvaveda* situates the term in a more concrete, political context, emphasising the organisational and authoritative aspects of such groups. This duality underscores the adaptability of the term, which could be recontextualised to address the evolving societal and ritualistic needs of the Vedic culture.

References

- BERGAIGNE, Abel (1878–1883), *La Religion védique d'après les hymnes du Rig-Veda I–IV*, Librairie Emile Bouillon, Paris.
- BHATTACHARYA, Dipak (2004), *On yāt, tāt, uttarāt and Similar Forms*, in Arlo Griffiths, Jan E.M. Houben (eds.), *The Vedas: Texts, Language and Ritual (Proceedings of the Third International Vedic Workshop)*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen, pp. 181–215.
- BHATTACHARYA, Dipak (2016), *The Paippalāda-Saṃhitā of the Atharvaveda. Volume Four, Consisting of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Kāṇḍas*, The Asiatic Society Calcutta.
- BOLLÉE, Willem B. (1981), *The Indo-European Sodalities in Ancient India*, in “Zeitschrift des Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft”, 131, pp. 172–191.
- BRERETON, Joel P. (2012), *Gods' Work: The Ṛbhus in the R̥gveda*, in *Indologica: T. Ya. Elizarenkova Memorial Volume, Book 2*, compiled and edited by Leonid Kulikov and Maxim Rusanov, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, pp. 111–134.
- DELBRÜCK, Berthold (1888), *Altindische Syntax*, Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, Halle.
- FALK, Harry (1986), *Bruderschaft und Würfelspiel. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Vedischen Opfers*, Hedwig Falk, Freiburg.
- GELDNER, Karl F. (1951–57), *Der Rig-Veda. Aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt und mit einem laufenden Kommentar versehen*, Harvard Oriental Series, Cambridge.
- HAUER, Jacob W. (1927) *Der Vṛātya: Untersuchungen über die nichtbrahmanische Religion Altindiens*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.
- HEESTERMAN, Jan (1962), *Vṛātya and Sacrifice*, in “Indo-Iranian Journal”, 6, 1, pp. 1–37.
- HOUBEN, Jan E.M. (2010), *Structures, Events and Ritual Practice in the R̥g-Veda. The Gharma and Atri's Rescue by the Aśvins*, in David Shulman (ed.), *Language, Ritual and Poetics in Ancient India and Iran: Studies in Honor of Shaul Migro*, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, pp. 87–135.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (2014), *The R̥gveda. The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, 3 Vols., Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York.

- KAJIHARA, Mieko (2019), *The Meanings of the Term brahmacārīn- in the Veda* (in Japanese), in "The Memoirs of Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia", 175, pp. 61–103.
- KERSHAW, Priscilla K. (2000), *The One-eyed God. Odin and the (Indo-)Germanic Männerbünde*, Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series, Washington, D.C.
- KIM, Jeong-Soo (2010), *Untersuchungen zu altindischen Abstrakta und Adjektiven im Rgveda und Atharvaveda. Die primären a-Stämme und die ana-Bildungen*, Hempen Verlag, Bremen.
- LELLI, Duccio (2023), *A poet at the Assembly: Some Remarks on a Feature of Rudra in the Atharvaveda*, in Elisabetta Poddighe, Tiziana Pontillo (eds.), *Resisting and Justifying Changes II. Testifying and Legitimizing Innovation in Indian and Ancient Greek Culture*, Pisa University Press, Pisa, pp. 21–36.
- PISANO, Paola (2023), *Rbhavaḥ sūracakṣaḥ: The Sun and Immortality in the Vedic Myth of the Rbhus and in Early Greek Wisdom Traditions*, in Elisabetta Poddighe, Tiziana Pontillo (eds.), *Resisting and Justifying Changes II. Testifying and Legitimizing Innovation in Indian and Ancient Greek Culture*, Pisa University Press, Pisa, pp. 373–399.
- RAU, Wilhelm (1957), *Staat und Gesellschaft im Alten Indien*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.
- RENOU, Louis (1955), *Les parties en prose de l'Atharvaveda*, in L. Renou, *Études Védiques et Pāṇinéennes*, Tome I, De Boccard, Paris, pp. 71–90.
- RENOU, Louis (1962), *Les Hymnes aux Marut*, in L. Renou, *Études Védiques et Pāṇinéennes*, Tome X, De Boccard, Paris.
- SADOVSKI, Velizar (2024), *Evidence for Indo-Iranian Lexemes and Phraseology in Armenian Onomastic Transmission: Part 1 (Ritual Formulae and Ritual Pragmatics in the Veda and Avesta, V)*, in *Studies on Central Asia and the Caucasus 1*, Firenze University Press, Firenze, pp. 5–23.
- SCHNEIDER, Carolin (2013), *Syntax und Wortarten der Lokalpartikeln im Rgveda. āpi (Folge XX)*, in "Indogermanische Forschungen", 118, pp. 23–54.
- SELVA, Umberto (2019), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda: A New Critical Edition of the Three 'New' Anuvākas of kāṇḍa 17 with English Translation and Commentary*, PhD Dissertation, Leiden–Torino.
- SELVA, Umberto (2021), *On Vedic śvāpada- in the Prose of Paippalādasamhitā 17.22.10*, in "Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft", 171, 1, pp. 123–148.
- TUCKER, Elizabeth (2016), *Is It Time to Re-Evaluate the Contribution Which the Atharvaveda Can Make to Indo-Iranian and Indo-European Historical Linguistics?*, in David Goldstein, Stephanie Jamison, Brent Vine (eds.), *Proceedings of the 27th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference, October 23rd and 24th, 2015*, Hempen Verlag, Bremen, pp. 199–223.

- VASSILKOV, Yaroslav V. (1990), *Draupadī in the Assembly-hall, Gandharva-husbands and the Origin of the gaṇikās*, in “Indologica Taurinensia”, 15/16, pp. 387–398.
- WACKERNAGEL, Jakob, and Albert DEBRUNNER (1930), *Altindische Grammatik. Band III: Nominalflexion - Zahlwort - Pronomen von Albert Debrunner und Jakob Wackernagel*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- WATKINS, Calvert (1995), *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- ZEHNDER, Thomas, LEACH, Richard, and Oliver HELLWIG (2022), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 4*. <<https://doi.org/10.48656/2s4s-tp54>> [Last accessed on 1 September 2025].

7. The scope of *bheṣajá* in early Vedic medicine

Kristen de Joseph

Abstract

Vedic *bheṣajá* is a key term in the lexicon of early Vedic medicine. As such, various aspects of the term have received scholarly treatment, from its derivation to its practical uses in Vedic medicine. And while nearly all historians of Indian medicine make note of the pre-scientific character of Vedic medicine, it is the effort to vindicate its scientific elements that usually dominates the discussion. By contrast, there has been less attention to the conceptual system of early Vedic medicine as a synchronic whole – a system that can be partly recovered from the text and discourse of the AV *saṃhitās*. In this paper, I aim to map the discursive terrain of AV *bheṣajá* ‘remedy’ as a means to better understand this conceptual system. I will use a series of interconnected questions to explore its contexts and its relation to other notions in early Vedic medicine: To whom does one turn for *bheṣajá*? What is it called on to provide in the texts? What can we infer from the fact that it is summoned not only to remove afflictions, but also to accrue benefits? If *āyus* is not the (primary) object of *bheṣajá*, then what is their relation? Who, and what, is able to benefit from *bheṣajá*? In what ways is *bheṣajá* depicted to act on the supra-physical world? The answers to these questions stand to tell us more about the conceptual system of AV medicine and its broader relation to the AV mindscape, at least insofar as it can be reconstructed from the texts.

Keywords

Atharvaveda; bheṣajá; medicine; remedy; physicians.

In one of the classical treatises of Āyurveda, the *Caraka-Saṃhitā*, we find a series of questions that outline the scope and purpose of Āyurveda: CaSū 30.20, *kimāyuh kasmādāyurvedaḥ kimarthamāyurveda* ‘What is āyus? Where does “Āyurveda” come from? What is the purpose of Āyurveda?’ and so on¹. The answers, meant to be known by all Āyurveda practitioners, illustrate a carefully systematized and self-aware discipline centred on its eponymous object, *āyus* ‘life (span)’.

But if there is one key word to to circumscribe the tradition of Atharvāṇic medicine to which Āyurveda proclaims its debt, I believe it would not be its object – whether *āyus* or any of the other desiderata found in the relevant *sūktas* (as I will turn to below) – but rather its means: *bheṣajā* ‘remedy’, one of the key terms of the early Vedic medical lexicon².

Numerous aspects of Vedic *bheṣajā* have been treated in scholarly literature: the derivation of *bhiṣāj-* and its parallels in Indo-Iranian³; the repertory of symptoms and illnesses for which remedies are prescribed⁴; continuities with later Indian medical tradition, from the KauśS (where the post-hoc term *bhaiṣajyāni* already seems to redefine *bheṣajā*)⁵ onward; and more still. And while nearly all historians

¹ Ed. Sharma 1976; transl. mine.

² The Āyurveda seems to have been well aware of the AV’s practical orientation: CaSū 30.21, *vedo hyātharvaṇo dānasvastyayanabalimaṅgalahomaniyamaprāyaścittopavāsamantrādiparigrahāc-cikitsāṃ prāha; cikitsā cāyuso hitāyopadiśyate ||* “(Physicians) owe their loyalty to the *Atharva veda* because this deals with the treatment of diseases by taking recourse to gift, propitiatory rites, worship, auspicious observances, oblations, observance of spiritual rules, atonement, fast, incantations etc. They are prescribed for the sake of longevity” (ed. and transl. Sharma 1976). The emphasis on means instead of object further seems to reflect the AV’s concern with proper conduct (namely as a prerequisite for order), in which we may include correct ritual practice; as Filliozat puts it (1964 [1949], p. 94): “In relation to the normal order disease is a disorder, and, as in the then current magical concept like brings in like, disease is linked with other disorders such as sin. Sin in its turn is a transgression of *ṛta* and it makes little difference whether this transgression is committed deliberately or by chance. Voluntary or not, the anomaly of behaviour or of thought brings in that of the organism.”

³ See Emmerick (1993), who surveys common Indo-Iranian notions of disease and cure. On the hypothesis that *bhiṣāj-* was borrowed into Proto-Indo-Iranian, see Lubotsky 2001, and further Kuiper 1995; on analyses of *bhiṣaj-* as an Indo-European form, see Ginevra 2019, §§1–2, with literature.

⁴ See especially Zysk 1993 [1985], *passim*.

⁵ As Zysk observes, “Of limited value for determining the actions of the early Atharvavedic rites, [KauśS] passages often reflect ritual procedures artificially constructed to fit the contents of the older text and, in the medical section, contain ideas representative of the later medicine of classical āyurveda rather than the medicine of the early Vedic age” (1991, p. 14). For our purposes, the KauśS seems

of Indian medicine make note of the pre-scientific character of Vedic medicine, it is the effort to vindicate its scientific elements that usually dominates the discussion⁶.

By contrast, there has been less attention to the conceptual system of early Vedic medicine as a synchronic (or at least pseudo-synchronic) whole⁷ – a system that can be partly recovered from the text and discourse of the AV *saṃhitās*. In this paper, I aim to map the discursive terrain of AV *bheṣajá* ‘remedy’ as a means to better understand this conceptual system; as in the CaSū verses above, I will use a series of interconnected questions to explore its contexts and its relation to other notions in early Vedic medicine: To whom does one turn for *bheṣajá*? What is it called on to provide in the texts? What can we infer from the fact that it is summoned not only to remove afflictions, but also to accrue benefits? If *āyus* is not the (primary) object of *bheṣajá*, then what is their relation? Who, and what, is able to benefit from *bheṣajá*? In what ways is *bheṣajá* depicted to act on the supra-physical world, and what can this tell us about the conceptual system of AV medicine and its broader relation to the AV mindscape, at least insofar as it can be reconstructed from the texts?

To constrain the scope to early Vedic, and more specifically AV, medicine and to reduce interference from the later tradition, I will seek the answers to these questions primarily in the *Śaunaka-Saṃhitā* (ŚS) and *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā* (PS) – the two extant AV recensions, and our most prolific testimony of early Vedic medicine – with the RV⁸ adduced for examples of continuity and contrast.

1. Physician and remedy: To whom does one turn for *bheṣajá*?

We start with one such contrast from the RV, where *bheṣajá* is unquestionably the province of the divine. RV *bhiṣaj-* and *bheṣajá-* always oc-

to introduce a distinction between *bhaiṣajyāni* and *āyusyāni* that does not hold for the AV *saṃhitā* texts. Nonetheless, works on the medical-ritual tradition of the Kauś and its relation to the AV *saṃhitās* offer invaluable context; with attention to medicine, see especially Bloomfield 1890, Bahulkar 1994, and Sumant 2015.

⁶ A worthy and frequently successful effort; see, most recently, Tucker 2023.

⁷ The exception of Thite (1982) may be noted, despite a poor critical reception: see especially the review of Das (1984).

⁸ The ŚS edition is that of Kim 2021, the translation Whitney 1905; the RV edition that of Aufrecht 1877, the translation Jamison, Brereton 2014. PS editions and translations are cited individually in the text. *Sūkta* titles are quoted from these editions.

cur in proximity to deities, in which we must also include the Divine Waters, the Wind and Heaven and Earth. In ṚV 1.157 ('Aśvins'), the relation between physician and remedy is spelled out:

(1) ṚV 1.157.6ab

*yuvāṃ ha stho bhiṣājā bheṣajébhir
áttho ha stho rathyā ráthyebhiḥ |*

You are healers through your healing remedies, and you are also charioteers through the parts of your chariot.

That is to say, the tools make the craftsman⁹. These divine physicians are called on to wield their tools, yet as clear as the above-stated relation may be, at other times the text blurs the line between physician and remedy – which, in the ṚV, can be styled as one and the same. The waters, for example, are said both to *possess* all remedies (as is often said of physician deities), and to *be* the remedy (ṚV 1.23.19, 20; 10.137.6); Rudra's hand is not only that of the physician deity, but also a remedy in itself (ṚV 2.33.7). If this seems to recall the duality of Soma as both a deity and a physical substance, we should note that Soma, too, is invoked as both physician and remedy (ṚV 8.72.17, 10.100.10). Such duality, or even multiplicity, is characteristic of the ṚV and AV *saṃhitās*.

Only in ṚV 10.97 ('Plants') do we find any allusion to a mortal physician, if a divinely 'inspired' (*vípraḥ*) one; it is likewise the only time in the ṚV that non-somic plants assume a role in medicine¹⁰:

(2) ṚV 10.97.6

*yátraúṣadhīḥ samágmata
rájānaḥ sámitāo iva |
vípraḥ sá ucyate bhiṣág
rakṣohámīvacátanaḥ ||*

⁹ We find a similar notion, albeit with a less clear relation, in ŚS 5.29.1c ('To Agni: against demons'; = PS 12.18.2c): *tvām bhiṣág bheṣajasyāsi kartā* 'Thou art a physician (*bhiṣáj*), a maker of remedy (*bheṣajá*).'

¹⁰ The RV does, however, show an awareness of the natural world as the source of *bheṣajá*: ṚV 8.20.25–26 ('Maruts') *yát síndhau yád ásiknyāṃ yát samudrēsu marutaḥ subarhiṣaḥ | yát párvateṣu bheṣajám || víśvam páśyanto bibhrthā tanúṣv ā tēnā no ádhi vocata | kṣamā rápo maruta áturasya na íṣkartā víhrutam púnāḥ ||* 'O Maruts possessing good ritual grass – what medicine is in the Sindhu, what in the Asiknī, what in the seas, what in the mountains, seeing it, you carry it all on your bodies. With it intercede for us. To ground (should go) the malady of the afflicted; make what has gone awry right again.'

When the plants have come together, like kings at an assembly, that inspired poet is said to be a healer who smites the demons and banishes affliction.

In the above stanza, which Jamison and Brereton deem ‘Atharvan in character’¹¹, the ṚV tradition seems to shade into that of the AV.

Indeed, the AV is more explicit still in its reference to human physicians (which may well imply a contrast to divine physicians) – for instance, in ŚS 8.7 (‘To the plants: for some one’s restoration to health’; PS 16.14):

(3) ŚS 8.7.26ab
yāvatīṣu manuṣyā
bheṣajāṃ bhiṣájō vidúḥ |

In how many [herbs] human physicians (*bhiṣáj*) know a remedy, so many, all-remedial, do I bring unto thee.

Not only is the AV’s repertory of plant medicine famously extensive (if often cryptic); it also sees *bheṣajá* in a more autonomous capacity. Namely, the AV shows a tendency to ‘cut out the middleman’, viz. the physician deity who ministers the remedy. While nowhere is a plant remedy actually addressed as *bhiṣáj* ‘physician’, they are nonetheless summoned by name or epithet, sometimes even in the second person. For example, in ŚS 2.4.3 (~ PS 2.11.3), the *janṅgīḍá* amulet is invoked (in the third person) to drive off *viṣkandha*, ‘devourers’ and ‘distress’; in ŚS 3.7.2 (~ PS 3.2.2), a ‘horn’ (in the second person), to remove *kṣettriya*. In ŚS 4.9.3 (‘For protection etc.: with a certain ointment’; ~ PS 8.3.2), an ointment is called on directly, in the second person, to effect various ends:

(4) ŚS 4.9.3
utāsi paripāṇaṃ
yātujāmbhanam āñjana |
utāmṛtasya tvāṃ vettha-
-átho asi jīvabhójanam
átho haritabheṣajám ||

Both art thou a protection, grinder-up of familiar demons (*yātú*), O ointment, and of what is immortal thou knowest; likewise art thou

¹¹ Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1552.

gratification (*-bhójana*) of the living, likewise remedy of jaundice (*hárīta-*).

This characteristic emphasis on the human physician/ritualist and natural remedies is part of the AV's overall focalization of the human world, which it balances with supra-physical interests of the sort that dominate the RV.

2. What is *bheṣajá* called on to provide?

The latter examples lead us to another point about the AV pharmacopoeia: much of it occurs in non-unique contexts, by which the same remedy may be used for different purposes – be it therapeutic or what one may call *accretive* in nature. That is to say, the uses of *bheṣajá* are not limited to *therapeutic* interventions – for example, those that prevent or treat an affliction; they are also called on to confer *áyus* and other benefits, where the presence of illness is beside the point, as I will show. Further, both the therapeutic and accretive uses can be seen to have supra-physical dimensions, as I will discuss in the next section.

2.1 Wellness, or even-betterness? Accretive uses of *bheṣajá*

In an example that most clearly associates *bheṣajá* with such an accretive end, we find a remedy petitioned for a full life span in ŚS 8.7 ('To the plants: for some one's restoration to health'; PS 16.14):

(5) ŚS 8.7.22cd

átho kṛṇomi bheṣajám

**yáthāsac chatáhāyanah ||*

Now do I make a remedy, that he may be one of a hundred years (*-hāyaná*).

The fuller context of these *pādas* is nonetheless therapeutic: ŚS 8.7 chiefly calls on an assortment of remedial plants and herbs to remove someone's *yakṣmá*, as well as unspecified ills that may or may not represent the same affliction. The scope nonetheless broadens at times, with respect to both affliction and patient:

(6) ŚS 8.7.11cd

trāyantām asmín grāme
gām áśvaṃ púruṣaṃ paśúm ||

Let them (the herbs) save in this village **cow, horse, man, beast**.

(7) ŚS 8.7.13cd
tā mā sahasraparṇyò
mṛtyór muñcantv āṇhasaḥ ||

Let them, thousand-leafed, free me **from death, from distress**.

(8) ŚS 8.7.14cd
āmīvāḥ sárva rákṣāmsy
āpa hantv ādhi dūrām asmát ||

Let it (the plant amulet) smite far away from us **diseases [and] all demons**.

(9) ŚS 8.7.15cd
gāvāṃ yákṣmaḥ púruṣānām vīrúdbhir
átinutto nāvyaètu srotyāḥ ||

Let the **yákṣma of kine, of men**, go driven by the plants beyond navigable streams.

Other times, we find various effects, both therapeutic and accretive, juxtaposed in the same stanzas (cf. also ex. 4 above):

(10) ŚS 6.57.3 ('With a certain remedy against disease'; ~ PS 19.10.6)
śāṇi ca no máyaś ca no
má ca naḥ kíṃ canāmamat |
kṣamā rápo víśvaṇi no astu bheṣajám
sárvaṇi no astu bheṣajám ||

[Be there] both weal for us and kindness (*máyas*) for us, and let nothing whatever ail (*am*) us; down with [our] complaint (*rápas*)! be every remedy ours; be all remedy ours.

(11) ŚS 19.44.1 ('With an ointment: against diseases etc. '; ~ PS 15.3.1)
āyuso 'si pratáraṇaṃ
vípraṇi bheṣajám ucyase |
tád āñjana tvám śamtāte
sám āpo ábhayaṇi kṛtām ||

Thou art an extender of life-time; all-healing art thou called; so, O ointment, do thou [make] wealfulness; make, O ye waters, weal [and] fearlessness.

This illustrates a broad palette of uses, typically in the broader context of a therapeutic intervention – but do these accretive uses necessarily demand the presence of an affliction? In ŚS 8.2, we find a petition for a full life span in a context where no affliction appears at all:

(12) ŚS 8.2.5 ('To prolong some one's life'; = PS 16.3.5)

ayāṃ jīvatu mā mṛta-
-imāṃ sām īrayāmasi |
kṛṇomy asmai bheṣajāṃ
mṛtyo mā pūruṣaṃ vadhiḥ ||

Let this man live; let him not die; him we send together; I make a remedy for him; death, do not slay the man.

Such examples can also help us situate *āyus* with respect to *bheṣajā*: as in example (11) above, ŚS 19.44.1, *bheṣajā* can be used to ensure *āyus* – yet *āyus* is just one of numerous outcomes, therapeutic or accretive, that *bheṣajā* is called on to deliver. Nor can we assume that the uses of *bheṣajā* in petitions for *āyus* merely imply 'afflictionlessness'; while the accretive use often does depend on, and add to, the therapeutic use, at other times, it acts on its own. This seems to point to a way in which *bheṣajā* was used outside the scope of therapeutic medicine, in contexts where no affliction was present, namely to secure benefits such as a full life span (exx. 5, 11 and 12), 'gratification of the living' (ex. 4), 'weal(fulness)' and 'kindness' (exx. 10, 11).

2.2 Physical and metaphysical wellness

Just as the accretive uses of *bheṣajā* show that its use exceeded the scope of illness, further evidence implies that it could exceed the physical world entirely. This is hardly an unknown phenomenon in AV medicine; illness can, of course, have supra-physical dimensions: as Bloomfield already observed, "the line between disease and possession by demons and demoniac influences is not drawn sharply"¹². In this section, we look at some other factors in this equation – what other supra-physical elements pertain to affliction, patient and remedy?

¹² Bloomfield 1899, p. 59. The nature of 'disease' and especially 'demons' must be carefully scrutinized in future research.

2.2.1 Who can suffer from *ámīvā*?

One phenomenon that may be useful to explore toward this end – and which we have already spotted in ex. 2 above – is the ill-defined *ámīvā* which, while frequently translated as ‘disease’, clearly reveals both physical and supra-physical qualities. As Zysk observes, the form itself points to a physical symptom – “The word is related to the verb *āmáyati*, ‘to ache,’ ‘to cause pain,’ from the root *am*, ‘to seize’” – and is associated with “malnutrition” and “bodily decay”¹³.

Yet the privative form *anamīvā* applies not only to humans, but also to animals and speech: “Cows are requested to be devoid of *ámīvā* at AV 3.14.3; Brhaspati, at RV 10.98.3, is asked to grant speech that is free from *ámīvā* for the purpose of bringing rain (through sacred utterances).”¹⁴ It is also once found as an epithet of Uṣas, Dawn, in the RV (10.35.6); further, in the funeral hymns, Yama is called on to make the dead *anamīvā* (ŚS 18.2.12 ~ PS 18.64.5), as well as the non-widowed wives present (ŚS 12.2.31 = ŚS 18.3.57 etc.) and even the devotees’ food (ŚS 18.1.42d = ŚS 18.4.46d etc.).

(13) ŚS 18.2.12 (‘Funeral verses’; ~ PS 18.64.5)

yáu te śvānau yama rakṣitārau
caturakṣáu pathiśádī nṛcákṣasā |
tābhyāṃ rājan pári dhehy enaṃ
svasty āsmā anamīvāṃ ca dhehi ||

What two defending dogs thou hast, O Yama, four-eyed, sitting by the road, men-watching, with them, O king, do thou surround him; assign to him (the dead man) well-being and freedom from disease.

Still other non-humans and even inanimate matter can be *anamīvā*: land and shelter (ŚS 12.1.62; PS 1.75.2, 7.6.10), even a sacrificed animal (PS 5.28.7) is petitioned to be *anamīvā*:

(14) PS 5.28.7cd (‘Sacrificing an animal’; PS only)

indro marutvān suhutaṃ kṛnot_uv
ayakṣmam anamīvam te astu ||

Let Indra together with Maruts make [it] well-offered. Let [this] be without *yakṣma*-disease, without illness for you. (Ed. and transl. Lubotsky 2002)

¹³ Zysk 1993 [1985], p. 49.

¹⁴ Zysk 1985, p. 313.

If all of these entities – human and non-human, divine and abstract, dead and inanimate – are wished to be *anamīvā*, does that imply they may likewise suffer from *āmīvā*? Even as an illness of the human body, *āmīvā*, as Zysk points out, has supra-physical correlates: “references indicate that she was associated with the committed sins which are attached to the body [RV 6.74.2, 3; ŚS 7.42(43).1–2 (cf. PS 1.109.1, 4)] and perhaps also with the sins which lead one astray [RV 1.189.1, 3]” (1993, p. 49). But if its scope appears to exceed even the human body, so too did its “patients”: the dead, livestock and sacrificial animals. While this is not unusual for Vedic illnesses, we are able to observe these parameters to a unique extent in the case of *āmīvā*.

2.2.2 If *āmīvā* exceeds the scope of the human body, does *bheṣajā* too?

At the same time, the texts make it clear that *āmīvā* falls within the scope of *bheṣajā*, for which we find testimony in the RV, PS and ŚS:

(15) RV 10.137.6ab (‘All Gods’)

āpa id vā u bheṣajīr
āpo amīvacātaniḥ |

These very waters are truly remedies; the waters banish *āmīvā*.

(16) PS 15.20.1 (‘To Rudra’; PS only, but cf. RV 2.33.2)

tvaj jātā rudra śantamā
*t_u vaṃ hi no *barbhriyā bheṣajebhiḥ* |
vi yakṣmān yāvayāsmad v_y +aṃho
v_y amīvās cātayāsmad viṣūcīḥ ||

O Rudra, the most beneficent ones (medicines) are born from you. You shall indeed sustain us with [your] medicines. Keep the *yakṣmas* away from us, [keep] away distress; make the diseases flee from us in all directions. (Ed. and transl. Lelli 2020)

(17) ŚS 8.2.28 (‘To prolong some one’s life’; ŚS only)

agnēḥ śārīram asi pārayiṣṇú
rakṣohāsi sapatnahā |
átho amīvacātanaḥ
pūtúdrur nāma bheṣajám ||

Agni’s body art thou, successful (*pārayiṣṇú*); demon-slayer art thou, rival-slayer, likewise expeller of disease, a remedy *pūtúdru* by name.

The waters, Rudra in his capacity as physician, and a remedy called *pūtúdrū* are all said to counter *ámīvā*. While each of these is either divine or ultimately associated with a divinity, this is an invariant fact of *bheṣajá* in both the ṚV and AV traditions; even when the deities appear to recede from the text, their presence remains implicit. The point is that *ámīvā*, even as an affliction that exceeds the scope of bodily illness (as demonstrated in the previous section), nevertheless seems to fall within the scope of *bheṣajá*, for which we find testimony in all three *saṃhitās*¹⁵. This is internally coherent, however, as we have seen that *bheṣajá* too exceeds the scope of bodily illness: for example, the same *bheṣajá*, in PS 15.20.1 (ex. 16), can repel *yákṣmas*, *ámhas* and *ámīvās*; in ŚS 8.2.28 (ex. 17), its indications are not only *ámīvā*, but also demons and rivals.

Thus both affliction and remedy are seen to have both physical and supra-physical effects in AV medicine. For example, while *bheṣajá* can be used to extend one's life (a physical effect), and *ámīvā* likewise has attested physical effects, there is more to the story – i.e., they also have supra-physical effects. Physical symptoms are just one possible manifestation of *ámīvā*, as we may already deduce from the fact that the dead, speech and shelter – in other words, the dead, abstract or inanimate, which are not subject to physical illness – are nonetheless susceptible to *ámīvā*.

2.3 Wholeness and liminality: A hypothesis

The contexts of *ámīvā* do not speak life or death – but, potentially, to thresholds and their discourse. The contexts where we find *ámīvā* are all contexts of liminality. In the ṚV, the cows and Dawn are well-attested liminal bodies¹⁶. Likewise, the funeral rites are also a site of liminality, where the notions of *āyus* and *ámīvā* find their closest nexus: one departs the *jīvaloká* when their *āyus* is up, but they must be *ānamīva* to cross into the *pitṛloká*¹⁷. This is why a dead man – whose '*āyus* is spent' (*kṣīṇam āyuhḥ*) – still needed to be *anamīvá*.

¹⁵ That is, even if we cannot assume that the same form of *bheṣajá* applies to *ámīvā* in all three – much less that *bheṣajá* is the only means to remove it, or that it can be used at all for a supra-physical variety of *ámīvā*.

¹⁶ See Rossi 2023.

¹⁷ On the construct of *loká*, see especially Gonda 1966.

Nonetheless, the two states are fundamentally independent: you can have *ámīvā* with no (more) *āyus*¹⁸ – but you should ideally be *anamīvá*, with or without *āyus*.

This would also account for why the AV funeral hymn calls specifically for the *non-widowed* wives at the funeral ceremony to be *anamīvá*. Why should they be mentioned here explicitly? Perhaps because ritual is the site of liminality par excellence, and the householder's wife is a *sine qua non* of ritual: as Jamison puts it, "a ritual without a wife is no ritual at all"¹⁹. Thus, by way of a hypothesis, *ámīvā* seems to have been particularly incompatible with liminality, and had to be banished lest the impurity cross the threshold with its host. Whether *ámīvā* was incurred especially at thresholds is another question.

3. Conclusion

The discourse of *bheṣajá* – which I have used here to explore the nexus of remedy, affliction and patient – speaks to a conceptual-semantic framework in the AV *saṃhitās* by which all three of these elements were, at least in part, still conceived in supra-physical terms. While the discursive construct of affliction is well noted to exceed the limits of bodily illness, previous observations have often been limited to the fuzzy boundary between illness and demons, or illness and sin. Yet this narrow focus does not reflect the full supra-physical extent of AV medicine, which itself partakes of the wider supra-physical belief system implicit in the AV *saṃhitās*. Even so, other notions in the same conceptual terrain can help us understand the nature of affliction and how it relates to life and death, physical and supra-physical in the *saṃhitās*. As a case in point, the uses of *bheṣajá* exceed not only bodily illness, but also physicality; afflictions treatable with *bheṣajá* can apply not only beyond the human body, but even beyond the physical world – such as in the case of *ámīvā*, or rather *anamīvá*, a specific condition of non-affliction that may operate particularly at thresholds. More than that, *bheṣajá* seems to exceed affliction itself; it also demonstrates accretive uses that confer benefits both material and abstract.

¹⁸ This may be where Yama comes in, when those who have lived out their *āyus* must be rendered *anamīvá* for the next world; it is less clear whether this *ámīvā* would have followed them from life, or was accrued after death.

¹⁹ Jamison 2005, p. 2; see also Ferrara 2017.

This more supra-physical side of AV medicine may well illustrate a transitional phase on the way from – as Zysk describes it²⁰ – “a healing tradition based on magico-religious beliefs and practices” to “a system of medicine based on empirico-rational principles and practices.” For historical purposes, it hardly matters how ‘scientific’ the tradition may or may not have been at any point, but rather that if we treat the AV medical tradition not in terms of scientific value but as a recoverable conceptual system, it will reveal a fuller view of the socio-cultural milieu that produced it.

References

- AUFRECHT, Theodor (1877), *Die Hymnen des Rigveda*, 2. Aufl., Adolph Marcus, Bonn.
- BAHULKAR, Shrikant S. (1994), *Medical Ritual in the Atharvaveda Tradition* (Shri Balmukund Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya Research Series 8), Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune.
- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice (1890), *The Kāuṣika Sūtra of Atharvaveda with Extracts from the Commentaries of Dārila and Keçava*, American Oriental Society, New Haven.
- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice (1899), *The Atharvaveda*, Karl J. Trübner, Strassburg.
- DAS, Rahul Peter (1984), Review of G. U. Thite (1982), *Medicine: Its Magico-Religious Aspects*, in “Indo-Iranian Journal”, 27, pp. 232–244.
- EMMERICK, Ronald (1993), *Indo-Iranian Concepts of Disease and Cure*, in “Journal of the European Āyurvedic Society”, 3, pp. 72–93.
- FERRARA, Marianna (2017), *Sexuality as a Promotion of Power: How the Chief Wife Becomes a Means of Persuasion in the Vedic Rhetoric on Kingship*, in “Kervan”, 21, pp. 23–49. <<https://doi.org/10.13135/1825-263X/2257>>.
- FILLIOZAT, Jean ([1949] 1964), *La doctrine classique de la médecine indienne*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris. Translated by Dev Raj Chanana (1964), Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.
- GINEVRA, Riccardo (2019), *Vedic bhiṣáj- ‘healer’ (*b^hh₂s-h₂ég- ‘the one who leads to the light’), the Indo-European Poetics of [LIGHT] as [LIFE] and the Mythology of the Aśvins*, in “Incontri Linguistici”, 42, pp. 67–85.
- GONDA, Jan (1966), *Loka: World and Heaven in the Veda*, Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, Amsterdam.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. (2005), *Roles for Women in Vedic Śrauta Ritual*, in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Goddesses and Women in the Indic Religious Tradition*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 1–17.

²⁰ Zysk 1993 [1985], p. 9.

- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (2014), *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- KIM, Jeong-Soo (2021), *Atharvavedasamhitā der Śaunakaśākhā: Eine neue Edition unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Parallelstellen der Paippalādasamhitā*, available at: <<https://opus.bibliothek.uni-wuerzburg.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/27703>>.
- KUIPER, Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus (1995), *Aryans in the Rigveda*, Rodopi, Amsterdam.
- LELLI, Duccio (2020), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Kāṇḍa Fifteen: Text, Translation, Commentary*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2001), *The Indo-Iranian Substratum*, in Christian Carpelan, Asko Parpola, Petteri Koskikallio (eds.), *Early Contacts between Uralic and Indo-European: Linguistic and Archaeological Considerations*, Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, Helsinki, pp. 301–317.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2002), *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda Kāṇḍa Five: Text, Translation, Commentary*, Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- ROSSI, Paola Maria (2023), *Conquering the Sun: Sovereignty and Liminality in the Vedic Mahāvratā Rite*, in Paola Maria Rossi (ed.), *Liminal Spaces and Identity Transformations in South Asian Literatures and Arts: Essays in Honour of Professor Alexander Dubyanskiy*, Milano University Press, Milan, pp. 81–110.
- SHARMA, Ram Karan, and Bhagawan DASH (1976), *Agniveśa's Caraka Samhitā*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi.
- SUMANT, Shilpa (2015), *Medical Charms: Śaunaka, Paippalāda and Kauśika*, in "Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute", 96, pp. 57–76.
- THITE, Ganesh Umakant (1982), *Medicine: Its Magico-Religious Aspects*, Continental Prakashan, Poona.
- TUCKER, Elizabeth (2023), *A sūkta of the Paippalāda Atharvaveda about the Symptoms and Causes of Tetanus*, in Christopher T. Fleming, Toke Lindegaard Knudsen, Anuj Misra, and Vishal Sharma (eds.), *Science and Society in the Sanskrit World*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 73–88.
- WHITNEY, William Dwight (1905), *Atharva-Veda Samhitā*, 2 Vols., Harvard University, Cambridge.
- ZYSK, Kenneth G. (1985), *Towards the Notion of Health in the Vedic Phase of Indian Medicine*, in "Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft", 135, 2, pp. 312–318.
- ZYSK, Kenneth G. (1993 [1985]), *Religious Medicine: The History and Evolution of Indian Medicine*, Routledge, London [First edition published 1985 by the American Philosophical Society].
- ZYSK, Kenneth G. (1991), *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi.

8. Lexical and etymological remarks on and around the ‘enemy’ in the *Śaunaka-Atharvaveda* (with special emphasis on the third *kāṇḍa*)

Matteo Macciò, Rosa Ronzitti*

Abstract

Object of the paper are a few nominal and verbal forms pertaining to the Vedic and particularly Atharvavedic lexicon of the ‘enemy’. Part I addresses the root etymology and derivational morphology of the Caland noun *śátru-* m. ‘enemy’ and the Caland adjectives *dódhat-* ‘fierce, obstinate’, *dúdhi-*, *dudhrá-* ‘~ id.’. The etymological dossier of *śátru-* is reviewed with particular attention to the long-recognised root $\sqrt{*k}at-$ ‘~ fight’ and the hypothesis of a delocative origin, for which explicit derivation is given. The treatment of *dódhat-* and related forms include a reconsideration of the standard etymon $\sqrt{*d}^heud^h-$ ‘shake’ based on the hypothesis of $*d^h-/ *i-$ -present alternation as well as a novel etymothesis $\sqrt{*d}eyd^h-$ ‘hard’ based on the comparison with OIr. *dúad* m. ‘labour, trouble, toil’, and more remotely maybe with Lat. *dūrus* ‘hard’. Part II is a textual, semantic, and etymological treatment of the root $\sqrt{m}uh-$ ‘confound, be confounded’ with related formations. By showing the close link between the notion of mental obnubilation and fallacy conveyed by the root and those of fog, sleep, and especially darkness, the etymothesis $\sqrt{*s}meuḡ^h-$ alongside the already established series $\sqrt{*s}meuḡ^h-$, $\sqrt{*s}meuḡ^h-$ ‘smoke’ is proposed.

Keywords

Vedic literature, Vedic verbal morphology, Indo-European etymology, Indo-European nominal morphology, Old Irish.

* Matteo Macciò is responsible for the Introduction and Part I, Rosa Ronzitti for Part II. Unless otherwise stated, translations are our own for the third *kāṇḍa* of the *Śaunaka-Atharvaveda*, by Whitney 1905 for the other *kāṇḍas*, by Hellwig et al. 2024 and Zehnder et al. 2024 for the *Paippalāda*, by Geldner 1951 (German) and Jamison, Brereton 2014 (English) for the *Ṛgveda* (with occasional slight modifications of the latter in Part II), by Eggeling 1882 for the *Śatapatha-Brahmaṇa*.

Introduction

1. The lexicon of the ‘enemy’ attested in the *Atharvaveda* (AV) substantially continues that of the *R̥gveda* (RV) and it is generated by three main sources of meaning: otherness (e.g. *áraṇa-* ‘foreigner’, *arí-* m. ‘~ enemy’ – beside ‘friend, guest’ –, *níṣṭya-* ‘external, foreigner’, *pára-* ‘other, foreigner, enemy’), wickedness (e.g. *ádeva-* ‘godless’, *aghāyú-* ‘~ wicked’, *duḥśáṃsa-* ‘evil-doer’), and hostility (e.g. *ámitra-* ‘non-friend’, *m̐d̐dh-* m. ‘~ despiser’, *abhi\ddā(s)-* ‘~ be hostile, defy, attack’, *\śap-* ‘curse’).

Much of this lexicon is etymologically problematic (e.g. *aghāyú-*, *m̐d̐dh-*, *abhi\ddā(s)-*, *\śap-*), including the Vedic basic word for ‘enemy’ itself, *śátru-* m. On the other hand, we come across forms with a (seemingly) clear etymology but a very peculiar motivation, such as *sapátna-* m. ‘rival, enemy’ from *sapátnī-* f. ‘fellow wife, rival wife’¹.

2. The following table shows the principal concepts motivating the word ‘enemy’ vel sim. in IE languages based on their respective etymologies²:

¹ S. Macciò forthc., §12, where I argue that *sapátna-* is actually back-formed from the compound adj. *sapatnahán-* ‘slaying the enemy’ RV 10+ and that the first member of the compound is originally the unmarked compositional representation of *sapátnī-* (cf. *sapatnaghñí-* ‘slaying the rival wives’ RV 10.159.5). As an alternative, *sapátna-* could also represent the substantivisation of a bahuvrīhi compound **sápatna-* ‘having the same *patnī*’ referring to a familial rivalry much like *bhrátr̥vya-* m. ‘paternal cousin; rival, enemy’: **sápatnāh* could be two in-laws, e.g. a woman’s brother and husband, or less likely two fellow husbands of a polyandric wife.

² For which, due to space limitations, I must refer the reader to the etymological dictionaries of the relevant languages or branches.

As is clear from the table, the Vedic onomasiology for ‘enemy’ is quite varied. It largely aligns with the rest of the IE languages, especially Greek, but also presents its own peculiar motivations.

3. The present paper deals with some chosen nouns, adjectives and verbal roots referred to or predicated of the ‘enemy’ in the third *kāṇḍa* of the *Śaunaka* recension of the AV (ŚŚ), on which the authors have been working within the Atharvavedic PRIN Project 2022 *Entangled Chronotopes*: a new Italian and English translation has been completed, and an English commentary is under preparation.

Part I is devoted to the etymology and derivational morphology of some apparent Caland nominals. One is the noun *śātru-* m. ‘enemy’, very frequently attested throughout Vedic and Sanskrit literature and variously interpreted by etymologists: it seemed therefore convenient to recapitulate this now hefty dossier up to the most recent treatments (§4)³. The others are the quite rare adjective *dódhat-* ‘fierce, obstinate’ and related forms, for which both a revision of the standard etymology and a new etymothesis are proposed (§5).

Part II focuses on the morphosemantics and etymology of the verbal root *√muh-* ‘confound, be confounded’ and relative formations, strongly tied to the representation of enmity and conflict in the AV, but also of illness, love and sacrifice. Attention is drawn to textual and lexical elements that highlight the relation between the root and the imagery of sleep and darkness and finally support the proposed IE reconstruction.

Part I

Caland’s enemies: Etymological remarks on śātru- and dódhat- with related forms

4. *śātru-* m. RV+ is the most common and least connotated word for ‘enemy’ in Vedic (mostly pl.), widely attested also in Sanskrit (esp. in the epics) and continued in Pkt. (Pā.) *sattu-* m. ‘id.’. It is not very fre-

³ Also, I didn’t have much of a choice, since a few days before the Workshop I happened to read in García Ramón 2020 the very idea I had been meaning to present (delocative derivation).

quent in composition (esp. as a first member) until the epic language, when it becomes fairly productive.

It occurs a dozen times in the third *kāṇḍa* of the ŚŚ⁴, always but twice (3.6.6, 3.19.2) in the Acc. pl.: reference is made, as usual in both the ṚV and the AV, to the enemy front as the object of hoped-for divine actions such as a *pramṛṇati* ‘shatter’ (3.1.4), *vidhyati* ‘pierce’ (3.2.5), *hanti* ‘kill’, *niḥśṛṇāti* ‘tear apart’, *sināti* ‘bind’ (3.6.1–2, 5), *sahate* ‘defeat’ (3.10.12), *apavṛṇkte* ‘chase away’ (3.12.6)⁵.

ŚŚ 3.1.3 also attests the denominal present participle *śatrūyánt-* ‘being hostile, acting as an enemy’ (finite forms virtually unattested), occurring some ten times in a few repetitive contexts in the ṚV and ŚŚ (mainly as the subjective Gen. of words for ‘riches, wealth’) and very sparsely afterwards. ṚV 8.45.5 is the only Vedic attestation of the abstract *śatrutvá-* n. ‘enmity’.

4.1. Three roots have been considered for the etymology of *śátru-*.

GPW VII 55 indicates √*śad-*, only attested in the perfect stem *śāśad-* (ṚV and AV) ‘stand out [fig.], excel, triumph’⁶, hence **śād-tru-* ‘siegreich-

⁴ 3.1.1a (= PS 3.5.1a, 3.6.1a), 4b (= 3.6.4b) (to Indra and Agni against the enemies); 3.2.5d (= 3.5.5d) (to Indra, Agni, and Apvā against the enemies); 3.6.1c (= 3.3.1c, ≈ 6.9.4c), 2b (= 3.3.2b), 5c (= 3.3.6c), 6c (≈ 3.3.4c) (to the *aśvattha*-tree against the enemies); 3.10.12c (= 1.106.4c) (to the *ekāṣṭakā* for progeny and prosperity); 3.12.6b (= 20.23.3b) (to the house to build); 3.19.2c (= 3.19.2c, ≈ 19.11.9c) (a *purohita*’s orison for the battle).

⁵ Here and in the following, the present 3sg. is used as lemmatising form.

⁶ Formally and semantically not unproblematic, s. Schaefer 1994, p. 30ff. and Kümmel 2000, p. 512ff. resp. Analogical long-vowel reduplication according to Krisch 1996, pp. 30ff., 43f. As to the root etymology, the most usual comparison is with Gk. (Hom.+) κέκασμαι ‘excel, be superior’, κεκαδμένος ‘adorned, equipped’, PNs Κάστωρ -ορός m., Καστιό-άνειρα f., hence PIE √**kād-* or √**kend-* ‘shine forth, stand out [fig.]’ (IEW 516f. and LIV² 325 resp.; √**kād-* is reconstructed as √**keh₂d-* by Lubotsky 1981, positing an Indo-Iranian laryngeal loss in front of a consonantal cluster with initial PIE *media*, which would speak for the reconstruction of the latter as a pre-glottal stop). García Ramón 1988–90 (s. also 2024 with bibl.) tried to trace both Ved. √*śad-* and the Greek forms to a PIE root √*(s)*kend-* ‘appear, make oneself visible’ common to OInd. √*chand-* ‘seem, please’, Av. √*sənd-*, OPers. √*θand-* ‘appear, seem (good)’, assuming an early paradigmatic split in Proto-Indo-Iranian. His reconstruction is deemed likely in EWA II 607 and EDIV 333 but encountered some serious criticism by Kümmel 2000, p. 183f., particularly regarding the respective perfect formations of Ved. √*śad-* and OInd. √*chand-* (active and with *s- *mobile* the latter, middle and without *s- *mobile* the former; s. now García Ramón 2024, p. 95ff., 106). Kümmel 2000, p. 512f. also points out some less compelling problems with the semantic interpretation of Ved. √*śad-*, which would not mean ‘stand out, excel’ but ‘feel strong’, thus hindering the equation to √*chand-* within Indo-Aryan and to Gk. κέκασμαι etc. in IE (hence √**skend-* ‘(er)scheinen’ ≠ √**kend-* ‘Selbstvertrauen,

er Gegner'. Although it may count on some textual support (RV 7.98.4ab *yád yodháyā maható mányamānān sākṣāma tán bāhúbhiḥ śásādānān* 'When you will set to fighting those who think themselves great, we shall overcome them, though they are exulting in their arms'), this etymology is outdated (s. below)⁷.

Stärke entwickeln' ≠ ³√ **k̑*/kend- 'sich auszeichnen' in LIV² 325, 350, 546; s. now García Ramón 2024, pp. 88ff., 106ff.).

- ⁷ It raises, however, an interesting phonological issue. From the phonological point of view, an underlying representation /śád-tru-/ could indeed surface as [śátru-], at least judging from some spelling alternations: *cháttra*- n. 'parasol' ŠB, Sū+ (~ √chad- 'cover', transp. PIE **skéd-trom*) is spelled also *cháttra*- (e.g. BaudhGS 2.6.9, 2.11.44, 3.4.24; ŠB 6.3.2, 6.10.2); *tóttra*- n. 'goat' MBh+ (~ √tud- 'strike, push', transp. PIE *(s)téud-trom) is spelled also *tóttra*- (e.g. MBh 6.43.5, 9.19.15 [s. Poona apparatus ad loc.]; Rām 2.35.31, 2.42.5, 3.27.10); the *hapax abandhrá*- 'without bonds, hoops' ŚS 4.16.7 (d = VārSS 1.6.5.10.3; s. Kim 2021, p. 144, fn. 608) possibly realises /a-band-dhrá-/ (~ √bandh- 'bind', if from PIE **ṇ-bʰendʰ-tró*- [s. AiGr II.2 707f. for adjectival -tra- and -trá-] and not **ṇ-bʰendʰ-ró*-). On such alternations s. already Saussure 1887, p. 251f. However, in none of its countless attestations is *śátru*- spelled <śattru->, which seems to rule out /śád-tru-/. To be sure, non-alternating forms like *śátru*- or *dátra*- n. 'gift' RV+ (~ √dā- 'give') can still be seen as reflecting PIE */TtrV/ sequences that were simplified already in the protolanguage according to the so-called *metron*-rule **VTTRV* > *VTTRV* (Saussure 1887 assumes non-phonemicity: *[VTTRV] */VTRV/; Schindler ap. IG I.2 111f. syllabic conditioning: **VTTRV* > *VTTRV*; Hilmarsson 1993 accentual conditioning: **VTTRV* > *VTTRV*; Neri 2017, pp. 179f., 206, fn. 8, 240 accentual and consequent syllabic conditioning: **VTTRV* > **VTTRV* > *VTTRV* vs **VTTRV* > **VTTRV*; s. Byrd 2015, p. 186ff. for the missing effect of Sievers-Edgerton's law). Thus *śátru*- could proceed from a PIE **kād-tru*- or **kīd-tru*- > **kātru*- or **kītru*- (since PIE **a* functions as a full grade in Ablaut slots and **tro*-derivatives have full grade, it should be noted that this etymology of *śátru*-, if correct, would speak in favour of √**kād*- over √**kēd*-), as *dátra*- from PIE **dé-dh₃-tro*- > **dédtro*- (Schmidt-Hackstein's law; s. Hackstein 2002) > **détro*- > **détro*- (metron-rule) – an oxytone *dátrá*-, given for the RV in EWA I 713 but not attested to my knowledge, could instead proceed directly from **deh₃-tró*- through *Wetter-Regel* (PGmc. **uēdra*- n. 'weather' < PIE **h₂ue-tró*- < √**h₂ueh₁*- 'blow'; s. Neri 2017, in part. p. 287f. on *dátra*-); actually, it is well possible that *dátra*- itself is a secondary barytone for **dátrá*- (individualising or concretising barytonesis; cf. Neri 2017, p. 288 for an alternative hypothesis), since **dátrá*- would have the expected accentuation for a *nomen actionis* or *rei actae* (AiGr II.2 701ff., Gr² II.1 339ff.). In a rather funny way, Gk. μέτρον n. 'measure' is now no longer etimologised on PIE √**med*- 'take measures' with *metron*-rule, but on √**meh₁*- 'measure' with *Wetter-Regel*. Given that the rest of the Greek evidence is also uncertain (κέντρον n. 'goat, point of a spear, sting' and πέτροα f., -ος m./f. 'rock, stone', mentioned by Hilmarsson 1993, p. 212 together with μέτρον, are indeed quite shaky evidence, for κέντρον simply does not present the relevant context – in no case could **kēmt.trom* develop into **κέντ.τρον* – and the etymology of πέτροα, -ος on PIE **péd*- n. 'foot' is far from likely), all is left to support the action of the *metron*-rule at a PIE level are two Indo-Aryan (beside *dátra*-, *átra*- n. 'food' RV 10.79.2, BĀU 5.13.4) and some Germanic examples (the best one being OHG *sedel* n., OE *seðel* n./m. 'seat, throne' < PGmc. **sepla*- < PIE **séd-tlom* vs PIE **séd-tlóm* > Plir. **sat-trá*- > Ved. *sattrá*- n. '(Soma) ceremony', YAv. *hastra*- n. 'gathering'; s. already Saussure 1887, p. 6f.). It is worth noting, however, that the Vedic evidence for the *metron*-rule is not as reliable as it seems, precisely

MW 1051 indicates $\sqrt{\acute{s}at-}$, only attested in the causative $\acute{s}ātáyati$ ‘cut off, hew off’ ŚS 6.135.1, 12.5.69, TS 6.2.8, ‘throw down, slay’ MBh, Rām (suppletive⁸ to $\sqrt{\acute{s}ad-}$ ‘fall off, out’ RV+⁹ together with $\acute{s}īyate$ ‘fall out, disappear’), whence $*\acute{s}āt-tru-$ ‘overthrower’ (s. fn. 7). A link with PS1. $*kotiti$ ‘knock over’ (Slov. *kotāti* ‘roll’, Cz. *kaceti* ‘fall’, Russ. *katát’* ‘turn, roll’) is rejected in REW I 540. The comparison with Latv. *sist* ‘hit, strike’ (KEWA III 323) and through that with *sīts* m. ‘hunting spear’, Gk. *κεντέω* ‘prick, goad, sting’, *κέντρον* n. ‘goad’, OHG *hantag* ‘sharp, pointed’ (PIE $\sqrt{*kēnt-}$)¹⁰ is hindered by the short /i/ in Latvian (PBalt. $*\acute{s}int-ti > ^{\dagger}sist$, cf. *sīts* < PBalt. $*\acute{s}iñ-ta-$ < PIE $*\acute{k}n̥(t)-to-$)¹¹.

Finally, the current standard etymology¹² connects $\acute{s}ātru-$ (and possibly $\sqrt{\acute{s}at-}$, s. above) with some IE words of the semantic field of ‘fight’ pointing to PIE $\sqrt{*kāt-}$ (for $*a$ the Celtic evidence is decisive¹³):

- in Anatolian HLuv. *katt(i)-* c. ‘hostility’ < PIE $*\acute{k}āt(i)-$, Hitt. *kattu-* n. ‘enmity’ *hapax* KUB 43.60 i 17¹⁴ < PIE $*\acute{k}āt-u-$ (→ HLuv. *kattun(i)-* ‘weapon’, Hitt. *kattawai-*¹⁵ ‘be aggrieved, become hostile’, *kattawātar*, Gen. -*wannas* n. ‘aggrievedness, enmity’, *kattawanalli-*, CLuv. *kattawatnalla/i-* ‘vengeful’, c. ‘plaintiff’ ← oblique stem $*\acute{k}āt-éu-$ ¹⁵;

because it is not always easy to distinguish the forms with constantly simple spelling from those with alternating spelling: in the face of $\acute{ā}tra-$ with constantly simple spelling, we find its derivative $a(t)trín-$ ‘devouring’ RV+ with alternating spelling (*atrin-* in Vishva Bandhu’s edition, *atrin-* elsewhere). Preliminary to the definition of a *metron*-rule outside Germanic is therefore a thorough recognition and assessment of <tra> and <tr> spellings in Vedic texts and according to the Vedic grammatical tradition (*Vyākaraṇa* and *Prātiśākhya*s).

⁸ But s. Jamison 1983, p. 90.

⁹ Hence also $\acute{s}āda-$ m. ‘~ grass, stalk’ RV+? S. EWA II 607, 629 with bibl. and Jamison 2025 ad RV 9.15.6.

¹⁰ Doubts on the Germanic side in EWAhd IV 819.

¹¹ For YAv. *θātairō* Yt. 10.14 (AW 786 “rettungslos verderbt”) s. bibl. quoted in KEWA III 323.

¹² IEW 534, KEWA III 294, EWA II 607 and LIV²Add s.v. $?\sqrt{*kāt-}$.

¹³ García Ramón 2020, p. 278 proposes to trace PCelt. $*katu-$ back to PIE $*\acute{k}āt-$, but *schwa secundum* is not a case in point here, as the obstruent cluster is followed by a vowel, not a sonorant (and a vowel). The root shape $\sqrt{*k(h_2)et-}$ as per EDH 466 raises the problem of the aspirating effect of $*h_2$ (IG I.2 135f., Eichner 1988, p. 141, EDA 620f., eDiAna s.v. $*k(h_2)et-$).

¹⁴ But the interpretation ‘talon’ has been proposed as well (García Ramón 2020, p. 263, fn. 9 with bibl.).

¹⁵ HED IV 138ff., EDH 466, eDiAna s.vv. $*k(h_2)et-$, $/kattun(i)-/$, s. below for further recent bibl.

- in Greek κότος m. 'grudge, resentment' ('vengeance' Aesch. fr. 266.5 Radt) < PIE **kót-o-* or maybe << **két-es/os*-¹⁶;
- in Celtic OIr. *cath* m.¹⁷, W *cad* f. 'battle, troop', Corn. *cas* f. 'battle', OBret. *cat* as first or second member in compounds and PNs, Gaul. *Catu*- in PNs < PIE **kát-u-*, W *cadw* m. 'battle, troop' < **kát-u-o-*, *cadr* 'strong', OBret. *cadr* 'beautiful' < **kát-ró*-¹⁸;
- in Germanic ON *hǫð* f. 'battle', first member in PNs, *Hǫðr* m. DN, OHG *Hadu*- and OE *Heaðu*- in PNs < PIE **kát-u-*, MHG, NHG *hader* m. 'quarrel' < **kát-e/or-eh₂*-¹⁹;
- in Slavic OChS *kotora* f. 'fight (μάχη)', Russ.ChS *kotera* f. 'id.', ORuss. *kotera* f. 'strife' < PIE **kát-e/or-eh₂*-²⁰.

The Anatolian and Greek evidence sets itself apart to some extent²¹. There seems to be a closer semantic link between the two branches than with the other ones²², especially in the case of the Luvian forms, which Melchert (2012, p. 209 with fn. 6) separates from Hitt. *kattu-* and connects with Gk. κότος. Moreover, they raise the problem of the PIE palatal Anlaut **k*^o (whence Luv. *z*^o would be commonly expected)²³ required by Indo-Aryan (s. fn. 20 on Slavic). García Ramón (2020) tried to reunite *śatru-* with Hitt. *kattawātar* and Gk. κότος on the basis of a PIE Caland adjective **kót-ú-* 'hostile', leaving pending – but *de facto* denying

¹⁶ As evidence for the reconstruction of an **es*-neuter one may adduce the verb κοτέω 'bear a grudge', esp. in light of the treatment by Tucker 1990 (on κοτέω in part. s. pp. 35 with fn. 20, 63 with fn. 69; cf. Fraenkel 1910, p. 195, García Ramón 2020, p. 277, fn. 54). General scepticism in DELGIE 502, GEW I 931f., DELG 572, EDG I 761.

¹⁷ S. Ziegler 1994, p. 109 for Ogam attestations.

¹⁸ IEW 534, EDPC 195, LEIA C-47f., DLG 111, DGVB 98.

¹⁹ EDPG 214f., AEW 277f., Schaffner 2001, p. 498f.

²⁰ REW I 646, ЭССЯ XI 200f., EDS 240 (s. fn. 43). *Centum* outcomes in Balto-Slavic are well known, e.g. PIE **h₂ek-mon-* > Lith. *akmuō* m., OChS *kamy* m. 'stone' (assuming an irregular metathesis) vs Lith. *ašmuō* m. 'cutting-edge, blade', Ved. *aśman-* m. 'stone, rock', Av., OPers. *asman-* m. 'stone, rock, heaven'. It is still debated whether they are due to language contact (mainly Germanic borrowings), substrate or adstrate influence (of other branches or of *centum* dialects within Balto-Slavic), or phonological conditioning (post-sibilant or pre-sonorant position among the hypotheses) (Matasović 2005). In the present case, one could assume **s-* mobile (PIE √*(s)*kāt-*) (GCLS I 38, VGBS 92f., Matasović 2005, pp. 365, 369, 372), although the other branches do not provide any positive evidence.

²¹ S. HEG I 545 with bibl.

²² S. in part. García Ramón 2020.

²³ EDH 466 assumes a Hittite loanword.

– the North-Western connection²⁴. Unfortunately, García Ramón fails to discuss the Luvian evidence, albeit crucial for the reconstruction of the palatal. In yet another perspective, Hackstein (2024) separates Ved. $\sqrt{\text{śat-}}$ and śatru- from all the rest, which he then connects with the local particle PIE $*\text{kāt}$ ‘down’²⁵ verbalised as ‘to down, subdue’. Now, if one accepts Melchert (2012)’s reconsideration of Luvic dorsals, according to which PIE $*\hat{k}$ indeed yields a plain velar in Lycian and Luvian unless followed by a front vowel, $*\hat{i}$ or $*\hat{u}$ ²⁶, I do not see any compelling reason to exclude any of the five branches from the comparative basis of $\sqrt{*}\hat{k}\text{at-}$. At any rate, the Anatolian and Greek evidence is not decisive for the matter in hand.

As far as the *Wurzeletymologie* of śatru- is concerned, the root $\sqrt{*}\hat{k}\text{at-}$ of the battle-word is the obvious candidate, regardless of its relation to $\sqrt{\text{śat-}}$ ‘cut off, hew off’. To be sure, $\sqrt{\text{śad-}}$ could not be excluded with certainty on either phonological or semantic grounds. It is indeed morphology that excludes $\sqrt{\text{śad-}}$, because the root-final /d/ entails the difficulty of operating with a suffix $-\text{tru-}$ (only potential example of which is śatru- itself in AiGr II.2 860).

The evidence subsumed under $\sqrt{*}\hat{k}\text{at-}$, with or without inclusion of Anatolian and Greek, points to a Caland-like series of $*\text{u-}$ and $*\text{r-}$ formations: $*\hat{k}\text{at-ró-}$, $*\hat{k}\text{at-e/or-eh}_2\text{-}$ and $*\hat{k}\text{at-u-}$ with thematised $*\hat{k}\text{at-}\hat{u}\text{-o-}$. This does not *per se* necessitate postulating some kind of adjectival meaning for the root: verbal roots can be attracted into the Caland system²⁷, and the semantics of the historical continuants of $\sqrt{*}\hat{k}\text{at-}$ do lean towards a verbal meaning (‘~ fight’, or ‘~ cut, wound’ if we accept to identify PIE $\sqrt{*}\hat{k}\text{at-}$ in OInd. $\sqrt{\text{śat-}}$), especially if Anatolian and Greek are left aside. On the other hand, the complete lack of verbal continuants speaks against the reconstruction of a verbal root and resembles the situation of some roots belonging to the core nominal lexicon of PIE, e.g. $\sqrt{*}\text{ker-}$ of $*\text{kor-o-}$ ‘war, army, *Männerbund*’ (OPers. *kāra-* m. ‘army’, Lith. *kāras* m. ‘war’, maybe Gk. $\kappa\omicron\rho\omicron\varsigma$ $\tau\pi\lambda\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$ $\alpha\upsilon\theta\rho\omega\pi\omega\nu$ [...])

²⁴ S. fn. 13 for the attempt at retrieving it by postulating *schwa secundum* for PCelt. $*\text{kātu-}$.

²⁵ Hitt. *katta* adv. ‘below, down(wards)’, posp. ‘by, under’, *kattan* adv. ‘below’, posp. ‘under, by, (along) with’ (but s. Goedegebuure ap. Melchert 2012, p. 211); Gk. $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$ prep. ‘down(wards), under, by’. S. LIPP II 419ff.

²⁶ More precisely, the inherited voiceless palatovelars would have undergone conditioned palatalisation before front vowels, $*\hat{i}$ and $*\hat{u}$ and then merged with velars elsewhere (voiced palatovelars are left aside for lack of evidence).

²⁷ S. lately Nussbaum 2022, p. 208.

Hsch. κ 3655) and **kor-jo-* ‘id.’ (Lith. *kārias* m. ‘war, army’, OIr. *cuire* ²⁸ m. ‘troop’, Goth. *harjis* m., ON *herr* m., OE *here* m. ‘army’, cf. Gk. κοίρανος m. ‘(military) leader’)²⁸, which has been thought to be identical with $\sqrt{*(s)ker-}$ ‘cut’²⁹. In the end, the issue of the nominal or verbal semantics of $\sqrt{*\hat{k}at-}$ is better left unsettled.

4.2. In light of the above, *śātru-* must contain a suffix *-ru-*.

A suffix **-ru-* is attested in Vedic and IE³⁰. A few Vedic examples are (de)verbal adjectives: *bhīrú-* ‘fearful’ RV+³¹, *dhārú-* ‘sucking’ ŚS 4.18.2³², rhizotonic *céru-* ‘respectful, worshipping’ RV 8.50.7, and the controversial *péru-/perú-* RV³³. Some forms instantiate Pāṇini’s rule A 3.2.159: *dāru-* ‘giving’, *śadru-* ‘falling’, *sadru-* ‘sitting’, *seru-* ‘binding’³⁴. *śātru-* could fit in this series as the substantivisation of an adjective **śatrá-* ‘fighting’, although this would be considerably older than the others. On the other hand, some archaic-looking nominal formations feature the same suffix: PIE **h₂ek-ru-*, **d_ṛk²h₂ek-ru-* ‘tear’ (Toch.A *ākār*, OInd. *áśru-* n., YAv. *asrū-* n., Gk. δάκρυ n., Arm. *artawsr*, cf. Lat. *dacruma* f. ‘id.’)³⁵, **smók-ru-* ‘beard, chin’ (OInd. *śmáśru-* n., cf. Arm. *mawrowk*’ pl., Lith. *smākras* m., Alb. *mjékër* f.)³⁶, PGmc. **χunχ/g-ru-* ‘hunger’ (with **a-*metaplasm ON *hingr* m., OHG, OS *hungar* m.)³⁷, and some other potential forms in Indo-Aryan³⁸. The difference between the two groups must be a matter of chronology rather than deverbal as opposed to denominal derivation, and *śātru-* would sit well among the more archaic forms.

²⁸ S. McCone 1987, pp. 112, 117f. for onomastic continuants in Continental Celtic and possibly in Greek and Italic.

²⁹ NIL 440, McCone 1987, p. 117.

³⁰ AiGr II.2 859f., Gr² II.1 384f.

³¹ Or cf. Lith. *bailūs* ‘id.’ (AiGr II.2 860)? But s. ALEW s.v.

³² Or cf. Gk. θήλυς ‘female’ (AiGr II.2 860)? But s. EWA I 789.

³³ *perú-* ‘durchbringend, -fahrend, rettend’ and *péru-* ‘gähren, schwellen machend’ WRV 861, similarly GPW IV 875 and MW 648.

³⁴ However meagre the evidence, Rau (2007, p. 282) overstates the rarity of the type, also because he ignores Pāṇini’s examples (possibly due to the tendency of Indo-Europeanists to consider them not *sprachwirklich*).

³⁵ Pinault 1997, p. 227ff.

³⁶ Matasović 2005, p. 372.

³⁷ Schaffner 2001, p. 499ff.

³⁸ S. AiGr II.2 860f.

Recently, two secondary developments have been supposed at the origin of the suffix. García Ramón (2020, p. 276) proposes, specifically for *śátru-* and quite *en passant*, “conflation de *-ro-* et *-u-* et/ou délocatif ‘en (état d’) inimitié’”³⁹. Clayton (2023, p. 33) mentions *śátru-* among the potential instances of **-u_ṛ- > *-ru-* metathesis⁴⁰ in its general treatment of the fate of heteroclitics in **-u_ṛ-/(e/o)n-* in Old Indic, although he cautiously refrains from discussing it as it is one of the *ru-*forms “without an obvious Sanskrit base”.

Clayton’s caution is well grounded, as there is no **n*-stem among the IE *comparanda* that could suggest the reconstruction of a PIE stem in **-u_ṛ(s)/-u_ṛ(e/o)n-*: his own later account of Lat. *caterva* f. ‘crowd, troop, band’ as a *Movierung* of **kāt-u_ṛ/-u_ṛon-*⁴¹ crucially relies on HLuw. *kattun(i)-* ‘weapon’ being a remnant of an **n*-stem (PIE **kāt-un-no-*), but this might be a later deinfinitival derivation (eDiAna s.v. /*kattun(i)-*/ with bibl.).

The delocalival hypothesis can count on the parallel of PGmc. **uēpru-* ‘lamb, ram, wether’ (Goth. *wiprus* m. ‘lamb’, OHG *widar* m. ‘ram, wether’, ON *veðr* m. ‘ram’) from PIE **uēt-r-u-* ‘yearling’ as delocalival of **uēt-/ut-* ‘year’, **er*-Loc. **uēt-er* (cf. Ved. *savātár-* ‘having the same calf’)⁴². Hence *śátru-* would be an unmarked substantivisation of PIE **kāt-r-u-* (/k_ṛt-r-éu-) ‘(the) one in the fight(ing)’, ultimately derived from a root noun **kāt-* ‘fight’, **er*-Loc. **kāt-er* ‘in/during the fight(ing)’. Note that the same basis can underlie PIE **kāt-er-eh₂-* continued in Germanic and Slavic⁴³.

³⁹ On the conflation of **-ro-* and **-u-*, which represents somehow the null hypothesis, s. Nussbaum 1976, p. 66f., Neri 2003, pp. 296, fn. 995, 303.

⁴⁰ Well known in Inlaut (AiGr I 206f., Gr² I 260f., IG I.2 161f.); for the Auslaut s. IG I.2 161f. and lately Del Tomba 2021 with Tocharian evidence.

⁴¹ Clayton 2024, p. 15f. (who all the same reconstructs *śátru-* as **kāt-ru-*), aiming at disproving Rix’s Proto-Italic law **VsūV > *VrūV*. Lat. *caterva* is indeed generally reconstructed as a secondary derivative in **-uēh₂-* of an **es*-stem. The root is however disputed (EDL 98): an etymology on **kāt-* was already envisaged by Vaillant 1939, p. 106 (contra LEW I 182).

⁴² This is the ingenious reconstruction of Rau 2007, quoted by García Ramón 2020. Actually, Rau posits an intermediate delocalival noun **uēt-r-* ‘year’ as the basis of the proterodynamic adj. **uēt-r-u-/ut-r-éu-* ‘having a year’. On the **er*-Loc. s. Nussbaum 1986, p. 235ff., Rau 2007, p. 289f., Lundquist 2014, p. 90ff., Neri 2017, pp. 117, fn. 68, 150ff. with fn. 211, 212 and 214, 188f., 222, fn. 74.

⁴³ Which García Ramón (2020) chose not to consider (§4.1). I should point out that REW I 646 diverges from ЭССЯ XI 200 and EDS 240 in the spelling of the Russian Church Slavonic form, the first having ORuss. *kotera* vs OChS, Russ.ChS *kotora*, the other two Russ.ChS, ORuss. *kotera* vs OChS *kotora*. As it happens, A. Lubotsky recommends me caution in handling the Slavic evidence, as Church Slavonic manuscripts present

It is true that an **er-Loc.* like **kát-er* ‘in/during the fight(ing)’ does not fit into the temporal (adverbial) semantics typical of the **er-Loc.* and its derivatives (s. above PIE **uét-er* ‘in/during the year’, or Ved. *vāsarā-* ‘auroral’ ← **h₂ués-er* ‘at dawn’)⁴⁴. However, temporal adverbs must be regarded as the archaic core of the derivational model, which could expand to bases with non-temporal semantics⁴⁵. This means also verbal bases, as Lundquist (2014, pp. 92, 96f.) in particular has shown⁴⁶, so that here again we are not in the position of assessing precisely the verbal or nominal semantics of *√*kāt-* (or assuming directly a root noun **kāt-* ‘fight’).

In conclusion, *śátru-* must be added to the Caland system of PIE *√*kāt-* ‘fight_{N/V}’.

5. *dódhat-* ‘fierce, obstinate’ RV+ is attested quite rarely and only in the weak stem, five times in the RV and three in the AV (s. below).

It is regarded as the participle of an otherwise unattested present *dódhati*⁴⁷. The root, however, is represented by the adjectives *dúdhi-* and *dudhrá-*, both interpreted as approximately synonyms in the semantic range ‘violent, impetuous, fierce, obstinate’⁴⁸.

dúdhi- is attested only twice:

considerable variation in the readings. I myself am not competent to take the issue further.

⁴⁴ S. in part. Lundquist 2014, p. 94ff.

⁴⁵ Especially in its later Indo-Iranian stage (s. Lundquist 2014, p. 91ff.). In fact, Nussbaum 1986, p. 235ff. and especially Neri 2017, *passim* apply a much wider interpretation of the derivational semantics of the model.

⁴⁶ Lundquist 2014, p. 97: “within the reconstructible periods of pre-Vedic and Proto-Indo-Iranian, **ar*-locativals appear to be built according to the derivational schema: nominal or verbal stem + **-ar* suffix → temporal-locative adverb. To this adverb could be derived deadverbial adjectives. [...] in the case of *uśar-* the derivation would be nominal stem *us-* + locative suffix *-ar*, using the same synchronic stem as in *us + rá-*, and meaning ‘at/in the dawntime’. Likewise to the verbal root *vas + ar* → *vasar* ‘at the dawning’. From here speakers could derive a deadverbial adjective → *vāsarā-* ‘auroral’.”

⁴⁷ Gotō 1987, p. 175f., LIV² 148. The constantly weak inflection (Nom.pl. *dódhataḥ* in RV 10.119.2) would actually imply a reduplicated verbal formation (given the full reduplication, an intensive), but the phonology does not work, as a *saṃprasāraṇa* root would yield *dódhuvat-*, which is indeed the attested intensive participle of *√dhav-* ‘shake (off, down), agitate’ (s. §5.2 ad fin. and Schaefer 1994, p. 138ff., in part. 139f.).

⁴⁸ On *dúdhita-*, attribute of *támas-* n. ‘darkness’ in RV 2.17.4, 4.1.17, 16.4, s. Schindler 1967.

RV 6.36.2c (to Indra) *syūmagṛbhe dūdhayé* ‘rvate ca’ and to the headstrong charger pulling at the reins’ / ‘nach einem störrigen Roß, das den Zaum festhält’;

RV 10.102.6c (on Mudgala and Mudgalānī’s chariot race) *dūdher yuktāsya drāvataḥ sahānasā-* ‘of the frenzied bull, yoked and running with the cart’ / ‘des wütigen Gespanns, das mit dem Karren lief’.

dudhrá- is more frequent:

PS 12.15.6a (= RV 2.12.15a) (to Indra) *dudhra ā cid* ‘even if you [sc. Indra] are stubborn’;

RV 1.56.3cd (id.) *āyasó* [...] *dudhrá* ‘headstrong metal (weapon)’ (s. §5.2 ad fin.);

RV 1.64.11d (to the Maruts) *dudhrakṛto marúto* ‘acting headstrong, the Maruts’;

RV 5.56.3d (id.) *dudhró gaúr iva bhīmayúḥ* ‘fearsome like a headstrong ox [sc. the Maruts’ onslaught]’;

RV 6.22.4c (to Indra) *dudhra khidvaḥ* ‘you [sc. Indra] headstrong hammer-head’;

RV 7.21.2b (id.) *dudhrāvācaḥ* ‘possessing headstrong speech [sc. the Soṃma-pressing stones]’;

RV 8.66.2ab (id.) *ná yāṃ dudhrá vārante ná sthirá mūro* ‘whom [sc. Indra] neither obdurate nor substantial hindrances will obstruct’;

MS 2.13.12d *agne dudhra* ‘O obstinate Agni’.

Geldner (1951)’s translations are roughly equivalent: ‘hartnäckig’ (RV 1.56.3, 2.12.15, 6.22.4, 8.66.2), ‘störrig’ (5.56.3), for *dudhrakṛto-* (1.64.11) ‘trotzbietend’, for *dudhrāvāca-* (7.21.2) ‘trotzig redend’.

Some translations of *dódhat-* slightly differ from those of *dūdhi-* and *dudhrá-* in that they place emphasis on the notion of violence or rage, but one cannot really observe any difference in usage, the core meaning remaining ‘fierce, obstinate’ vel sim.:

PS 1.69.1b (to the *avālapsya*-amulet against the enemies) *sapatnān dodhato bhayān* ‘stubborn and fearless rivals’;

ŚS 3.6.2b (= PS 3.3.2b) (to the *aśvattha*-tree against the enemies) *śátrūn* [...] *dódhataḥ* ‘the violent enemies’ (‘violent’ already Whitney 1905, ‘as they rush on’ Bloomfield 1897, ‘faisant rage/raging’ Spiers 2020);

ŚS 12.1.58d (= PS 17.6.5d) (to the earth) *-anyān* [...] *dódhataḥ* ‘others that are violent’ (‘the others that rush (against me)’ Bloomfield 1897).

In the RV it is attributed to Indra's opponents, especially mythical ones (Vṛtra, Makha), and to the blowing winds:

- 1.80.5a and 8.6.6a (to Indra) *vṛtrásya dódhataḥ* 'of raging Vṛtra';
 2.21.4a (id.) *dódhato vadhó* 'the deadly blow against those raging';
 10.119.2a (self-praise of the *laba*-bird) *prá vātā iva dódhataḥ* 'forth like raging winds';
 10.171.2ab (to Indra) *makhásya dódhataḥ* 'of the raging Battler'.

Geldner (1951) translates *dódhat-* along the lines of *dúdhi-* and *dudhrá-*: 'trotzig' (RV 1.80.5, 8.6.6), 'Widerspenstiger' (2.21.4), 'widerstrebend' (10.119.2, 10.171.2).

5.1. The etymology of this word family is considered uncertain in KEWA II 49, EWA I 731. Usually a PIE root $\sqrt{*d^heud^h-}$ is reconstructed comparing Gk. $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ $\tau\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}\sigma\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ 'is shaken, quakes' (Hsch. θ 968) and a PGmc. base **dud(+n?)-* drawn out from Engl. *dodder* and Norw. *dudra* 'quaver' (CEDEL 223), but the form $\sqrt{*d^heud^h-}$ is suboptimal with respect to the phonostructure of PIE roots. The difficulty has prompted two main solutions: to consider the Vedic adjectives onomatopoeic as per Gotō (1987, p. 175f.), which is unsatisfactory, or to single out $*-d^h-$ as the enlargement of the root $\sqrt{*d^heud^h-}$ 'jolt, shake' as per IEW 264f. However, since the root is now reconstructed as $\sqrt{*d^heud^hH-}$ (cf. OInd. *dhūnóti* 'shake (off, down), agitate', Gk. $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\omega$, $\theta\upsilon\acute{\iota}\omega$ 'rage, seethe')⁴⁹, the problem arises of the lack of any laryngeal reflex in the Vedic adjectives⁵⁰.

One may argue that $\sqrt{*d^heud^hH-}$ itself is an enlarged root alongside $\sqrt{*d^heud^h-}$. At least for the latter, the hypothesis of an enlargement may be considered not entirely *ad hoc*⁵¹, because Gk. $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\omega$ could be argued to build with PGmc. **dud(+n?)-* and possibly Gk. $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ a $*d^h-/i-$

⁴⁹ Cf. LIV² 149f., Borghi, Delucchi 2025. On $\theta\upsilon\acute{\iota}\omega$ s. DELGIE 360, DELG 448, GEW I 698, EDG I 567.

⁵⁰ Rothstein-Dowden 2022, p. 72, fn. 15.

⁵¹ More and more effort has been put, especially in the last decade, into giving a morphosemantic foundation to the traditional morphophonemic theory of root enlargements, otherwise prone to become the etymologist's black box. Instead of regarding enlargements as mere segmental alternations, the tendency is now to try and pin down their semantic function by tracing them back to independently reconstructible morphemes (Hackstein 2012; Ackermann 2017; Kölligan 2017 and 2018; Pinault 2022): a suffix, as in the case of nominal $*-h_2-$ (Nikolaev 2010; Nussbaum 2022, p. 218f.) or verbal $*-d^h-$ (Rothstein-Dowden 2022, p. 4, fn. 5) or $*-eh_1-$ (Ozono 2025), or a root, as in the case of $*-d^h-$ from $\sqrt{*d^heh_1-}$ 'put' (e.g. $\sqrt{*reh_1d^h-}$ 'carry out

present alternation in the sense of Rothstein-Dowden (2022 and 2023): in this scenario, *dódhat-* would instantiate the $*d^h$ -present *dódhati**, with expected full grade, and *dúdh-i-* and *dudh-rá-* would show the coalescence of the present suffix with the root⁵².

This reconstruction has some shortcomings, though. Firstly, the meaning ‘shaking’ that one should surmise for the Vedic adjectives does not seem to fit the above-mentioned attestations (also, it would be at odds with the assumed $*d^h$ -present, which as a rule should be intransitive). Secondly and most importantly, the comparative basis for an enlarged root $\sqrt{*d^heud^h}$ - meaning ‘shake’ is, in fact, rather shaky in the first place, given that the Greek gloss is of doubtful reading⁵³ and the Germanic verbs are most likely of onomatopoeic origin⁵⁴.

In sum, while the above reconstruction of $\sqrt{*d^heud^h}$ - ($\sim \sqrt{*d^heud^h}$ -H₍₂₎₋) ‘shake’ could represent a more or less sensible restatement of the etymology of Ved. *dúdhi-*, *dudhrá-* and *dódhat-* given in IEW 264, there seems to be some room for improvement. In the following I attempt at a simpler etymology by means of a new etymothesis.

5.2. A mechanical back-projection of Ved. *dúdhi-*, *dudhrá-*, and *dódhat-* in PIE phonology would result in a root $\sqrt{*deud^h}$ -⁵⁵.

I contend that such root can be reconstructed on the basis of the Vedic adjectives and the Old Irish noun *dúad*, Early OIr. *dód* m. ‘labour, trouble, toil’ (‘labour, toil, pain, hardship’ P.O.C., ‘affliction, a cross’ Eg.Gl. 252). The form is attested as both a *u*-stem (Gen.sg. *duadha* 3 C 12 174r.12 = *Mochean do theacht a chláirseach* 14 [p. 40 ed. Breathnach]) and

successfully, accomplish, establish’ from $*reh_1=\sqrt{d^heh_1}$ - ‘establish an assessment’ as per Kölligan 2018).

⁵² A Caland parallel would then be found in PIE $*h_1rud^h-ró-$ ‘red’ (Gk. ἐρυθρός, Lat. *ruber*) if from $\sqrt{*h_1reu(-)d^h}$ - ‘be(come) red’ (Gk. ἐρεύθομαι, Lat. *rubeo*) (Rothstein-Dowden 2022, p. 4, fn. 5).

⁵³ S. Latte’s and Cunningham’s apparati ad loc. This uncertainty is also the premiss for the “Pre-Greek” hypothesis of EDG I 566f. Sure enough, it hinders the further connection to θύσανος m. ‘tassel’ (GEW I 697), on which also DELG 447 is sceptical.

⁵⁴ S. Schindler 1967, p. 69 with bibl.: “Neben engl. *dodder* gibt es *doddle*, *didder*, *diddle*, *dadder*, *daddle*, *totter*, *titter*, *toddle* usw. mit ähnlichen Bedeutungen.” The Germanic verb is not even mentioned in LIV² 148 s.v. $?\sqrt{*deud^h}$ -. “Onomatopoeic origin” does not mean, here and in general, lack of prehistory and etymology, but only that these are impossible to retrieve via morphology and thus difficult to prove.

⁵⁵ For the method of tentative etymology s. Eichner 1973, p. 61, Borghi 2002, p. 119ff., Ronzitti 2004, p. 47 with fn. 1.

an *o*-stem (Gen.sg. *duaidh* TSh. 2.2.2 [p. 75 ed. Atkinson])⁵⁶, and stands isolated within Celtic. Based on the *varia lectio dosodh* (Metr.Dinds. 1.34), Thurneysen (1917) tried to explain it as a compound of *sá(i)th* (*ā/i*-stem: Gen. *sáithe/sátha*) f. ‘sufficiency, fill (of food)’ (cf. Lith. *sótis* f. ‘id.’, with zero-grade Lat. *satis* adv. ‘enough’)⁵⁷ and the pejorative prefix *do*°, with subsequent metaplasm to the *u*-stems. This is still the current etymology (LEIA D-207, eDIL s.v. *dúad*). However, the early form *dód* cannot proceed from PCelt. **dusātu-* (<< PIE **du(s)°seh₂-ti-*) and could be justified in Thurneysen’s terms only as a reverse spelling; moreover, a metaplasm to the *u*-stem inflection is quite a costly assumption. Starting from *dód* instead, the later form *dúad* is perfectly explicable via the breaking of /*ō*/⁵⁸, while the *varia lectio dosodh* is easily accounted for as a paronymological spelling. Finally, *dód* > *dúad* reflects PIE **de/ouð^h-u/o-*.

Comparing now the Old Irish and the Vedic forms, I propose to posit an adjectival root *√*deuð^h-* meaning the property concept⁵⁹ ‘hard’ – continued in Indo-Aryan in the sense of ‘tough’ (‘obstinate, fierce, etc.’) and in Insular Celtic in the sense of ‘hardship’ (‘labour, toil, etc.’) – and accordingly yielding a set of Caland derivatives⁶⁰:

- a thematic adjective PIE **dud^h-ró-* ‘hard’ > Ved. *dudhrá-*;
- a proterodynamic adjective PIE **dúd^h-i-/dud^h-éj-* ‘hard’ > Ved. *dúdhī-*;
- an adjective **déuð^h-nt-* ‘hard’ (PIE amphidynamic **déuð^h-ont-/dud^h-nt-*) > Ved. *dódhat-*⁶¹;
- an abstract noun **dóuð^h-u-* (PIE acrodynamic **dó/éuð^h-u-*) or **dóuð^h-o-* ‘hardness’ > OIr. *dód, dúad*⁶².

⁵⁶ eDIL s.v. *dúad* (quod vd. also for secondary spellings and abbreviations), LEIA D-207. The Irish lexeme, like the Vedic one, could also reflect a root *√*d^heuð^h-*, but the *Wurzelansatz* *√*deuð^h-* is preferred for phonostructural reasons. Furthermore, as it turns out, it allows for the comparison with Lat. *dūrus* ‘hard’ (s. below ad fin.).

⁵⁷ LEIA S-15f., EDPC 324, ALEW s.v. *sótus*.

⁵⁸ Dated towards the end of the 7th c. in McCone 1996, p. 134.

⁵⁹ Balles 2006, p. 269ff., Rau 2009, p. 78ff.

⁶⁰ Cf. Rau 2009, p. 71ff. building on Nussbaum 1976.

⁶¹ S. already Lowe 2014, p. 183.

⁶² Both **u*-stem and **o*-stem abstract nouns obviously extend their domain well beyond the Caland system, but the set of reconstructs as a whole clearly belongs there. Admittedly, the reconstruction of the **u*-stem noun is not straightforward from a PIE standpoint, due to the constraint against Caland **u*-derivatives from roots containing **u*. However, at least one such derivative seems to be found in Lith. *dubūs* ‘deep, hollow’, OIr. *dub*, MW *du* ‘black, dark’ < PIE **d^hub^(h)-u-* ‘dark’ and/or ‘deep’ (*√*d^heuð^h-* ‘dark’ IEW 263f. and EDPC 108 based on Gk. τυφλός ‘blind’, PGmc. **dauba-* ‘deaf’; *√*d^heuð^h-* ‘deep’ Neri 2003, p. 46, fn. 105, NIL 123ff. based on Toch.B *tapre*, A *tpār* ‘high’,

For this etymology, the occurrence of *dudhrá-* with *āyasá-* ‘made of iron, metal’ in R̥V 1.56.3 (to Indra) is especially significant, as it could pre-serve the ancient meaning ‘hard’⁶³:

sá turvāṇir mahāṇi areṇú paúṃsyē
girér bhr̥ṣṭír ná bhr̥ājate tujá śávaḥ |
yéna śúṣṇam māyínam āyasó máde
dudhrá ābhúṣu rāmáyan ní dāmani ||

He is surpassing and great in masculine strength, (even) without raising dust. Like the peak of a mountain his power glints with its thrusting, (the power) with which his headstrong metal (weapon), in his exhilaration and among those standing by him, brought wily Śuṣṇa down to rest in fetters.

At any rate, the motivation {hard} also suits the metaphorical meaning ‘headstrong, hartnäckig’ generally attributed to *dudhrá-* and often also to *dúdhi-* and *dódhat-* in reference translations.

In light of the proposed reconstruction, I would refrain from positing a present *dódhati** on account of *dódhat-*, even if the Nom.pl. *dódhataḥ* (R̥V 10.119.2) with zero-grade suffix may have been influenced by the inflection of reduplicated present and intensive participles (e.g. *dódh_uvat-* from *√dhav-* ‘shake (off, down), agitate’, s. fn. 47).

Finally, I should like to point out a possible connection to Lat. *dūrus* ‘hard’ (which would unambiguously point to PIE **d°*, s. fn. 56). Neither the etymology on PIE *√d_{ueh}2-* ‘far, long’ (Hitt. *tuwa-*, OInd. *dūrā-* ‘id.’, Gk. *δῆρός*, Dor. *ḍā°* ‘long [of time]’) with the semantic development ‘long’ > ‘lasting’ > ‘stable’ > ‘hard’ (EDL 184) nor the etymology on PIE **dór-u-/dr-éu-* ‘tree, wood’ (Hitt. ^(GIS)*tāru-* n., OInd. *dāru-* n., Gk. *δόρυ* n.) with dissimilation of **dre/ou-ro-* (LEW I 384ff.) can be considered satisfactory – especially the first one is to my mind semantically very

PGmc. **deupa-* ‘deep’; in ALEW s.v. *daubà* an attempt is made at reconstructing a single root *√*d^heuḃ^h-* ‘dark, deep’ by assumption of PGmc. **deupa-* < **deuppa-* < pre-PGmc. **d^heuḃ^hn-*, but the Tocharian evidence resists any such attempt). There are also a few cases that prove that the constraint did not apply to **u*, but they are all cases of ascending diphthong (e.g. PIE **h₁ués-u-* adj./n. ‘good’, **h₁uṛ^hH-ú-* ‘wide’, **sueh₂d-ú-* ‘sweet’). On the other hand, a secondary **u*-stem to an **o*-stem – which is not a Caland derivative *per se* – would be awkward from a Goidelic standpoint (cf. De Bernardo Stempel 1999, p. 87ff.). All in all, the PIE **u*-stem is probably the more likely option.

⁶³ However the sentence structure is interpreted: Renou 1969 and Jamison, Brereton 2014 intend *dudhrá* as an attribute of *āyasó* ([‘le foudre] d’airain impétueux’, ‘headstrong metal’), Geldner 1951 as an apposition to the subject (*dudhrá ābhúṣu* ‘in [Sachen seiner] Anhänger hartnäckig’).

flimsy⁶⁴. Therefore, one could think of attaching Lat. *dūrus* to our Indo-Celtic dossier as a PIE Caland adjective **duH₍₂₎-ró-* ‘hard’ derived from an enlarged root $\sqrt{*deu\text{-}H_{(2)}}$ ⁶⁵ parallel to $\sqrt{*deu\text{-}d^h\text{-}}$.

Part II

The root $\sqrt{muh\text{-}}$ and related forms in the third kāṇḍa of the Śaunaka-Atharvaveda and beyond

6. In the third *kāṇḍa* of the ŚS the very initial group of hymns consists of curses against the enemies, in order to make them helpless. The verbal root $\sqrt{muh\text{-}}$ occurs in the typical formulas that I collect below⁶⁶:

3.1.1

*agnīr naḥ śātrūn prāty etu vidvān
pratidāhann abhīśastim ārātim |
sá sēnāṇi mohayatu páreṣāṇi
nīrhastāṁś ca kṛṇavaj jātávedāḥ ||*

Let Agni go against our enemies, the wise one,
burning malediction and hostility.
Let him confound the adversaries’ army,
may Jātavedas make them helpless!

3.1.5

*īndra sēnāṇi mohayāmītrāṇām |
agnér vātasya dhrājyā
tān viśūco ví nāśaya ||*

⁶⁴ The temporal meaning of the denominative *dūrāre* ‘harden; endure, last’ is clearly secondary (LEW I 386) and has no bearing on the etymology of *dūrus*. I will not address the *vexata quaestio* of Dybo’s law, which would predict PIE **duh₂-ró-* > Lat. **dūrus*, but, if the law applied in the *paenultima* as per Neri 2017, p. 221, fn. 66, *dūrāre* could have been the source for the analogical reintroduction of the long vowel in the adjective. From *dūrus* one could obviously reconstruct **dūh₂-ró-*, but there does not seem to be any straightforward explanation for the accent retraction in a primary adjective.

⁶⁵ It should be noted that the falling diphthong would in principle allow for the reconstruction **deuH₍₂₎-ró-* or **douH₍₂₎-ró-* (with syncope or Saussure effect, respectively, the **e*-grade being much more likely in a **ró*-adjective), thus avoiding any difficulties raised by Dybo’s law (s. fn. 64). However, I am not aware of any attestation of OLat. *dourus*.

⁶⁶ Cf. Macciò forthc., §10.

O Indra, confound the enemies' army!
 By the fire's and the wind's drive,
 do cause them to vanish, scattered in all directions!

3.1.6

índraḥ sēnāṃ mohayatu
marúto ghnantv ójasā |
cákṣūṃṣy agnír ā dattāṃ
púnar etu párajitā ||

Let Indra confound the army,
 let the Maruts strike with the strength!
 Let Agni take the eyes for himself,
 let [it] retreat, defeated!

3.2.1

agnír no dūtāḥ práty etu vidvān
pratidāhann abhísastim árātim |
sá cittāni mohayatu páreṣāṃ
nírastāṃś ca kṛṇavaj jātavedāḥ ||

Let Agni, our messenger, go against [the enemies], the wise one;
 burning malediction and hostility.
 Let him confound the adversaries' thoughts,
 may Jātavedas make them handless!

3.2.2

ayám agnír amūmuhad
yāni cittāni vo hṛdí |
ví vo dhamatv ókasaḥ
prá vo dhamatu sarvātaḥ ||

This Agni caused the thoughts
 which are within your heart to be confounded.
 Let him blow you away from [our] home,
 let him blow you away from everywhere!

3.2.3

índra cittāni moháyann
arvān ākūtyā cara |
agnér vátasya dhrājyā
tān víśūco ví nāsaya ||

O Indra, by confounding [their] thoughts,
 do move hither, with [their] design.
 By the fire's, the wind's drive,
 cause them to vanish in all directions.

3.2.4

*vy ākūtaya eṣām ita-
-ātho cittāni muhyata |
ātho yād adyāiṣāṃ hrđī
tād eṣāṃ pāri nīr jahi ||*

O designs of those ones, be scattered!
And [you] too, thoughts, be confounded!
And also what is in their heart today,
do expel it out of them!

3.2.5

*amīṣāṃ cittāni pratimohāyanti
grhānāṅgāny apve párehi |
abhi préhi nīr daha hrtsú śókair
grāhyāmitrāṇis tāmāsā vidhya śátrūn ||*

By turning the confusion of their thoughts against them,
grab [their] members, O Apvā (Panic), go far away!
Go against [them], burn [them] with sufferings in their hearts,
grab the enemies, pierce the adversaries with darkness!

Other loci are similar: 11.9 (to Arbudi) and 11.10 (to Triṣandhi) are dedicated to the help in battle:

11.9(11).13

*múhyantv eṣāṃ bāhávaś
cittākūtāṃ ca yād dhrđī |
māiṣāṃ úc cheṣi kíṃ caná
radité arbude táva ||*

Let their arms be confounded,
and what thought and design is in their heart;
let not anything of them be left
in case of your bite, O Arbudi!

11.10(12).20

*śitipadī sām patatv
amítrāṇām amūḥ sícaḥ |
múhyantv adyāmūḥ sēnā
amítrāṇāṃ nyarbude ||*

Let the white footed-one⁶⁷ fly/fall upon

⁶⁷ In ŚS 11.10.6 *śitipadī-* is mentioned as a kind of arrow. Bloomfield 1897, p. 638 affirms: “apparently a white-footed cow is chased as a symbolic arrow into the camp of the enemy”. This interpretation is supported by Dārila to KauS 16.25 and Sāyaṇa. In ŚS

yonder lines of enemies;
 let today yonder armies of your enemies
 be confounded, O Nyarbudi!

11.10(12).21

mūḍhā amitrā nyarbude
jahy èṣāṃ vāraṃ-varam |
anāyā jahi sēnayā ||

Confounded be your enemies, O Nyarbudi!
 Slay each best man of them;
 slay [them] with this army!

We can notice a symmetry between some recurrent expressions:

S = the enemy's thoughts/army	Intransitive V = be confounded	
S = god	Causative V = confound	O = the enemy's thoughts/army

The first structure is intransitive (fourth class present *múhyati*, i.e. intransitive verb with a non-agentive subject), the second one is causative (tenth class present *moháyati*, reduplicated aorist *ámūmuhat*), in a typical syntactic alternation (the subject of the intransitive, i.e. inaccusative verb is the object of the transitive, i.e. causative verb)⁶⁸.

A rare intransitive perfect is to be found in PS 19.46.6c (text according to Bhattacharya 2016⁶⁹, no parallel in the ŚS):

mo abhāgo vidita yo mumoha

Let be not excluded by his part the sage man who is confused (fallen into confusion).

The intransitive construction of *mumoha* is expected, since, when the present of a verb is a middle form or an equivalent thereof (like the fourth class *ya*-present), the perfect requires a stative interpretation,

3.29.1 the same compound indicates a white-footed sheep, but in the only occurrence in RV 1.35.5 the pl. *śitipādas* is applied to the flying horses of Savitar's chariot.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the conjugation and forms s. Jamison 1983, p. 143; Di Giovine 1990, p. 187ff.; EWA II 384f.

⁶⁹ Bhattacharya confirms the reading *mumoha*, which is a correction of *mamoha* (in the Kashmir manuscript). S. also Di Giovine 1990, p. 188, fn. 445 for an accurate overview of the question.

which can be confirmed by late texts; see for instance a beautiful passage from the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Baroda ed.):

6.57.86cd

muhur vijajvāla mumoha cāpi
saṃjñāṇi samāsādyā viśiṣmiye ca ||

[Aṅgada] repeatedly felt a burning sensation and swooned.
On regaining consciousness, he was surprised.

7. Generally speaking, the root $\sqrt{muh-}$ means ‘become stupefied or unconscious, be bewildered or perplexed, err, be mistaken, go astray’ (MW 825). It is strongly characteristic of a state of confusion which can vary in its reference according to the textual typology. In Atharvāṇic literature (§6), the verb is typical of the lexicon of war, and it is applied to the mind of the enemies that must be destroyed by the gods.

Yet, beside these war-related expressions, three remarkable Atharvavedic passages lead us to other semantic fields: illness, love and sacrifice.

The semantic field of illness concerns some intestinal disorder caused by a magical agent (since the diseases are obviously represented like demons who penetrate into the body)⁷⁰:

9.8(13).17

yā gūdā anusārpany
āntrāni moháyanti ca |
āhiṃsantīr anāmayā
nīr dravantu bahír bīlam ||

They that creep along the intestines,
and confound the entrails—
not injuring, free from disease,
let them run out, out at the orifice.

Love is represented as a chaotic, tumultuous sensation in the following hymn (with Dionysian features), dedicated to the Gandharvas and Apsaras.

⁷⁰ S. Bloomfield 1897, pp. 45ff., 600ff.: the charm is intended to drive away the diseases from every single limb. For the concept of disease in the AV I limit myself to indicate the fundamental book by Zysk 1996.

2.2.5

yāḥ klandās tāmiṣṭcayo
’kṣākāmā manomúhaḥ |
tābhyo gandharvāpatnībhyo
’psarābhyo ’karaṇ nāmaḥ ||

They that are noisy, dusky,
 dice-loving, mind-confusing—
 to those, that have the Gandharvas for spouses,
 to the Apsaras I have paid homage.

In the following passage, the Sacrifice is threatened when the gods disregard the ritual rules (the dog is a highly impure animal, who defiles the ritual ground)⁷¹:

7.5.5

mugdhā devā utā śúnāyajanta-
-utā góṛ āngaiḥ purudhāyajanta |
yā imāṇ yajñāṇ mānasā cikéta
prā ṇo vocas tám ihéhá bravaḥ ||

The gods, confounded, both sacrificed with a dog
 and sacrificed variously with limbs of a cow;
 he who knoweth with the mind this sacrifice—
 him mayest thou proclaim to us here, here mayest thou speak.

In 2.2.5, the verbal compound *manomúh-* implies a transitive use of the purely radical noun *-muh-* (since the root has no diathesis), whereas in 7.5.5 *mugdhā-* is a PPP with intransitive-passive value.

8. The condition determined by *√muh-* is clearly opposite to ‘light, enlightenment’, ‘harmony’, ‘rationality’, ‘order’. Going back to the oldest occurrences, the confusion of the army remains a major semantic field, cf. RV 10.81.6c *múhyantv anyé abhíto jánāsaḥ* ‘Let the other peoples all around be left in confusion’. Direct references to ‘dusk’ and ‘dark’ are found in RV 10.162.6:

yás tvā svápnena támasā
mohayitvā nípádyate |

⁷¹ Cf. ŚBM 1.5.2.15 *sārvam evā táttra kalpate ná muhyati* ‘Verily thus everything is in order [and] does not become confused’ (personal translation), which is said when the officiating priests act in mutual understanding during the rite.

*prajāñ yás te jīghāṃsati
tām itó nāśayāmasi ||*

Who, having stupefied you with sleep, with darkness,
goes down on you,
who intends to smite your offspring,
that one we banish from here.

We notice that darkness was also present in the adjective *tāmiṣīci-* (ŚS 2.5.5, §7).

The phenomenon described in the Ṛgvedic passage is the demonic possession of a pregnant woman: the evil spirit causes her to sleep and endangers the foetus' life. The causative gerund *mohayitvā* governs *svāpnena tāmasā* 'with sleep, with darkness' or 'with the darkness of sleep'. Sleeping is conceived of as a kind of fog that envelopes the mind, lowering every defence⁷². A further scenario is described in ṚV 5.40.5:

*yāt tvā sūrya svārbhānu
tāmasāvidhyad āsurāḥ |
ākṣetravid yāthā mugdhó
bhūvanāny adīdhayuh ||*

When, o Sun, Svarbhānu
Āsura pierced you with darkness,
like a befuddled man not knowing the territory
did the living beings perceive.

The story of the demon Svarbhānu, who represents the sunspots (or, otherwise, the solar eclipse), was reconstructed by Jamison (1991, p. 133ff.): during a battle between Devas and Asuras, Svarbhānu pierced the sun with darkness (or with arrows) or wrapped it into a black mantle, so that the sun ceased to shine and the creatures lost their orientation. In this very hymn we find the words *tāmas-* 'darkness' (5.40.6) and *māyā-* 'trick, deceit' (5.40.8), whose effects are that men feel confused and blinded, not recognising the place where they are (*ākṣetravid-*). Darkness and deceit constitute a smoke screen that blocks the sunlight.

⁷² Like in the Homeric poems, in the ṚV sleep can be poured (the root *√vap-* 'pour' sounds similar to *√svap-* 'sleep'), cf. 2.15.9ab *svapnenābhyúpyā cúmuriṃ dhūniṃ ca | jaghántha dásyum prá dabhītim āvaḥ ||* 'Having poured sleep on Cumuri and Dhuni, you smashed the Dasyu and helped Dabhīti'.

9. Whereas *támas-* has in the RV a double meaning, both ‘darkness’ and ‘error’, the neuter noun or substantivised adjective *mógha-* is specialised only in indicating what is ‘false’ or ‘fruitless’. The allomorph *móha-AV+*, very common in later literature (Ronzitti 2024), covers more or less the same semantic sphere⁷³. In the ŚS *móha-* is a *hapax* in the magical context of 8.8.9 (as *abhi\dhā-* ‘encircle’ suggests)⁷⁴. The text, which is aimed at conquering the enemies, declares:

sedīr ugrā vyṛddhir
ārtīś cānapavācanā |
śrámas tandrīś ca móhaś ca
tāir amūn abhi dadhāmi sārvañ | |

Debility, formidable ill-success,
 and mishap that is not to be exorcised away,
 toil, and weariness, and confusion—
 with these do I encircle all yon men.

The form *mógha-* can be related to Arm. *moyg* ‘brown, dark’ and Russ. *smúglyj* ‘id.’ (with a further suffix **-lo-*), from **(s)móugh^ho-*. Such form, starting from the meaning ‘dark, smoke/-y’, may have passed to ‘false; illusion, illusory appearance’. The interesting reduplicated (intensive?) adjective *momughá-* (*hapax*, ŚBM 1.4.3.16) means ‘foolish’ and appears to be used in a ritual context beside the alliterative compound *manomúṣi-* ‘mind-stealer’:

yádi śaṣṭhyāmanuvyāhāret | tam prāti brūyānmāno vā etádātmano ’gnāvādhā
mānasātmāna ārttimāriṣyasi manomúṣigṛhīto momughāścariṣyasīti tātā haivā
syāt

If any one were to curse him at the sixth [verse], he should say to him,
 ‘Thereby thou hast put thine own mind into the fire: by that mind of
 thine shalt thou undergo suffering, thou shalt move about as one pos-
 sessed with the [demon] “mind-stealer”, as one deranged in mind!’ for
 this is what would take place.

⁷³ It occurs several times in the sixth book of the *Mahābhārata*, *Bhagavadgītā* section, to indicate ‘falsity, mental confusion’ and the wrong behaviour of inferior, adharmic men. S. details and passages in Ronzitti 2024.

⁷⁴ I just recall that the acts of going around (circumambulation) or circling around are in strict relation with sorcery, whose Old Indic name is in fact *abhicāra* ‘the act of going around’.

Such a shift from a concrete to a more abstract meaning, in particular within the sphere of heresy, must have taken place at the Indo-Iranian level, since it is common to both Vedic and Avestan (YAv. *ašəmaoya-*, s. §10).

10. The root $\sqrt{\text{muh-}}$ has never received a satisfying etymology: in the first version of his dictionary, M. Mayrhofer collected a little family of Indo-Iranian words, remaining sceptical about some other proposals (Lat. *muger* m. 'Falschspieler', Latv. *mudzināt* 'wimmel machen, verwirren, verknoten', Russ. *myzgatʹ* 'hin und her schweifen'), but does not go further (KEWA II 662, EWA II 384f.). Di Giovine (1990, p. 189, fn. 451) is rather inconclusive. In a separate essay (1989), he discussed the Avestan compound *ašəmaoya-* 'who confounds the order, heretic' ('Verbreiter ketzerischer Lehre, Irrlehrer' AW 257), but focusing his interest more on the meaning than on the origin of the word.

In Ronzitti (2011, p. 81ff.) I proposed, instead, to connect $\sqrt{\text{muh-}}$ to the root $\sqrt{*(s)\text{meyk}^h-}$, $\sqrt{*(s)\text{meyg-}}$, $\sqrt{*(s)\text{meyg}^h-}$ 'rauchen, Rauch' (IEW 971), adding a further form with the aspirated voiced palatal $*\text{g}^h$, to say $\sqrt{*(s)\text{meyg}^h-}$ 'emit smoke' > 'cheat, confound' ~ 'be wrapped with smoke' > 'be confounded, err'. Both $\sqrt{*(s)\text{meyg}^h-}$ and $\sqrt{*(s)\text{meyg}^h-}$ are required by the two allomorphic PPPs *mugdḥá-* and *mūḍḥá-* and by the couple *mógha-/móha-* (§9). The Khotanese verb *mūys-* 'be foolish' allows us to attribute the palatal enlargement to Proto-Indo-Iranian⁷⁵.

The association of 'smoke, darkness' to 'confusion' could be quite widespread and natural imagery. Among the IE languages we find a parallelism that concerns the very noun **témH-os* 'darkness' (§8) in the Latin adverb *temere* 'by chance, casually, recklessly' from **témHesi* 'in the darkness' (OInd. *támasi*) (EWA I 626). In conclusion, the syntagmatic conjunction between $\sqrt{\text{muh-}}$ and *támas-*, so frequent in our occurrences, has a deep etymological consistency.

⁷⁵ S. bibl. in EWA II 384.

References

- ACKERMANN, Katsiaryna (2017), *Investigating internal ways of lexicon expansion in early PIE. Observations on IE roots with potential *b^h-extension*, in Bjarne Simmelkjaer Sandgaard Hansen et al. (eds.), *Etymology and the European Lexicon. Proceedings of the 14th Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft, 17–22 September 2012, Copenhagen*, Reichert, Wiesbaden, pp. 1–13.
- AiGr = WACKERNAGEL, Jakob, and Albert DEBRUNNER (1896–1954), *Altindische Grammatik*, Bde. I–III, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- AEW = Jan de VRIES (1977²), *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Brill, Leiden.
- ALEW = HOCK, Wolfgang (ed.) (2025), *ALEW [Altltauisches etymologisches Wörterbuch] 2.0*, available at: <<https://alew.hu-berlin.de/>> [Last accessed on 17 June 2025].
- AW = BARTHOLOMAE, Christian (1904), *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Trübner, Straßburg.
- BALLES, Irene (2006), *Die altindische Cvi-Konstruktion. Form – Funktion – Ursprung*, Hempen, Bremen.
- BHATTACHARYA, Dipak (ed.) (2016), *The Paippalāda-Saṁhitā of the Atharvaveda*, Vol. 4, The Asian Society, Calcutta.
- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice (transl.) (1897), *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, Clarendon, Oxford.
- BORGHI, Guido (2002), **B^hr̥ḡ^h-rō^h-b^hr̥ḡ^h-rō^h·(h₁?)ēs·(·(h₁?)ēs) (Oltranzismo ricostruttivo ed estremismo panindoeuropeo)*, Qu.A.S.A.R., Milano.
- BORGHI, Guido, and Martina DELUCCHI (2025), *Teutrania, Teutranter e la sua genealogia: uno studio etimologico su IG XI.4 1206–8*, in “Rivista Italiana di Onomastica”, 31, pp. 45–60.
- BYRD, Andrew Miles (2015), *The Indo-European Syllable*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- CEDEL = KLEIN, Ernest (1971), *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Elsevier, Amsterdam.
- CLAYTON V, John B. (2023), *The Development of the Indo-European *-wr̥-/wen-Heteroclitics in Sanskrit and Beyond*, PhD thesis, University of California at Los Angeles.
- CLAYTON V, John B. (2024), *Minerva, caterva, & sonorant metathesis: Arguments against a sound law by Rix*, presented at the 43rd East Coast Indo-European Conference, Athens (GA), 1–3 July 2024.
- DE BERNARDO STEMPEL, Patrizia (1999), *Nominale Wortbildung des älteren Irischen. Stammbildung und Derivation*, Niemeyer, Tübingen.
- DELG = CHANTRAINE, Pierre (1999²), *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire de mots*, Klincksieck, Paris.
- DELGIE = BOISACQ, Émile (1916), *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Étudiée dans ses rapports avec les autres langues indo-européennes*, Winter, Heidelberg & Klincksieck, Paris.

- DEL TOMBA, Alessandro (2021), *Metathesis of PIE *-u_ṛ in Tocharian*, in "Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft", 74, pp. 51–85.
- DGVB = FLEURIOT, Léon (1964), *Dictionnaire des gloses en vieux Breton*, Klincksieck, Paris.
- DI GIOVINE, Paolo (1989), *Il riflesso pahlavico del nome avestico dell'«eretico»*, Ist. di Linguistica, Università della Basilicata, Potenza.
- DI GIOVINE, Paolo (1990), *Studio sul perfetto indoeuropeo*, Pt. I, Dip. di Studi Glottoantropologici dell'Università di Roma «La Sapienza», Roma.
- DLG = DELAMARRE, Xavier (2003), *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise. Une approche linguistique du vieux-celtique continental*, Errance, Paris.
- EDA = MARTIROSYAN, Hrach K. (2010), *Etymological Dictionary of the Armenian Inherited Lexicon*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- EDG = BEEKES, Robert (2010), *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, with the ass. of Lucien van Beek, Vols. 1–2, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- EDH = KLOEKHORST, Alwin (2008), *Etymological Dictionary of the Hittite Inherited Lexicon*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- eDiAAna = MILLER, Jared et al. (eds.), *eDiAAna. Digital Philological Etymological Dictionary of the Minor Ancient Anatolian Corpus Languages*, available at: <<https://www.ediana.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/search.php>> [Last accessed on 8 June 2025].
- eDIL = TORNER, Gregory et al. (2013–19), *An Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, available at: <<https://dil.ie/>> [Last accessed on 10 June 2025].
- EDIV = CHEUNG, Johnny (2007), *Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- EDL = de VAAN, Michiel (2008), *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- EDPC = MATASOVIĆ, Ranko (2009), *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- EDPG = KROONEN, Guus (2013), *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- EDS = DERKSEN, Rick (2008), *Etymological Dictionary of the Slavic Inherited Lexicon*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- EGGELING, Julius (transl.) (1882), *The Satapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, Pt. I, Clarendon, Oxford.
- EICHNER, Heiner (1988), *Anatolisch und Trilaryngalismus*, in A. Bammesberger (ed.), *Die Laryngalthorie und die Rekonstruktion des indogermanischen Laut- und Formensystems*, Winter, Heidelberg, pp. 135–151.
- ЭССЯ = ТРУБАЧЕВ, Олег Н. et al. (eds.) (1974–), *Этимологический словарь славянских языков. Праславянский лексический фонд*, Вып. 1–42 (up to 2021), Наука, Москва.
- EWA = MAYRHOFER, Manfred (1992–2001), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, Bde. I.–III., Winter, Heidelberg.

- EWAhd = LLOYD, Albert L. et al. (1988–), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Alt-hochdeutschen*, Bde. I–VIII (up to 2024), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen–Zürich.
- FRAENKEL, Ernst (1910), *Beiträge zur griechischen Grammatik*, in “Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft”, 43, pp. 193–219.
- GARCÍA RAMÓN, José Luis (1988–1990), Homérico κέκασμαι : védico śāśad-, protoario *sčand-, IE *(s)kēnd- ‘aparecer, hacerse visible’, in “Die Sprache”, 34, pp. 27–58.
- GARCÍA RAMÓN, José Luis (2020), Grec κότος « rancune », hittite kattaūātar « tort, grief », « cause (ou objet) de vengeance, motif de querelle » : phraséologie, comparaison, reconstruction, in Claire Le Feuvre, Daniel Petit (eds.), Ὀνομάτων ἱστωρ. *Mélanges offerts à Charles de Lamberterie*, Peeters, Leuven–Paris, pp. 261–282.
- GARCÍA RAMÓN, José Luis (2024), When synchronic semantics and reconstruction (apparently) collide: Ved. śāśadé and Hom. κέκασται, in Éric Dieu, Daniel Kölligan (eds.), *Homonymie, Polysemie und Etymologie in den indogermanischen Sprachen / Homonymie, polysémie et étymologie dans les langues indo-européennes / Homonymy, polysemy and etymology in Indo-European languages. Proceedings of the workshop on Indo-European Linguistics, July 11–12, 2023, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg*, Röll, Dettelbach, pp. 73–132.
- GCLS = VAILLANT, André (1950–1977), *Grammaire comparée des langues slaves*, tomes I–V, IAC & Klincksieck, Lyon–Paris.
- GELDNER, Karl F. (transl.) (1951), *Der Rig-Veda*, Tle. I–III, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- GEW = FRISK, Hjalmar (1960–1972), *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bde. I–III, Winter, Heidelberg.
- GOTŌ, Toshifumi (1987), *Die „I. Präsensklasse“ im Vedischen. Untersuchung der vollstufigen thematischen Wurzelpräsentia*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien.
- GPW = BÖHTLINGK, Otto, and Rudolf ROTH (1855–1975), *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*, Tle. I–VII., Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, St. Petersburg.
- Gr² = BRUGMANN, Karl, and Berthold DELBRÜCK (1897–1916²), *Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen*, Bde. I.1–II.3.2 von K. Brugmann, Trübner, Straßburg.
- HACKSTEIN, Olav (2002), *Uridg. *CH.CC > *C.CC*, in “Historische Sprachforschung”, 115, pp. 1–22.
- HACKSTEIN, Olav (2012), *When Words Coalesce: Chunking and Morphophonemic Extension*, in H. Craig Melchert (ed.), *The Indo-European Verb. Proceedings of the Conference of the Society for Indo-European Studies, Los Angeles 13–15 September 2010*, Reichert, Wiesbaden, pp. 87–104.

- HACKSTEIN, Olav (2024), *Tocharian Lexemes for 'belly', 'beaming' and 'burly'*, presented at the 43rd East Coast Indo-European Conference, Athens (GA), 1–3 July 2024.
- HED = PUHVEL, Jaan (1984–), *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*, Vols. 1–11 (up to 2021), Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin–New York–Amsterdam–Boston.
- HEG = TISCHLER, Johann (1977–2016), *Hethitisches etymologisches Glossar*, Tle. I–IV, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck.
- HELLWIG, Oliver et al. (2024), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 12 (Version 1.0.0)*, available at: <<https://doi.org/10.48656/pg2v-1n76>> [Last accessed on 15 June 2025].
- HILMARSSON, Jörundur (1993), *The Fate of TTR/RTT in Indo-European*, in Gerhard Meiser (ed.), *Indogermanica et Italica. Festschrift für Helmut Rix zum 65. Geburtstag*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck, pp. 209–222.
- IEW = POKORNY, Julius (1959), *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bd. I, Francke, Bern–München.
- IG = KURYŁOWICZ, Jerzy et al. (eds.) (1968–2018), *Indogermanische Grammatik*, Bde. I.1–IV.1–2, Winter, Heidelberg.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. (1983), *Function and Form in the -āya-Formations of the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. (1991), *The Ravenous Hyenas and the Wounded Sun: Myth and Ritual in Ancient India*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca–London.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. (2025), *Rigveda Translation: Commentary. Book 9*, available at: <http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/?page_id=29> [Last accessed on 10 June 2025].
- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (transl.) (2014), *The Rigveda. The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, Vols. I–II, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- KEWA = MAYRHOFER, Manfred (1956–1980), *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*, Bde. I.–III., Winter, Heidelberg.
- KÖLLIGAN, Daniel (2017), *Schneidende Kritik: idg. *skel(H)- + *d^heh₁-*, in “Historische Sprachforschung”, 130, pp. 63–72.
- KÖLLIGAN, Daniel (2018), *Funktionsverbgefüge und Sekundärwurzeln*, in Elisabeth Rieken (ed.), *100 Jahre Entzifferung des Hethitischen. Morphosyntaktische Kategorien in Sprachgeschichte und Forschung. Akten der Arbeitstagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft vom 21. bis 23. September 2015 in Marburg*, Reichert, Wiesbaden, pp. 229–237.
- KRISCH, Thomas (1996), *Zur Genese und Funktion der altindischen Perfekta mit langem Reduplikationsvokal. Mit kommentierter Materialsammlung*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck.
- KÜMMEL, Martin Joachim (2000), *Das Perfekt im Indoiranischen. Eine Untersuchung der Form und Funktion einer ererbten Kategorie des Verbums und ihrer Weiterentwicklung in den altindoiranischen Sprachen*, Reichert, Wiesbaden.

- LEIA = VENDRYES, Jules et al. (1959–1996), *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien*, A–D, MNOP–TU, IAS, Dublin & CNRS, Paris.
- LEW = WALDE, Alois, and J. B. HOFMANN (1938–1954³), *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bde. I–II., Winter, Heidelberg.
- LIV² = RIX, Helmut (ed.) (2001²), *LIV. Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben. Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstammbildungen*, Reichert, Wiesbaden.
- LIV²Add = KÜMMEL, Martin Joachim (2023), *Addenda und Corrigenda zu LIV²*, available at: <<http://www.martinkuemmel.de/liv2add.pdf>> [Last accessed on 10 June 2025].
- LOWE, John J. (2014), *Indo-European Caland Adjectives in *-nt- and Participles in Sanskrit*, in “Historische Sprachforschung”, 127, pp. 166–195.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (1981), *Gr. pégnumi: Skt. pajrá- and loss of laryngeals before mediae in Indo-Iranian*, in “Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft”, 40, pp. 133–138.
- LUNDQUIST, Jesse (2014), *Rigvedic uṣar and the Indo-European Locative *-er*, in Stephanie W. Jamison et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 25th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*, Hempen, Bremen, pp. 87–103.
- MACCIÒ, Matteo (forthc.), *Rappresentazioni del nemico nell’Atharvaveda*, in Sonia Maura Barillari, Martina Di Febo (eds.), *Il conflitto immaginato. La rappresentazione dello scontro nelle letterature e nelle arti. Atti del XXIX Convegno internazionale del Laboratorio Etno-Antropologico, Genova, 17–19 settembre 2024*, Virtuosa-Mente, Arenzano.
- MATASOVIĆ, Ranko (2005), *The Centum Elements in Balto-Slavic*, in Gerhard Meiser, Olav Hackstein (eds.), *Sprachkontakt und Sprachwandel. Akten der XI. Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft, 17.–23. September 2000, Halle an der Saale*, Reichert, Wiesbaden, pp. 363–374.
- McCONE, Kim R. (1987), *Hund, Wolf und Krieger bei den Indogermanen*, in Wolfgang Meid (ed.), *Studien zum indogermanischen Wortschatz*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck, pp. 101–154.
- McCONE, Kim R. (1996), *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change*, Dept. of Old and Middle Irish, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth.
- MELCHERT, H. Craig (2012), *Luvo-Lycian Dorsal Stops Revisited*, in Roman Sukač, Ondřej Šefčík (eds.), *The Sound of Indo-European 2. Papers on Indo-European phonetics, phonemics and morphophonemics*, Lincom, München, pp. 206–218.
- MW = MONIER WILLIAMS, Monier (1899), *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, Clarendon, Oxford.
- NERI, Sergio (2003), *I Sostantivi in -u del Gotico. Morfologia e Preistoria*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck.
- NERI, Sergio (2017), *Wetter. Etymologie und Lautgesetz*, Università degli Studi, Perugia.

- NIKOLAEV, Alexander (2010), *Indo-European *dem(h₂)- ‘to build’ and its derivatives*, in “Historische Sprachforschung”, 123, pp. 56–96.
- NIL = WODTKO, Dagmar et al. (2008), *Nomina im Indogermanischen Lexikon*, Winter, Heidelberg.
- NUSSBAUM, Alan J. (1976), *Caland’s “Law” and the Caland System*, PhD thesis, Harvard University.
- NUSSBAUM, Alan J. (1986), *Head and Horn in Indo-European*, de Gruyter, Berlin–New York.
- NUSSBAUM, Alan J. (2022), *Derivational properties of “adjectival roots” (expanded handout)*, in Melanie Malzahn et al. (eds.), *Zurück zur Wurzel. Struktur, Funktion und Semantik der Wurzel im Indogermanischen. Akten der 15. Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft vom 13. bis 16. September 2016 in Wien*, Reichert, Wiesbaden, pp. 205–224.
- OZONO, Junichi (2025), *Ai. πῖνᾱτί und gr. πίμπλημι*, in S. Hisatsugi et al. (eds.), *Reduplikation in indogermanischen Sprachen*, Baar, Hamburg, pp. 91–107.
- PINAULT, Georges-Jean (1997), *Remarque sur le pluriel tokh. B akrūna, A ākrunt*, in Alexander Lubostky (ed.), *Sound Law and Analogy. Papers in honor of Robert S.P. Beekes on the occasion of his 60th birthday*, Rodopi, Amsterdam–Atlanta, pp. 219–233.
- PINAULT, Georges-Jean (2022), *Suffixes from roots: the case of PIE *-bʰo- and related issues*, in Melanie Malzahn et al. (eds.), *Zurück zur Wurzel. Struktur, Funktion und Semantik der Wurzel im Indogermanischen. Akten der 15. Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft vom 13. bis 16. September 2016 in Wien*, Reichert, Wiesbaden, pp. 235–246.
- RAU, Jeremy (2007), *The Derivational History of Proto-Germanic *weþru- ‘lamb’*, in Alan J. Nussbaum (ed.), *Verba Docenti. Studies in historical and Indo-European linguistics presented to Jay H. Jasanoff by students, colleagues, and friends*, Beech Stave, Ann Arbor–New York, pp. 281–292.
- RAU, Jeremy (2009), *Indo-European Nominal Morphology: The Decads and the Caland System*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck.
- RENOU, Louis (1969), *Études Védiques et Pāṇinéennes*, Tome XVII, Inst. de civilisation indienne de l’Université de Paris, Paris.
- REW = VASMER, Max (1953–1958), *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bde. I–III., Winter, Heidelberg.
- RONZITTI, Rosa (2004), *Vecchie e nuove proposte etimologiche per alcuni derivati in *-mo- dell’antico indiano*, in Rosa Ronzitti, Guido Borghi (eds.), *Atti del secondo incontro genovese di Studî Vedici e Pāṇiniani*, Genova, 23 luglio 2003; 15 ottobre 2003, Le Mani – Microart’s, Recco, pp. 47–63.
- RONZITTI, Rosa (2011), *Quattro etimologie indoeuropee: lat. bufo, it. gufo, ingl. smog e drug*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck.
- RONZITTI, Rosa (2024), *Il concetto di moha ‘inganno, illusione’ nella Bhagavad-gītā*, in “Pagine Filosofali”, 12 September 2024, available at: <<https://>

- www.paginefilosofali.it/il-concetto-di-moha-inganno-illusione-nella-bhagavadgita-rosa-ronzitti/> [Last accessed on 6 June 2025].
- ROTHSTEIN-DOWDEN, Zachary (2022), *Dental-aspirate presents in Greek and Indo-European*, PhD thesis, Harvard University.
- ROTHSTEIN-DOWDEN, Zachary (2023), *Observations on averbo patterning in Proto-Indo-European: dh-presents beside i-presents*, presented at the 34th West Coast Indo-European Conference, October 27–28, 2023, University of California at Los Angeles.
- de SAUSSURE, Ferdinand (1887), *Sur un point de la phonétique des consonnes en indo-européen*, in “Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris”, 6, pp. 246–257.
- SCHAEFER, Christiane (1994), *Das Intensivum im Vedischen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- SCHAFFNER, Stefan (2001), *Das Vernersche Gesetz und der innerparadigmatische grammatische Wechsel des Urgermanischen im Nominalbereich*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, Innsbruck.
- SCHINDLER, Jochem (1967), *Idg. *dheudh- in Farbbezeichnungen*, in “Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung”, 81, pp. 68–71.
- SPIERS, Carmen (2020), *Magie et poésie dans l’Inde ancienne: édition, traduction et commentaire de la Paippalādasamhitā de l’Atharvaveda, livre 3*, Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris Sciences et Lettres.
- THURNEYSEN, Rudolf (1917), *Altirisch soad*, in “Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie”, 11, p. 212.
- TUCKER, Elizabeth Fawcett (1990), *The Creation of Morphological Regularity: Early Greek Verbs in -éō, -áo, -óō, -úō and -íō*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- VAILLANT, André (1939), *Généralités*, in “Revue des Études Slaves”, 19, pp. 106–113.
- VBS = STANG, Christian (1966), *Vergleichende Grammatik der Baltischen Sprachen*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo–Bergen–Tromsø.
- WHITNEY, William Dwight (transl.) (1905), *Atharva-Veda Samhitā*, rev. by Charles Rockwell Lanman, Halves I–II, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- WVR = GRASSMANN, Hermann (1996⁶), *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, Reichert, Wiesbaden.
- ZEHNDER, Thomas et al. (2024), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 1 (Version 1.0.0)*, available at: <<https://doi.org/10.48656/as99-n988>> [Last accessed on 15 June 2025].
- ZIEGLER, Sabine (1994), *Die Sprache der Ogam-Inschriften*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- ZYSK, Kenneth G. (1996), *Medicine in the Veda*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.

PART 3

RITUAL

9. High plains drifters: On Gandharvas, Maruts and Kaṇvas in the *Atharvaveda**

Robert Leach

Abstract

What is the relation between the Gandharvas and the Maruts? How do Atharvavedic representations of these two figures differ from their depictions in other Vedic texts? Does it seem likely that the Gandharva and the Marut originate from the same cultural milieu, and to what extent do they appear to belong to the same socio-ritual communities? Both of these figures have been identified by modern scholars as being, as it were, the celestial representatives of the Vṛātyas, and therefore, by extension, of the Indo-European cultural institution commonly known as the *Männerbund*. How are we to make sense of these claims, and what are their implications? These are several of the questions I aim to address in this paper.

Keywords

Atharvaveda; Paippalāda; Gandharvas; Maruts; Kaṇvas.

* My sincere thanks to Marianna Ferrara and Duccio Lelli for organising a wonderful workshop and for inviting me and my colleagues in Zurich to participate.

This short contribution is intended as a preliminary and partial attempt to address a small but perplexing problem in the field of Vedic studies, articulated by Thomas Oberlies in his *Die Religion des Ṛgveda*. Oberlies (1998, p. 229) writes there:

Gandharvas und Apsaras scheinen die göttlichen Gegenstücke der Initianden der vedischen Stämme zu sein, die vor ihrer Heirat mit den unverheiratet Mädchen – ihnen entsprechen die Apsaras – im “Männerhaus” (*sabhā*) zusammenleben und von ihnen in die Liebeskunst eingeführt werden.

He adds in a footnote (*ibid.*, fn. 386):

Wie sich dies mit der o.a. These, die Marut seien die Götter der Initianden ... verträgt, muss eine eigene Untersuchung zeigen. Diese müsste sich auch mit Witzels These, dass “the gandharvas seem to form, together with the promiscuous apsaras, the counterpart of the *vrātyas* and their female companions” (1992, p. 618), befassen.

The close connection between Gandharvas and *Vrātyas* (especially in parts of the Vedic corpus younger than the *Atharvaveda*) has long been noted in modern scholarship¹, and the subject appears to have been revived in recent years by Vasilkov’s (1989–90) contention that the tree-dwelling Gandharvas who threaten the bridal party in the *Atharvaveda*’s description of the wedding ceremony at ŚS 14.2.9 (~ PS 18.7.10) would have been impersonated by the “long-haired boy-dancers” (*keśīno jānāḥ*) of the assembly hall (*sabhā*-) described in the same *sūkta* (ŚS 14.2.59a ~ PS 18.12.8a). Vasilkov (*ibid.*, p. 397) identifies these unmarried boys as belonging to a *Männerbund* or “warrior brotherhood”, and as we have seen, Witzel (see also 2004, pp. 620–621) and Oberlies also express the view that the Gandharvas can be viewed as divine counterparts of the *Männerbund*. However, as is well established in modern scholarship and as every student of the Veda knows, it is the Maruts that are the divine counterparts of the roaming *Vrātyas*, or their divinized ancestors (Charpentier 1911, pp. 359–360), and therefore they that represent the celestial *Männerbund*². This being the case, and given their obvious differences, how can the Gandharvas

¹ See especially Hillebrandt 1891, p. 439 and Hauer 1927, p. 54, citing texts such as the *Vājasaneyā-Saṃhitā*, the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa*.

² See e.g. Falk 1986, pp. 18–57; Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 49; Witzel 2018.

be said to represent the same phenomenon? This article is intended as an investigation (Oberlies' *Untersuchung*) into this question that is preliminary in the sense that it is a first attempt to explain this peculiar problem, and partial insofar as my inquiries will be in the main part limited to the *Atharvaveda*. I want to ask in principle: How can we attempt to make sense of these apparently overlapping functions of the Gandharvas and the Maruts, and can the *Atharvaveda* help?

It should first be pointed out that, as depicted in both the *Ṛgveda-Saṁhitā* (henceforth *Ṛgveda*) and the *Atharvaveda*, the singular Gandharva and plural Gandharvas³ share several important characteristics with the Maruts. These are worth briefly noting here: they are celestial beings who are often located at the top of the firmament or the vault of heaven (*nāka-*) i.e. the highest part of the cosmos, and are associated thus with the sun and the celestial waters; however, they also spend much of their time roaming through the intermediate space (*antārikṣa-*) and are consequently also associated with the wind and with birds; they also share an association with horses; they are linked with soma, and consequently with poetic insight (*dhī-*) and *ṛtá-* 'truth'; they have a striking and/or beautiful appearance and wield weapons.

If we take a closer look at the depiction of the Gandharva/s in the *Atharvaveda*, a twofold picture emerges, as already noted by Kuiper (1996, pp. 243–245): on the one hand, this figure is praised as benevolent and auspicious. A few examples will suffice:

PS 1.7.1–2 (~ ŚS 2.2.1–2)

divyo gandharvo bhuvanasya yas patih

... *vikṣv īḍyah* |

The celestial Gandharva, who is lord of the world ... is to be praised among the clans ...

...*deva divya*

namas te astu... ||1||

O celestial god, let there be homage to you ...

³ There is not the space here to go into the complex issues of the distinct identities of, and relations between, the singular Gandharva (more prominent in the *Ṛgveda*) and plural Gandharvas, and nor are these issues germane to the central argument of this study.

yajataḥ...

namasyaḥ suśevo

mṛḍād gandharvo bhuvanasya yas patih ||2||

venerable ... worthy of homage, benevolent – Gandharva, who is the lord of the world, will be favourable. (Transl. Zehnder et al. 2024).

PS 2.6.2ab (~ ŚS 2.1.2ab)

*pra tad voced amṛtaṁ *nu vidvān*

gandharvo dhāma paramaṁ guhā yat⁴ |

Let the Gandharva now knowingly proclaim that immortal, supreme abode which is hidden.

PS 2.76.4

payo mahyam apsaraso

gandharvā me payo dadhan |

payo me viśvā bhūtāni

vāto dadhātu me payaḥ ||

The Apsarases will grant me vitality (lit. ‘milk’), the Gandharvas [will grant] me vitality, all beings will grant me vitality, the wind [will grant] me vitality.

PS 4.9.4d (~ ŚS 7.109.5d)

gandharvaiḥ sadhamādaṁ madema ||

May we enjoy the feast together with the Gandharvas! (Transl. Zehnder et al. 2024)

PS 15.13.4 (~ ŚS 11.6.4)

gandharvāpsaraso brūmo

aśvinā brahmaṇaspatim |

aryamā nāma yo devas

te no muñcantv aṁhasaḥ ||

We address the Gandharvas and Apsarases, the Aśvins and Brahmanaspati, the god that is called Aryaman: let them free us from distress!

On the other hand, there are quite a few Atharvavedic *sūktas* in which the Gandharvas (plural) are characterised as threatening and harmful, even demonic. On occasion, the threat they pose is of a sexual nature

⁴ On **nu*, see Zehnder 1999, p. 35.

(e.g. PS 12.7.9 ~ ŚS 4.37.7, PS 12.8.6 ~ ŚS 4.37.11), in other instances unborn children are at risk (see below). Again, a few exemplary stanzas will suffice:

PS 7.11.3

*yadī ghnanty apsaraso
gandharvā gehyā uta |
kravyādo mūrādevinas
tān ito nāśayāmasi ||*

If the Apsarases and the Gandharvas that are in the house [try to] slay, and [if] the Mūrādevins that eat bloody flesh [do so]: them do we cause to vanish from here. (Transl. Griffiths 2009, p. 365)

PS 12.8.3 (~ ŚS 4.37.8)

*bhīmā indrasya hetayaḥ
śatam ṛṣṭīr *ayasmayīḥ |
tābhir gandharvāṃ abhedyāṃ
avakādān vy ṛṣatu ||*

Indra's missiles are terrible, one hundred metal spears. With those let [the plant] pierce the Gandharvas, the unbreakable' ones, who eat avakā. (Transl. Zehnder et al. 2024)

ŚS 8.5.13ab (~ PS 16.28.3ab)

*nāinaṇi ghnanty apsarāso
nā gandharvā nā mārtyāḥ |*

Neither Apsarases nor Gandharvas nor mortals slay him (who wears the Śraktya amulet).

ŚS 8.6.18–23c (~ PS 16.80.9–81.5c)

*(18ab) yās te gārbhaṇi pratimṛśāḥ
jātāni vā mārāyāti te |*

The one that gropes for a fetus or that kills a newborn ...

(19ab) yé ... sūtikā anuśerate

those that ... lie with (rape³) women who have just given birth ...

(19cd) gandharvān ... ajatu

drive away the Gandharvas! ...

(23abc) yā āmāni māṃsam adanti

*pāuruṣeyaṇi ca yé kravīḥ
gārbhān khādanti keśavās |*

the hairy ones that eat raw flesh and human carrion, that feed on fetuses.

ŚS 12.1.50 (~ PS 17.5.8)

*yé gandharvā apsarāso
yé cārāyāḥ kimīdinaḥ |
piśācānt sārva rākṣāṃsi
tān asmād bhūme yāvaya ||*

Those that are Gandharvas, Apsarases, Arāyas and Kimīdins – keep all those Piśācas and Rakṣases away from us!

It seems to me *prima facie* plausible that the poets who praise the Gandharvas and who wish to feast with them are not the same as the poets who fear and revile them. If this is the case, we might ask ourselves: who are these poets who view the Gandharvas as antagonists? I believe that the opening stanza of the *sūkta* PS 12.7–8 (~ ŚS 4.37) provides us with a clue. For the sake of clarity, I give the first two stanzas here:

*tvayā pūrvam atharvāṇo
jaghnū rākṣāṃsy oṣadhe |
tvayā jaghāna kaśyapa
tvayā kaṇvo agastyah ||1||*

With you, O plant, the Atharvans slew the Rakṣases at a former time. With you Kaśyapa slew them, with you Kaṇva and Agastya [slew them].

*tvayā vayam apsaraso
gandharvāṃś cātayāmasi |
ajaśṛṅgy aja rakṣaḥ
sarvān gandhena nāśaya ||2||*

With you we scare away the Apsarases and the Gandharvas. O Ajaśṛṅgī, drive [away] the Rakṣas! Make them all disappear with your smell! (Transl. Zehnder et al. 2024)

The reference to Kaśyapa, Kaṇva and Agastya together as (or alongside) Atharvans and as enemies of the Gandharvas and other demons is worth highlighting here, and I will return to this in my conclusion below. However, in order to explain why I think the first of these verses may contain a clue as to the identity of the poets who oppose the Gandharvas, I turn for the time being to the other applications of

the name *kāṇva-* in the *Atharvaveda*. As well as denoting the legendary *ṛṣi-* ‘seer’ (as in the above verse)⁵ and the poet-singers who claim descent from him⁶, masculine *kāṇva-* also designates a type of demon, while in the *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā* feminine *kaṇvā-* designates both a type of demon as well as, in several instances, a group of benevolent beings. Each of these latter meanings are in evidence in the *sūkta* PS 4.13 (~ ŚS 2.25), the text and translation of which given here is from Zehnder et al. 2024:

śaṃ no devī prśniparṇy
aśaṃ nirṛtaye karat |
ugrā hi kaṇvajambhanī
tāṃ tvāhārṣaṃ sahasvatīm || 1 ||

The goddess Prśniparṇī will make well-being for us, [but] adversity for Nirṛti, for she is fearsome and Kaṇva-crushing. So I have seized you, the victorious one.

sadānvāghnī prathamā
prśniparṇy ajāyata |
tayā kaṇvasyāhaṃ śiraś
chinadmi śakuner iva || 2 ||

Prśniparṇī was born first as a Sadānvā-slayer. With her I cut off the head of the Kaṇva, as if of a bird.

ūrjabhṛtaṃ prāṇabhṛtaṃ
prajānām uta tarpaṇīm |
sarvās tāḥ prśniparṇī-
*-ītaḥ kaṇvā mā *nīnaśat || 3 ||*

The one bringing nourishment, the one bringing breath, and the one satisfying our progeny – let Prśniparṇī not make all those Kaṇvās disappear from here.

⁵ The other references to Kaṇva the ancient seer in the *Atharvaveda* occur at PS 2.14.5 (~ ŚS 2.32.3, ŚS 5.23.10), PS 4.38.4 (~ ŚS 4.29.5), PS 5.25.2 (~ ŚS 4.19.2), PS 11.2.6, PS 19.7.5 (~ ŚS 6.52.3), PS 20.4.4 (~ ŚS 7.15.1), ŚS 18.3.15 (~ PS 18.70.3), ŚS 20.115.2 (~ RV 8.6.11), ŚS 20.139.3 (~ RV 8.9.3), ŚS 20.140.4 (~ RV 8.9.9).

⁶ See PS 6.17.11 (~ RV 1.14.2), PS 8.15.2, ŚS 20.18.1 (~ RV 8.2.16), ŚS 20.10.2 = 20.59.2 (~ RV 8.3.16), ŚS 20.52.3 = 20.57.16 (~ RV 8.33.3), ŚS 20.120.2 (~ RV 8.4.2), ŚS 20.138.3 (~ RV 8.6.3), and ŚS 20.141.4 (~ RV 8.9.14). On this patronymic meaning of *kāṇva-* (where one might expect, and indeed where we often encounter, *kāṇvā-*), see Oldenberg 1888, pp. 202, 215–216 and Hoffmann 1975 [first published 1940], p. 20.

*samākṛtyainā nir aja
tikṣṇaśṛṅga *ivarṣabhaḥ |
arāyaṃ kaṇvaṃ pāpmānaṃ
prśniparṇi sahasvati ||4||*

Having brought them together, drive them away like a sharp-horned bull, [as well as] the Arāya, the Kaṇva, and the evil one, O victorious Prśniparṇī⁷.

*tvam ugre prśniparṇy
agnir iva pradahanṃ ihi
kaṇvā jīvīṭayopanīḥ |
girim enā ā veśaya
tamāṃsi yatra gacchāṃs
tat pāpīr api pādaya ||5||*

O mighty Prśniparṇī, go on burning the life-extinguishing Kaṇvās like fire. Make them go into the hills. Where darknesses will go, there cast the wicked ones.

*arāyam asṛkpāvānaṃ
yaś ca sphātim jihīṛṣati |
garbhādaṃ kaṇvaṃ nāśaya
prśniparṇi sahasvati ||6||*

Make the blood-drinking Arāya disappear, and the one that wants to take away abundance, the fetus-devouring Kaṇva, O victorious Prśniparṇī!

*yā no gā yā no grhān
yā na sphātim upāharān |
tā ugre prśniparṇi tvam
kaṇvā mā nīnaśa itaḥ ||7||*

[The Kaṇvās] that will bring us cows and homes, that will [bring] us abundance, do not make those Kaṇvās disappear from here, O mighty Prśniparṇī.

There are several other *sūktas* in the *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā* that are dedicated to driving away malevolent female Kaṇvās, for example PS 1.86 and PS 10.1. In the latter *sūkta*, as well as in PS 5.9 and PS 19.36.15–18,

⁷ See Zehnder et al. 2024 on PS 4.13.4c: “At PS 7.11.7cd: *arāyaṃ kaṇvaṃ pāpmānaṃ tam ito nāśayāmasi*, the singular pronoun *tam* seems to imply that *arāyaṃ kaṇvaṃ pāpmānaṃ* describes a single being, so that one might perhaps understand ‘the miserly Kaṇva, the evil one, that one we make disappear from here’.”

demonic Kaṇvās are either paired with or, I would argue, identified with a kind of female demon called *sadānvā-*. The names *kaṇvā-* and *sadānvā-* seem to be used interchangeably in these *sūktas* (rather like masculine *kaṇva-* and *sadānvā-* in PS 4.13.2 above)⁸. Sadānvās are characterised in the *Atharvaveda* as engaging in precisely the same behaviour as is attributed to the Kaṇva in the above *pāda* PS 4.13.3c (~ ŚS 2.25.3c), namely, the devouring of human fetuses. In the *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā* in particular, attacking pregnant women and feeding on their unborn or newborn children is one of the Sadānvās' most characteristic behaviours⁹. Moreover, it is one that is ascribed to them already in the *Ṛgveda*. Thus, the first hemistich of the second stanza of ṚV 10.155, a *sūkta* intended to scare away (1d *cātaya* 'cause to hide'; Jamison and Brereton: "banish") a Sadānvā, explicitly identified as *arāyī-* (1a, 2c), a kind of demoness, reads as follows: 2ab *cattó itás cattámútaḥ sárva bhrūṇāny āruṣī* "She (RL: the Sadānvā) is banished from here, banished from yonder, having assailed all fetuses" (translation by Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1639). As we saw above, depictions of demonic Gandharvas also characterise these figures as attacking pregnant (and postpartum) women and devouring their fetuses and newborn children (e.g. ŚS 8.6.18–23c ~ PS 16.80.9–81.5c). However – I come now to the nub of my argument – despite their shared proclivity for feeding on human fetuses, it is very striking that, with a single exception, demonic Gandharvas and demonic Kaṇvas/Kaṇvās/Sadānvās never appear together in the same *sūkta* as objects of fear and chastisement¹⁰. Consider ŚS 8.6 ~ PS 16.79–81, a lengthy *sūkta* against miscarriage and stillbirth: this *sūkta* seems tailor-made for fetus-devouring Kaṇvas/Kaṇvās/Sadānvās and yet they do not appear there, whereas

⁸ See e.g. PS 19.36.16cd: *tvam nudasva kaṇvā aśivā ajuṣṭāḥ sadānvā nir itaḥ *sedha pāpīḥ* "Push the inauspicious, unwelcome Kaṇvās away. Drive the evil Sadānvās away from here!" (text and translation from Zehnder et al. forthcoming). It is to be noted that even if Kaṇvas and Kaṇvās are identified as Sadānvās, this is not to say that all Sadānvās are Kaṇvas and Kaṇvās. In the anuvāka PS 17.12–15 against Sadānvās, the word *kaṇva/kaṇvā-* is noticeably absent.

⁹ See especially PS 5.9.6c, 7c: *yā garbhān pramṛśanti* 'Those [Sadānvās] that grope for fetuses', and PS 17.14.8ab: *garbhān ekāḥ *pratimarṣaṇi yā adanti sadānvāḥ* "Those particular Sadānvās who eat the embryos, groping for [them]" (text and translation by Selva 2019, p. 113). For an overview, see also Selva 2019, p. 46.

¹⁰ The single exception is PS 7.11, a "composite" (Griffiths 2009, p. 363) *sūkta* that appears to have been cobbled together from disparate sources (including the *Ṛgveda*), the offending *pāda* 7c *arāyaṇi kaṇvaṇi pāpmānam* apparently being borrowed from PS 4.13.4c.

the Gandharvas do (ŚS 8.6.19 ~ PS 16.80.10). Moreover, it is notable that Gandharvas feature in this *sūkta* alongside several other key figures of Atharvavedic demonology, including the Rakṣas (ŚS 8.6.13d ~ PS 16.80.5d) and the (masculine) Arāya (ŚS 8.6.4–6, 12c ~ PS 16.79.4–6, 80.3c). On the other hand, consider PS 17.12–15, against the Sadānvās: the purpose of this anuvāka is to drive away Sadānvās, who are characterised as eaters of human fetuses (see especially PS 17.14.4, 8), and who feature alongside several other key figures of Atharvavedic demonology, including the Rakṣas (PS 17.12.6, 15.3, 6) and (as in the Ṛgvedic hemistich given above) the (feminine) Arāyī (PS 17.13.4, 8, 14.1, 2, 15.1, 10), but not the Gandharva.

To summarise the foregoing, there are certain Atharvavedic poets who fear and rail against a type of demon they call *kāṇva-* (masculine) and *kāṇvā-* (feminine). These demons appear to be very closely related to, or even identical with, a class of female demons called *sadānvā-*, who from the time of the *Ṛgveda* are characterised as posing a mortal threat to pregnant women and their unborn or newborn children, whom they seek to devour¹¹. These poets demonise Kaṇvas, Kaṇvās and Sadānvās, but they do not demonise Gandharvas. Let us call these poets the ‘anti-Kaṇvas’. On the other hand, there are other Atharvavedic poets who do *not* demonise the Kaṇvas, Kaṇvās or Sadānvās but who *do* demonise the Gandharvas, often in very similar ways to those in which the Kaṇvas, Kaṇvās and Sadānvās are demonised, i.e. as representing a mortal threat to pregnant women and their unborn or newborn children. If we are being very cautious, we may designate these poets as ‘those who are not ill-disposed towards the Kaṇvas’. More economically, we might, however tentatively, call them ‘Kaṇvas’, not least since there are good reasons for supposing that Kaṇvas had a large hand in the composition of the *Atharvaveda* (see below).

¹¹ Note PS 17.12.6ab, where Sadānvās are named as a threat alongside their male and female descendants (*sādānvā-*): *sādānvāḥ sādānveyān stripuṃsaṃ ubhayān saha* ‘The Sadānūvās, the descendants of the Sadānūvās, both the male and female ones, together’ (translation by Selva 2019, pp. 66–67). Might these male and female descendants of the Sadānvās be the Kaṇvas and Kaṇvās? The *vṛddhi* derivative *sādānveya-* occurs in two other places in the *Atharvaveda*, but unfortunately both instances leave our question unanswered: PS 11.11.1c *yadi kiṃ ca khalyaṇi *sādānveyam* ‘if anything belonging to the threshing floor stems from Sadānvās (i.e. is contaminated by Sadānvās)’ (edited and translated by Tucker 2016, pp. 312–313); and PS 16.8.10a *sādānveyaṇi pra mṛṇa rakṣa indra* ‘Crush the descendant of the Sadānvā, the demon, O Indra!’

I propose that the above evidence points to there being two groups of poets in our sights here, presumably rivals, who took it upon themselves to insult each other in verse. The name *sadānvā-*, if we take seriously the etymology given by Yāska's *Nirukta*, may indeed itself be an insult that is directed at Kaṇvas primarily in their role as singers of melodies (*sāman-*)¹². It is especially striking that the group of Atharvavedic poets I am calling the Kaṇvas have in common with the Ṛgvedic Kaṇvas an antipathy towards the Gandharva/s¹³. Also in common with the Ṛgvedic Kaṇvas (e.g. RV 1.39.7–9, 8.7.17–19, 32), Atharvavedic Kaṇvas affiliate themselves with the Maruts¹⁴. Thus we read, for example, at PS 6.17.11: *ā tvā kaṇvā ahūṣata grṇanti vipra te dhiyaḥ | marudbhir agna ā gahi ||* 'The Kaṇvas have called you here. They sing your insightful thoughts, O inspired one! Come here, along with the Maruts, O Agni!'¹⁵ More strikingly still, Paippalādin anti-Kaṇvas also associate the Kaṇvas with the Maruts. I give here the text and translation of PS 10.1.1–2 by Zehnder et al. (2024), with a couple of my own minor changes:

*hā amba tejane dhenō
lambanastani |
na tad vido yad icchasi
yad u vittam na tad ghasaḥ ||*

Hey mother, ... (*tejane*), dairy cow, [you] with your sagging udders, you will not find what you are looking for! And what you have found, you will not eat!

*putro yas te prśnibāhus
tam u tvaṇ sāmanam kṛdhi |
atho duhitaram naptrīm
atho tvaṇ sāmanā bhava ||*

¹² Yāska explains *sadānve* at RV 10.155.1b as describing the constant screaming noise of these beings (*Nirukta* 6.30: *sadānonuve śabdakārike*, Lakshman Sarup 1927, p. 128), i.e. *sādā + nu* 'always crying out, always shouting/screaming', a fitting insult to singers perhaps. Bloomfield (1897, p. 301) connects the word with *dānu-* and *dānavā-*. On Kaṇvas as *sāman*-singers, see e.g. Oldenberg 1884, pp. 450, 464, as well as below.

¹³ The only Ṛgvedic references to the Gandharva which appear to conceive of this figure as an antagonist to Indra occur in the Kaṇva-authored *sūktas* of the eighth book (RV 8.1.11, 8.77.5).

¹⁴ The Kaṇvas are also associated with the Maruts in the *Yajurveda Saṃhitās*, see e.g. VSM 17.74 ~ MS 2.10.6:138.16–139.1 ~ KS 18.4:269.1–2 ~ TS 4.6.5.4; MS 4.10.5:155.4–7 ~ KS 21.13:54.14–17 ~ TS 4.3.13.6–7.

¹⁵ Elsewhere see also e.g. the *sūkta* PS 8.15.

The son of yours that has speckled arms, make him docile, and also your daughter and your granddaughter. And also be docile yourself¹⁶.

I submit that these two stanzas address (and insult) *Ṛṣni*, the divine cow who is the mother of the Maruts. *Ṛṣni* is identified here as a *Sadānvā* who is looking for human fetuses to devour. She is also, I contend, the addressee of several of the stanzas in PS 6.8, another *sūkta* directed against the *Sadānvās*¹⁷. On the basis of PS 5.7.11cd (~ ŚS 4.15.12cd), where the Maruts are characterised as *ṛṣnibāhavo maṇḍūkā* ‘frogs with speckled arms’, ŚS 8.8.17cd (~ PS 16.30.7cd) **bhavās ca ṛṣnibāhuś ca śārva* ‘Bhava and the one with speckled arms, [i.e. you] O Śarva’¹⁸, and PS 6.8.9 (immediately below), *Ṛṣni*’s son with speckled arms (*ṛṣnibāhuḥ*) must be Śarva:

*śarvapuṭre bhavapatni
yātubhrātri sadānve |
tasyāddhi putrān bhrātṛṃś ca
yatra tvā vinayāmasi ||*

You, *Sadānuvā*, whose son is Śarva, whose husband is Bhava, whose brother is sorcery: eat the sons and brothers of him, to whom we remove you. (Transl. Griffiths 2009, p. 108).

Bhava and Śarva are sometimes depicted as aspects or embodiments of Rudra (e.g. ŚS 11.2 ~ PS 16.104–106), and sometimes as Rudras i.e. Maruts (e.g. PS 15.21.3)¹⁹. Anti-*Kaṇva* poets also associate demonic *Kaṇvās* with Rudras (Maruts) in the *sūkta* PS 1.86. This *sūkta* against *Kaṇvās* immediately follows one intended to return a (presumably young) man who is *marudyuta*- ‘joined with (or ‘kept away by’ from 2.

¹⁶ Cf. PS 5.1.3: *hā amba suhūtale atho hai sāmānantame | putro yas te ṛṣnibāhus tam u tvaṃ sāmānaṃ kṛdhi | atho duhitaraṃ napṛīm atho tvaṃ sāmānā bhava.*

¹⁷ See especially PS 6.8.4a *khele hai lambanastani* ‘Hey *Khelā*, [you] with the sagging udders’ (modified from Griffiths 2009, p. 100; on *khele*-, see Griffiths *ibid.*, p. 101); and PS 6.8.5ab: *asuvāne bahuputṛe anantarve mahodari* ‘“You, not giving birth, [but] having many sons; not pregnant, but with a big belly” (translation by Griffiths 2009, pp. 102–103). I take ‘many sons’ here to refer to the Maruts, and the other statements as alluding to the Maruts’ extraordinary birth (on which, see especially RV 6.66.1–5, and e.g. RV 2.34.2).

¹⁸ On the variant readings of this hemistich, see Kim 2021, p. 435; on the nominative (*ṛṣnibāhuḥ*) and the vocative both referring to Śarva (*pace* Whitney, Lanman 1905, pp. 505–506), see Bloomfield 1897, p. 586.

¹⁹ On the identity between Rudras and Maruts, see e.g. RV 1.39.4–8, RV 1.85.1–2, RV 5.54.4. Falk (1986, pp. 63–65) expresses some caveats.

yav/ya?) the Maruts' (PS 1.85.3c, 4b). Here is the fifth stanza of PS 1.86, in which two Kaṇvās are described as *rudrapreṣite* 'sent by Rudras'. The text and translation is taken from Zehnder et al. (2024):

*dudvā ca dudvatī ca sthas
tad vāṇ nāma tad vāṇ nāmadheyam |
rudrapreṣite stho 'vye
nāma pary asmān vṛṇktaṁ
yo no dveṣti tam rchatam ||*

You are Dudvā and Dudvatī. That is your name, that is your designation. You are sent by the Rudras, [you are] Avyās by name. Avoid us! Hit the one who hates us!

Conclusions

Quite a lot of scholarly work has been carried out on the Kaṇvas (e.g. Oldenberg 1888; Hoffmann 1975; Kuiper 1991; and now Witzel 2025) relative to the other Ṛgvedic poetic lineages, but the details remain sketchy. We know that they authored the bulk of the eighth book and a substantial portion of the first book of the *Ṛgveda*, and that the Āṅgirasas were responsible for much of the remainder of these two books. Proferes (2003, pp. 15–18) proposes that the Soma Pavamāna liturgies which comprise ṚV 9 were taken from the priestly circles of the Kaṇvas, the Āṅgirasas and the Ātreyas (who also composed the majority of hymns in ṚV 5), and that (following Oldenberg 1888) each of these kin-groups or clans were closely connected with each other. The Kaṇvas probably lived on the high plains of Balochistan, near the southern Iranian border (Witzel 1985, p. 231)²⁰. Their likely geographic proximity to Iran and the linguistic connections between ṚV 8 and Iran (on which, see e.g. Hopkins 1896, pp. 79–92; Hoffmann 1975, p. 9) are especially notable in light of the Avesta's depiction of the antagonistic aquatic monster called *gaṇdarəβa*, cognate with Vedic *gandharvā-* (see Panaino 2001). It has been convincingly argued that the Kaṇvas were worshippers of the Aśvins (Parpola 2015, pp. 120–128), and they have been identified as "professional sorcerers" (Kuiper 1991, p. 16; also Hoffmann 1975). The word *kāṇva-* is most likely non-Indo-Aryan (Kui-

²⁰ Parpola (2015, pp. 120–121) places them further to the north, along with the Ātreyas, in Gandhāra. The Ātreyas are also closely linked to the Maruts, as can be seen by the number of hymns addressed to them in ṚV 5.

per 1991, pp. 16, 43, 80; Witzel 2025, pp. 36–37; *pace* Hoffmann 1975), but it appears that the Kaṇvas became “Aryanized” (Kuiper 1991, p. 17) at an early stage (Oldenberg 1888, p. 219; Parpola 2015, p. 302). Several scholars have suggested that this only accounts for some Kaṇvas, and that others among them remained faithful to their own tradition and consequently earned a reputation as dangerous sorcerers (Kuiper 1991, p. 17; Parpola 2015, p. 303). If we accept this reconstruction of events, it might help explain why the *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā* distinguishes between demonic and benevolent (i.e. “Aryanized”) Kaṇvās.

In addition to their substantial contribution to the composition of the *Ṛgveda*, recent scholars have identified the Kaṇvas and Āṅgirasas as also having authored both the *Sāmaveda* (see Parpola 2015, pp. 128–129)²¹ and the *Atharvaveda* (e.g. Insler 1998; Parpola 2015, pp. 131–132; Witzel 2025, pp. 36–37). One of the oldest names (perhaps the oldest) for the *Atharvaveda* is *atharvāṅgirāsah*, a coordinative (dvandva) compound meaning ‘the Atharvans and the Āṅgirasas’. While *āṅgiras-* (plural) or *āṅgirasá-* is a family name (i.e. a patronymic, ‘the descendants of Āṅgiras’), *átharvan-* is rather a priestly title (see Spiers 2020, pp. 39–48). Witzel (2025, pp. 36–37) discusses the links between Kaṇvas and Atharvans, and points to the use of the word *átharvan-* by the Kaṇva author of ṚV 8.9 (verse 7) to refer to a priest participating in the worship of the Ásvins (via the gharma offering).

If we return now to PS 12.7.1 (~ ŚS 4.37.1) discussed above (“With you, O plant, the Atharvans slew the Rakṣases at a former time. With you Kaśyapa slew them, with you Kaṇva and Agastya [slew them]”), I propose that this verse identifies Kaśyapa, Kaṇva and Agastya (and presumably those who claim descent from them) *as* Atharvans. The Kaśyapas are linked to the Kaṇvas as outsiders in later literature (see below), but they are also linked to them in the *Ṛgveda*, via the inclusion of their hymns in the eighth book (ṚV 8.29, 8.97). Agastya – another non-Indo-Aryan name (see Kuiper 1991, p. 18) – is mentioned by the Kaṇva author of ṚV 8.5.26, and is also connected to the Kaṇvas (as well as to the Maruts) via the inclusion of several *sūktas* attributed to him in Book 1 (ṚV 1.165–172)²². He is also mentioned next to Kaṇva (and Atri) in the parallel verses at ŚS 2.32.3 and ŚS 5.23.10 (~ PS 2.14.5), in two

²¹ On the Kaṇvas as singers of *sāmans*, see also e.g. Oldenberg 1884, p. 464 and Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1019.

²² On Agastya’s closeness to the Maruts, see especially ṚV 1.165 and ṚV 1.70–171.

sūktas (of only three in total) attributed by the (hopelessly inadequate) *Śaunakīya Anukramaṇī*, the *Atharvavedīya-Bṛhatsarvānukramaṇikā*, to Kāṇva (Whitney, Lanman 1905, p. 1040). Agastya's descendants the Agastis (**agastayah*; see Lubotsky 2007, p. 25) are classed alongside the Kaṇvas and Kāśyapas at PS 8.15.1–2. As with the Kaṇvas, as pointed out by Kuiper (1991, pp. 18–19), citing *Jaiminīya-Bṛāhmaṇa* 2.220 (*tasmād v agastayo bahirdhe 'va kurupāñcālebhyaḥ* 'Therefore, the descendants of Agastya live outside, as it were, (the land of) the Kurus and Pañcālas'), the Agastis had an outsider status in the eyes of certain brahmans.

That there were rivalries between competing clans of Ṛgvedic poets is in evidence throughout the *Ṛgveda* itself²³. Calls for unity, such as we find in the famous final *sūkta* of this compilation (RV 10.191), naturally presuppose disunity. These rivalries (and, indeed, accompanying calls for unity²⁴) persisted into the post-Ṛgvedic period (Witzel 1997, p. 264) despite apparent efforts at ritual, socio-religious and political unification under the ascendant Kuru kings (Witzel 1995, 1997, 2025). Of this post-Ṛgvedic period, Proferes (2007, pp. 12–13) writes as follows:

As part of their program to consolidate power, the Kuru kings sought to overcome the divisive tendencies inherent in the clan-based organization of their priestly elite by encouraging the development of an ecumenical ritual system, one that did not rely upon or perpetuate the clan divisions characteristic of the Ṛgvedic period ... Fundamental to the shift in culture was the termination of lineage-based institutions as the basic custodians of orthopraxy. No longer were rites undertaken by members of a single priestly lineage, as they were in the period reflected in the Ṛgvedic compositions themselves ... Membership in any of the older lineages now marked one as a member of an elite class that was no longer internally divided, and the older lineages now became an emblem of class solidarity, rather than group division. A member of the *brāhmaṇa* class was one who could trace his ancestry [*sic*] back to the Ṛgvedic lineages, and one's politically significant identity was shifted away from the kinship group itself to the class to which all of them belonged. It no longer mattered politically whether one was a Vaiśvāmītra, a Vāṣiṣṭha, or a Bhāradvāja, but only that one was a *brāhmaṇa*.

²³ See e.g. RV 1.131.2–3, RV 4.24, RV 6.67.9–11, RV 7.28.1, RV 7.82.1, RV 8.8.8, RV 8.65, RV 10.128.

²⁴ See e.g. PS 3.23, PS 9.4, PS 19.15.1–6 (~ ŚS 7.52, ŚS 6.74).

It did matter, however, if one was a Kaṇva, or at least *a certain type of Kaṇva*, and internal divisions among the priestly elite persisted in the post-Ṛgvedic period when it came to this lineage, as well as to several others. This can explain why Kaṇvas and Kaṇvās are demonised by poets associated with other lineages in the *Atharvaveda*, and why in later literature the very identity of the Kaṇva and Kaśyapa lineages are called into question. This we encounter in the *Kāthaka-Saṃhitā* and in a parallel passage in the *Kaṣīṭhalakāṭha-Saṃhitā* (KS 28.4:158.3–4 ~ KapKS 43.4:304.6–7): here, as noted already by Hoffmann (1975, p. 21) and others, Kaṇvas and Kaśyapas are categorised along with non-brahmans (*abrāhmaṇa-*) and with brahmans who are not learned in the Veda (*aśrotṛiya-*). In the later *Bhāradvāja-Śrautasūtra* (BhārŚS 14.5.15), meanwhile, the legitimacy of the Kaṇva and Kaśyapa lineages is explicitly refuted, the Kaṇvas and Kaśyapas being identified as *anārṣeya-* ‘not descended from a seer (*ṛṣi-*)’, and therefore (along with beggars and other persons) ineligible to receive a *dāksīṇā-* ‘sacerdotal fee, gift’, a proscription also made in the *Kātyāyana-Śrautasūtra* (KātyŚS 10.2.35).

I make no attempt in this study to identify the Atharvavedic ‘anti-Kaṇvas’, but the presence of their compositions in the *Atharvaveda*, especially numerous in the *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā*, indicate that, despite their apparent status as Atharvans, the Kaṇvas did not monopolise this collection. For the purposes of this preliminary and partial study, the important characteristics of the Atharvavedic anti-Kaṇvas are i.) they demonise the Kaṇvas but not the Gandharvas, and ii.) they associate the Kaṇvas with the Maruts. The Kaṇvas, in their turn, associate themselves with the Maruts and demonise the Gandharvas, both in the *Ṛgveda* and in the *Atharvaveda*. In answer to our preliminary question, then, it appears that the *Atharvaveda* can help explain the partially overlapping functions of the Gandharvas and the Maruts in this work: it is a consequence of the fact that these figures were invoked by different lineages of Vedic poets, and that hostilities between these lineages existed during the period of the composition of the *Atharvaveda*. Judging by the persistence of these partially overlapping functions in later literature, and indeed by scattered remarks, even in the late Vedic sūtras, which betray a continuing animosity towards Kaṇvas and certain other family lineages, these divisions and hostilities endured. But I cannot emphasise enough that this study is merely preliminary, and that a great deal of work still needs to be undertaken. With respect to the *Atharvaveda* alone, a comparative analysis of thematic, stylistic,

grammatical and lexical features in *sūktas* identified as belonging to (or suspected to belong to) different poetic lineages would perhaps be a good place to start.

References

- BHATTACHARYA, Dipak (2008) (ed.), *The Paippalāda-Saṃhitā of the Atharvaveda. Volume Two, Consisting of the sixteenth Kāṇḍa*, Asiatic Society, Kolkata.
- BHATTACHARYA, Dipak (2011) (ed.), *The Paippalāda-Saṃhitā of the Atharvaveda. Volume Three, Consisting of the seventeenth and eighteenth Kāṇḍas*, Asiatic Society, Kolkata.
- BHATTACHARYA, Dipak (2016) (ed.), *The Paippalāda-Saṃhitā of the Atharvaveda. Volume Four, Consisting of the nineteenth and twentieth Kāṇḍas*, Asiatic Society, Kolkata.
- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice (1897), *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda Together with Extracts from the Ritual Books and the Commentaries*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- CHARPENTIER, Jarl (1911), *Bemerkungen über die vrātya's*, in "Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes", 25, pp. 355–388.
- FALK, Harry (1986), *Bruderschaft und Würfelspiel. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des vedischen Opfers*, Hedwig Falk, Freiburg.
- GRIFFITHS, Arlo (2009), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda, Kāṇḍas 6 and 7. A New Edition with Translation and Commentary*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen.
- HAUER, Jakob Wilhelm (1927), *Der Vrātya. Untersuchungen über die nichtbrahmanische Religion Altindiens. Erster Band*, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.
- HELLWIG, Oliver, LEACH, Robert, ZEHNDER, Thomas, PLAMADA, Magdalena, MALINAR, Angelika and Paul WIDMER (2024), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 12 (Version 1.0.0)* [Data set]. LaRS - Language Repository of Switzerland. <<https://doi.org/10.48656/pg2v-1n76>> [Accessed on 01/06/25].
- HILLEBRANDT, Alfred (1891) *Vedische Mythologie. Erster Band. Soma und verwandte Götter*, Wilhelm Koebner, Breslau.
- HOFFMANN, Karl (1975 [first published 1940]), *Vedische Namen*, in Johanna Narten (ed.) *Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik. Band 1*, Dr. Ludwig Reichert, Wiesbaden, pp. 6–28.
- HOPKINS, Edward Washburn (1896), *Pragathikani, I*, in "Journal of the American Oriental Society", 17, pp. 23–92.
- INSLER, Stanley (1998), *On the Recensions of the Atharva Veda and Atharvan Hymn Composition*, in "Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasasiens", 42, pp. 5–21.

- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (transl.) (2014) *The Rig Veda. The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- KIM, Jeong-Soo (2021) *Atharvavedasamhitā der Śaunakaśākhā. Eine neue Edition unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Parallelstellen der Paippalādasamhitā*. Published online at: <<https://opus.bibliothek.uni-wuerzburg.de/front-door/index/index/docId/27703>>.
- KUIPER, Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus (1991), *Aryans in the Rigveda*, Rodopi, Amsterdam.
- KUIPER, Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus (1996), *Gandharva and Soma*, in “Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik”, 20, pp. 225–255.
- LAKSHMAN, Sarup (1927) (ed. and transl.), *The Nighantu and the Nirukta. The Oldest Indian Treatise on Etymology, Philology, and Semantics*, University of the Panjab, Lahore.
- LELLI, Duccio (2020) (ed. and transl.), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda: Kāṇḍa Fifteen. Text, Translation, Commentary*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2002) (Ed. and transl.), *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda Kāṇḍa Five. Text, Translation, Commentary*, South Asia Books, Cambridge.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2007), *PS 8.15. Offense against a Brahmin*, in Arlo Griffiths, Annette Schmiedchen (eds.), *The Atharvaveda and its Paippalādaśākhā. Historical and Philological Papers on a Vedic Tradition*, Shaker, Aachen, pp. 23–33.
- OBERLIES, Thomas (1998), *Die Religion des Ṛgveda. Erster Teil: Das Religiöse System des Ṛgveda*, De Nobili Research Library, Wien.
- OLDENBERG, Hermann (1884). *Ṛgveda-Samhitā und Sāmavedārcika. Nebst Bemerkungen über die Zerlegung der Ṛgveda-Hymnen in Theilhymnen und Strophen sowie über einige verwandte Fragen*, in “Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft”, 38, 2, pp. 439–480.
- OLDENBERG, Hermann (1888), *Ueber die Liedverfasser des Ṛgveda. Nebst Bemerkungen über die vedische Chronologie und über die Geschichte des Rituals*, in “Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft”, 42, 2, pp. 199–247.
- PANAINO, Antonio (2001), *GĀNDARĒBA*, in *Encyclopædia Iranica* X/3, pp. 267–269; available online at: <<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gandareba>> [Last accessed on 9 August 2025].
- PARPOLA, Asko (2015), *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- PROFERES, Theodore N. (2003), *Remarks on the Transition from Ṛgvedic Composition to Śrauta Compilation*, in “Indo-Iranian Journal”, 46, 1, pp. 1–21.
- PROFERES, Theodore N. (2007), *Vedic Ideals of Sovereignty and the Poetics of Power*, American Oriental Society, New Haven.
- SELVA, Umberto (2019), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda: A New Critical Edition of the Three ‘New’ Anuvākas of kāṇḍa 17 with English Translation and Commentary*, PhD Dissertation, Leiden–Torino.

- SPIERS, Carmen (2020), *Magie et Poésie dans l'Inde ancienne: édition, traduction et commentaire de la Paippalādasamhitā de l'Atharvaveda*, livre 3, Université Paris sciences et lettres, Paris.
- TUCKER, Elizabeth (2016), *The Big-Bellied Heap of Indra*, in Joel P. Brereton (ed.) *The Vedas in Indian Culture and History. Proceedings of the Fourth International Vedic Workshop (Austin, Texas 2007)*, Società Editrice Fiorentina, Florence, pp. 303–318.
- VASILKOV, Yaroslav (1989–1990), *Draupadī in the assembly-hall, Gandharva-Husbands and the Origin of the Gaṇikās*, in “Indologica Taurinensia”, XV–XVI, pp. 387–398.
- WHITNEY, William Dwight and Charles Rockwell LANMAN (1905), *Atharva-Veda Samhitā, Translated with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- WITZEL, Michael (1985), *Zu den Namen vedischer Śākhās (Materialien zu den vedischen Schulen, 2)*, in “Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik”, 10, pp. 231–237.
- WITZEL, Michael (1992), *Alfred Hillebrandt Reconsidered*, in “Journal of the American Oriental Society”, 112, 4, pp. 611–618.
- WITZEL, Michael (1995), *Ṛgvedic History: Poets, Chieftains, and Politics*, in George Erdosy (ed.) *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia*, De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 307–352.
- WITZEL, Michael (1997), *The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu*, in Michael Witzel (ed.), *Inside the Texts, Beyond the Texts: New Approaches to the Study of the Vedas*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 257–345.
- WITZEL, Michael (2004), *The Ṛgvedic Religious System and its Central Asian and Hindukush Antecedents*, in Arlo Griffiths, Jan E.M. Houben (eds.), *The Vedas. Texts, Language & Ritual*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen, pp. 581–636.
- WITZEL, Michael (2018), *Vedic Gods*, in Knut A. Jacobsen (ed.), *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, Brill, Leiden [Accessed on 8 August 2025].
- WITZEL, Michael (2025), *The Realm of the Kuru. Origins and Development of the First State in India*, in “Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies”, 30, 2, pp. 1–165. <<https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/ejvs/article/view/27845>>.
- ZEHNDER, Thomas (1999), *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda, Buch 2, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, Schulz-Kirchner, Idstein.
- ZEHNDER, Thimas, HELLWIG, Oliver, LEACH, Robert, PLAMADA, Magdalena, MALINAR, Angelika, and Paul WIDMER (2024). *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 1 (Version 1.0.0) [Data set]*. LaRS - Language Repository of Switzerland. <<https://doi.org/10.48656/as99-n988>> [Last accessed on 01/06/25].
- ZEHNDER, Thimas, HELLWIG, Oliver, LEACH, Robert, PLAMADA, Magdalena, MALINAR, Angelika, and Paul WIDMER (2024). *Atharvaveda*

Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 4 (Version 1.0.0) [Data set]. LaRS - Language Repository of Switzerland. <<https://doi.org/10.48656/2s4s-tp54>> [Last accessed on 01/06/25].

ZEHNDER, Thomas, HELLWIG, Oliver, LEACH, Robert, PLAMADA, Magdalena, MALINAR, Angelika, and Paul WIDMER (2024). *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 10* (Version 1.0.0) [Data set]. LaRS - Language Repository of Switzerland. <<https://doi.org/10.48656/wnzc-rs52>> [Last accessed on 01/06/25].

ZEHNDER, Thomas, HELLWIG, Oliver, and Robert LEACH (forthcoming), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda Zurich Edition Book 19*.

10. On ŚS 1.11 “For trouble-free childbirth” and its parallels

Roland A. Pooth

Abstract

This first *sūkta* of the *strīkarmāṇi* invokes Pūṣan and Aryaman together with lesser-known deities in order to provide a birth process without complications.

In this essay, I translate and interpret ŚS 1.11 from the perspective of a comparison with its variants PS 1.5 and ṚVKh 1.3.6, thus illustrating the relevance of the parallel textual testimony. My comments critically discuss the existing English and German translations, including their parallels, and the novel translation of PS 1.5 by Zehnder et al.

Keywords

Atharvaveda; Childbirth ritual; Placenta; afterbirth imagery.

This *sūkta* is the first of the Atharvavedic *strīkarmāṇi* ‘women’s rites’. It invokes Pūṣan and Aryaman as well as two lesser-known parturition deities, voc. sg. *sūṣane*¹ and voc. sg. *biṣkale*, in order to provide a birth process without complications. It is paralleled by PS 1.5, where “[s]pecial support is requested for an unimpeded passage through the birth canal (3–4) and for an easy release of the placenta (4–5)” (Zehnder et al. 2024). In the *Kauśika-Sūtra* (KauS 4.9 [33].1), this hymn is quoted at the beginning of an extensive ceremony for safe delivery². The *Anukramaṇīs* add to the author’s name: *anena mantroktān aryamādidevān nārīśukhaprasavāyā ’bhiṣṭūye ’ṣṭaṃsa sarvābhir aprārthayat* (see Whitney, Lanman 1905, p. 11). In what follows, I translate and interpret ŚS 1.11 from the perspective of a comparison with its parallels PS 1.5 and ṚVKh 1.3.6. I critically discuss the commentary on PS 1.5 provided by Zehnder et al. 2024³. The hymn is discussed by Roth 1856, p. 15. Metres are: (9–10 | 10–11) + (8–8 | 8–8) + (5–8 | 8–8) + (8–8 | 8–8–8) + (8–8 | 8–8–8) + (8–8 | 8–8–8)⁴. Below, I quote the ŚS text as edited by Kim’s *Neuedition* (2021), but with restored metre (the number of syllables is given in brackets).

1. Text and translation of ŚS 1.11

vāṣaṭ te pūṣann asmīnt sūtāv
aryamā hótā kṛnotu vedhāḥ |
sisratāṃ nār y rtāprajātā
vī párvāṇi jihatāṃ sūtavā u || 1 || (9–10 | 10–11)

cātasro divāḥ pradīśāś
cātasro bhūmyā utā |
devā gārbhaṃ sām airayan
tāṃ vy ūrṇuvantu sūtave || 2 || (8–8 | 8–8)

¹ *sūṣā* = nom. sg. of *sūṣān-*, voc. sg. *sūṣane* ‘begetting creator god’ or ‘parturient woman’? Its root etymology must be **seuH-* ‘beget, procreate’ (LIV, p. 538). The nom. sg. rhymes with *pūṣā* (*pūṣān-*), thus Mayrhofer, EWAia II, p. 714: “Spielform nach *pūṣān-*”.

² Cf. GRETEL KauS ed.: KauS 4.9 [33].1 <*vāṣaṭ te pūṣann* [1.11.1]> *iti catura udapātre saṃpātān ānīya caturo muñjān mūrdhni vibhṛati prācaḥ || 1 | praticir iṣṭikāḥ || 2 | chidyamānāsu saṃśayaḥ || 3 | uṣṇenāplāvayati dakṣiṇāt keśastukāt || 4 | śālān granthīn vicṛtati || 5 | ubhayataḥ pāśaṃ yoktram ābadhnāti || 6 |* etc. (Transl. Caland 1900, pp. 107–111).

³ Other translations of ŚS 1.11 are: Weber 1858, p. 404; Ludwig 1878, p. 478; Griffith 1895, p. 14 (stanzas 1–2; stanzas 3–6 are in Latin); Bloomfield 1897, p. 99, notes p. 242; Whitney, Lanman 1905, p. 11; Elizarenkova 2005, p. 96, notes p. 380.

⁴ Cf. Whitney, Lanman 1905, p. 11: “pāṅktam: 2. anuṣṭubh; 3. 4-p. uṣṇiggarbhā kakummaty anuṣṭubh; 4–6. pathyāpāṅkti”.

sūṣā vy ūrṇotu
vī yóniṇi hāpayāmasi |
śrathāyā sūṣaṇe t_uvām
āva tvāṇi biṣkale sṛja ||3|| (5–8 | 8–8)

nēva māṃsé ná pīvasi
nēva majjās_uv āhatam |
āvaitu pīśni śévalaṇ
śúne jarāy_uv āttavé
'_ava jarāyu padyatām ||4|| (8–8 | 8–8–8)

vī te bhinadmi méhanaṇ
vī yóniṇi vī gavīnike |
vī mātāraṇi ca putráṇi ca
vī kumārāṇi jarāyuṇā-
-āva jarāyu padyatām ||5|| (8–8 | 8–8–8)

yáthā vāto yáthā máno
yáthā pátanti pakṣiṇaḥ |
evā t_uvāṇi daśamāsyā
sākāṇi jarāyuṇā pata
-āva jarāyu padyatām ||6|| (8 | 8–8–8) ||11|| a 2||

1. “Vaṣaṭ” for you, O Pūṣan – let Aryaman, the hotar, the expert, make (that, i.e. “Vaṣaṭ”) at this birth here. Let the woman (and) the ones born of truth stretch out. Let the limbs go apart to give birth.

2. The regions of the sky are four and (those) of the earth are four. The gods made the (embryo-and-)uterus be fitted. Let them open it to give birth. Let Sūṣā open it! We make the vulva go apart. Make it loose, you *sūṣaṇe*! Pour it off, you *biṣkale*!

3. No longer left in the flesh, nor in the fat, no longer in the marrows, let the spotted, slimy afterbirth come down for a dog to eat it. Let the afterbirth fall off.

4. I make your urethra gape apart, your vulva, your groins, the mother and the son, and the ever-youthful child with the afterbirth. Let the afterbirth fall off.

5. Like the wind, like the mind, like birds fly – fly like this together with the afterbirth, you child of ten months! Let the afterbirth fall off⁵.

⁵ Compare, e.g., Bloomfield 1897, p. 99: “I,11. Charm for easy parturition. 1. Aryaman as active hotar-priest shall utter for thee the vashaṭ-call at this (soma-) pressing, O Pūṣan! May (this) woman, (herself) begotten in the proper way, be delivered, may her joints relax, that she shall bring forth! 2. Four directions has the heaven, and also four the earth: (from these) the gods created the embryo. May they open her, that she

2. Parallels, text and translation of PS 1.5

The PS text is quoted from the Zürich PS online edition (Zehnder et al.). Deviations from the ŚS text are marked in bold:

*vaṣaṭ te pūṣann **asyai** **suṛktim**
 aryamā hotā kṛnotu vedhāḥ |
 sisratām nāry ***rtaprajātā**
 vi parvāṇi jihatām ***sūtavā** u ||1|| (10–10 | 10–11)*

*catasro **diśaḥ** pradiśaś
 catasro bhūmyā uta |
 devā garbhaṁ sam airayan
 te vy ***ūrṇuvantu** sūtave ||2|| (8–8 | 8–8)*

***suṣṭā** vy ūrṇotu
 vi yoniṁ hāpayāmasi |
 śrathayā sūṣaṇe t_uvam
 ava tvaṁ biṣkale sṛja ||3|| (5–8 | 8–8)*

*neva **snāvasu** **parvasu**
 na **keśeṣu** **nakheṣu** ca |
 avaitu pṛśni śevalaṁ
 śune **jarāy_u** v attave ||4|| (8–8 | 8–8)*

*neva māṁse na pīvasi
 neva **kasmimś^{*}** ***canāyatam** |
 ava jarāyu padyatām ||5|| (8–8 | 8)*

“Vaṣaṭ” to you, Pūṣan! Let Aryaman, the hotar, the expert, pronounce a good song of praise for her here. O woman, let the ones born in accordance with truth extend themselves. Let your legs part in order to give birth. The directions are four, the regions, and [those] of the earth are four. The gods created the embryo. Let them open [the cervix] so that she can give birth. Let Suṣṭā open [the cervix]. We spread the vulva apart. Detach [the foetus], O Sūṣaṇi! Release it, O Biṣkali! No longer [entangled] in tendons [and] in limbs, nor in hair and nails, let the speckled, slimy afterbirth come down, so that a dog may eat it. Neither

shall bring forth! 3. May Sūshan open: her womb do we cause to gape. Do thou, O Sūshana, loosen the womb, do thou, O Bishkalā, let go (the embryo)! 4. Attached not at all to the flesh, nor to the fat, not at all to the marrow, may the splotched, moist, placenta come down to be eaten by a dog! May the placenta fall down! 5. I split open thy vagina, thy womb, thy canals; I separate the mother and the son, the child along with the placenta. May the placenta fall down! 6. As flies the wind, as flies the mind, as fly the winged birds, so do thou, O embryo, ten months old, fall along with the placenta! May the placenta fall down!”

held in the flesh nor in the fat, nor in anything, let the afterbirth descend. (Zehnder et al.).

Stanza 4 is paralleled by PS 1.5.4–5, *Āpastambamantrapāṭha* 2.11.18–20, and *Pāraskara-Gṛhya-Sūtra* 1.16.2 in the following ways. Differences are given in bold.

ŚS 1.11.4	PS 1.5.4–5	ĀpMP 2.11.19–20	PārGS 1.16.2
<i>nēva māṁsé ná pīvasi</i>		<i>sthavitry āva padyasva ná māṁsēsu</i>	
<i>nēva majjās_uv āhatam </i>	<i>neva snāvasu parvasu</i>	<i>ná snāvasu ná baddhām asi majjásu 19 </i>	
	<i>na keśeṣu nakheṣu ca </i>		
<i>āvaitu pr̥śni śévalam̐</i>	<i>avaitu pr̥śni śévalam̐</i>	<i>nīr aitu pr̥śni śévalam̐</i>	<i>avaitu pr̥śni śévalam̐</i>
<i>śúne jarāy_uv āttavé</i>	<i>śune *jarāy_uv attave 4 </i>	<i>śúne jarāyo āttave 20 </i>	<i>śune jarāy_v attave </i>
	<i>neva māṁse na pīvasi</i>		<i>naiva māṁse na pīvari</i>
	<i>neva kasmim̐ś *canāyatam </i>		<i>na kasmim̐ś canāyatam</i>
<i>*_uva jarāy_u padyatām 4 </i>	<i>ava jarāy_u padyatām 5 </i>		<i>ava jarāy_u padyatām 2 </i>

Pāda 5a = ŚS 1.3.7a *prá te bhinadmi méhanaṁ*. Stanza 5 is not in PS 1.5 but ‘your vulva, your groins, the mother and the son, and the ever-youthful child with the afterbirth’ is paralleled by PS 20.26.10 *saṁ te cṛtāmi takariṁ saṁ yoniṁ saṁ gavīṁyau | saṁ mātaraṁ ca putraṁ ca saṁ garbhaṁ ca jarāy_u ca ||* „Ich binde deine *takari*- zusammen, zusammen [deinen] Mutterleib, zusammen [deine] Leisten, zusammen sowohl die Mutter als auch den Sohn, zusammen sowohl den Embryo als auch die Nachgeburt“ (Kubisch 2012, p. 154). The noun *takari*- must refer to “ein Teil der weiblichen Genitalien” (Mayrhofer, EWAia I, p. 611). The noun *jarāy_u*- n. is polysemous and can likewise refer to the ‘placenta, after-birth, secundine, chorion’ of the embryo (as *jarāy_unā* in RV 5.78.8) and to the ‘slough of a snake’ (as *jarāy_uubhir* in ŚS 1.27.1c). Stanza 6 is not in PS 1.5, too, and compares to PS 20.22.9 ab (~ RV 5.78.8ab), cd (= RV 5.78.7cd) *yathā vāto yathodakam̐ yathā samudra ejati | evā te garbha ejatu niraitu daśamās_{yo} bahir jarāy_unā saha ||* (Paṅkti) „Wie Wind, wie Wasser, wie ein breiter Strom in Bewegung ist – so bewege sich dein Embryo! Er komme hervor als einer, der zehn Monate hat, he-

raus, zusammen mit der Nachgeburt!“ (Kubisch 2012, p. 134). As to 6a *daśamāsyā* ‘O child of ten month’, although people commonly talk about pregnancy as being nine months long, a full-term pregnancy is 40 weeks long, which equals 10 months. Pregnancies of 42 weeks (around 10 months) are relatively common.

3. The first hemistich and its archetype

ŚS 1.11.1ab is paralleled by PS 1.5.1ab and ṚVKh 1.3.6ab (quoted in this order from top to bottom below). Deviations from the ŚS text are marked in bold:

vāṣaṭ te pūṣann asmínt sūtāu
aryamā hótā kṛṇotu vedhāḥ | (9–10)

*vāṣaṭ te pūṣann **asyai** **suṛktim***
aryamā hótā kṛṇotu vedhāḥ | (10–10)

*vāṣaḍ **vām** **dásrāv** **asmin** **suté***
***nāsatyā** hótā kṛṇotu vedhāḥ* | (9–10)

There are two options to read the first hemistich of the ŚS text. 1. In any case, “*Vāṣaṭ*” must be the object of *kṛṇotu*. The first option is that *asmínt sūtāu* makes up a locative noun phrase with *asmín* modifying *sūtāu* ‘at this birth(ing process)’ (of *sūtu-* m.). “*Vāṣaṭ*” is an exclamation uttered by the *hótar-* priest at the end of the sacrificial verse on hearing which the *adhvaryu* priest casts the oblation offered to the deity into the fire. “*Vāṣaṭ*” occurs with the dative of the deity (i.e. *te* plus the vocative here) and it is typically the object of *kṛ-*. Zehnder et al. argue that “the consistent syntactical structure of the ŚS and ṚVKh can confidently be considered as more original than the one found in the PS, although both versions are metrically too short by one syllable”. They rightly notice that the loc. sg. m. form of the anaphoric pronoun must be archetypal and replaced by the dative feminine *asyai* ‘for her here’, i.e. for the woman giving birth who is present on the scene. An immediate implication is that the referent of the anaphoric pronoun changed from a masculine to a feminine referent. The PS phrasing *asyai suṛktim* ‘a good song of praise for her here’ must thus be based on some kind of reinterpretation of the original context. Zehnder et al. further note that *suṛktí-* does not occur elsewhere in the PS but is “strongly rooted” in the language of the ṚV. They say that “the accusative *suṛktim* ‘a good

song of praise’ has been introduced in place of the former noun in the locative – whatever that noun was” (ibid.). Such an introduction of *suṛṛktim* makes the cadence optimal in the PS.

PS <i>vaṣaṭ te pūṣann asyai suṛṛktim</i>	10	— — —
ŚS <i>vāṣaṭ te pūṣann asmínt sūtāv</i>	9	— — —

Even though the PS cadence is optimal, the ŚS version should be original because it is closer to the ṚVKh parallel. When compared with the ŚS text, a metrical optimization of the PS text seems to be evident. A more problematic hypothesis concerns the change of the original syntax. Zehnder et al. claim that “the PS appears to have remodelled the sentence by introducing a syntactical break after the vocative *pūṣan*. In the absence of a direct object, now the accusative *suṛṛktim* ‘a good song of praise’ has been introduced ...” However, this might be too strong a claim. ŚS and ṚVKh can likewise be read with a syntactical break or pause after the vocative *pūṣan* if we say that the object “*Vaṣaṭ*” is anaphorically implied and elliptic ($\emptyset_{ACC}$) in the second part:

<i>vāṣaṭ te pūṣann asmínt sūtāv</i> ¹	$\emptyset_{ACC}$	<i>aryamā hótā kṛṇotu vedhāḥ</i>
<i>vāṣaḍ vāṃ dāsrāv asmin sūtē</i> ¹	$\emptyset_{ACC}$	<i>nāsatyā hótā kṛṇotu vedhāḥ</i>
<i>vaṣaṭ te pūṣan</i>	<i>asyai suṛṛktim</i> ¹	<i>aryamā hótā kṛṇotu vedhāḥ</i>

A translation that imitates the word order of the ṚVKh hemistich is the following:

“*Vaṣaṭ*” for you two, O two wonder-working ones – at this pressed one (i.e. soma) here, O Nāsatyas – let the hotar make it (“*Vaṣaṭ*”), (he who is) the expert.

It is not obvious to me that the “syntactical break after the vocative *pūṣan*” (“*Vaṣaṭ*” for you, O Pūṣan’) is really an innovation of the PS version. The only difference that I see here is that the PS has secondarily introduced an overt object *suṛṛktim* in the second part, whereas the object of *kṛṇotu* is not overt in *pāda* 1b but co-referential with the initial *vāṣaṭ* in the two other texts.

2. An interesting second option regarding the first hemistich ŚS 1.11.1ab is to take *asmín* as anaphorically referring to *gárbha-* m. ‘in this one (i.e. uterus/embryo) here’. We might perhaps even interpret the

locative *sūtau* as having its rare purposive function⁶. In other words, the “locative of goal” can sometimes have the same purposive function as the *dativus finalis*. An alternative translation might thus be: “‘Vaṣaṭ’ to you, O Pūṣan—let Aryaman, the *hotar*, the expert, make (it, i.e. “Vaṣaṭ”) in this (uterus/embryo) here in order to give birth’ with purposive *sūtau*, or ‘... in this one here at the birth(ing process)’ with local *sūtau*. Both interpretations separate *asmín* from *sūtau* and make two independent locative noun phrases out of them. Thus, the locative sg. m. *asmín* ‘in this ... here’ might be a modifier of an elliptic head (*ghárba-* m.). The lack of the accent in the ṚVKh (*váṣaḍ vāṃ dásrāv asmín suté*) “in der Mitte oder am Schluss einer Verszeile” (thus Grassmann’s *Wörterbuch*) does not support adnominal function and points to an independent pronoun ‘in this one here’. Zehnder et al. feel forced to emend ṚVKh *asmín suté* to **asmín suté* ‘at this pressed [soma] here’. However, although the accent-marking of some words of ṚVKh 1.3 is missing or different (Scheffelowitz 1966, pp. 57f.), this might still be too rash. An emendation of the ṚVKh text will not be necessary if the independent pronoun *asmín* was not co-referential with the participle loc. sg. m. *suté* ‘at the pressing’. If the lack of accentuation of *asmín* in the ṚVKh was original, it was replaced by *asmín* in the ŚS version and the two forms *asmín* and *sūtau* were secondarily reinterpreted as a locative noun phrase. This interpretation helps to avoid an emendation. And it would nicely explain the difference between ṚVKh 1.3.6a *asmín suté* vs. ŚS *asmín sūtau*. The part *asmín suté* of the hemistich ṚVKh 1.3.6ab could thus be original. It could have been re-modelled in the *Atharvaveda* to make it refer to the birthing process, not the pressing. It is possible that the ṚVKh version was archetypical and the divine twins, the two Nāsatyas, were replaced in the *Atharvaveda*. See Zehnder et al. 2024:

The Ásvins, who are here invoked by their alternative name (*nāsatya-*), and by one of their most common epithets (*dasrá-*), provide assistance in several Ṛgvedic passages that deal with trouble-free childbirth (see Zeller 1990, pp. 52–53; e.g. ṚV 10.39.7d, ṚV 10.184.2). They are especially well suited to this office because they repeatedly rescue people out of narrow spaces, most famously when Atri is stuck within the earth cleft (see Zeller 1990, pp. 73–74, Jamison, Brereton 2014, pp. 760–761, both on ṚV 5.78). It is not entirely clear why **the divine twins have been**

⁶ Cf. Hettrich 2007, p. 20, C.a.III Lokativ §2.3.1: “In diesen drei Sätzen stehen L_{zi} und D_{im} in syntaktischer Parallele” (ṚV 1.10.6, 1.31.7, 6.26.8).

substituted by two different gods in the Atharvaveda version of the stanza, though it should be noted that the term *násatyā-* is absent from the Atharvaveda, where the Ásvins are always designated simply as *aśvín-*. (bold type mine)

However, it might be too rash to conclude that the *entire* ṚVKh hemistich must thus be archetypical because ṚVKh 1.3.6a is has the same number of syllables as the ŚS text, which is metrically too short by one syllable. This does not speak for its overall archetypicality and probably something happened here, too⁷. *váṣaṭ te pūṣann* with Pūṣan might still be original, if it was originally recited at the birth of a child. If *asmin suté* is original, this was accompanied by a soma-pressing at that time. Cf. Bloomfield (1897, p. 242):

The point of the first hemistich is the punning comparison of the birth (*súti-*) with the act of pressing the soma. This makes of it a sacrifice⁸.

The fact that Pūṣan is otherwise providing assistance in the context of a sexual act, insemination, and impregnation of the bride speaks in favor of the hypothesis that something was done here during the recitation of this hymn that was ritually associated with a sexual act and insemination. See Zehnder et al. 2024:

The divine functions of Pūṣan (on which, see Atkins 1947) as ‘protector’ (*paraspá-*) and ‘releaser’ (*vimócana-*), and his role in providing assistance in the sexual act between newly-married partners, as well as in the im-

⁷ A way to increase the number of syllables of 1a from 9 to *10 would be to read archetypical **suté + *u* and to say that this was changed to ŚS *sútau* in anticipation of 1d *sútavái u*. A way to reduce the number of syllables of 1d from 11 to *10 and to get a perfect cadence would be to change the younger to the older neuter nom.-acc. pl. form (as attested in ṚV 4.19.9d *sám aranta párova*):

<i>váṣaṭ te pūṣann *asmint *suté *u</i> ¹	*10	— — —
<i>aryamā/násatyā hótā kṛnotu vedhāḥ</i>	10	— — — (<i>aryamā</i> or <i>násatyā</i>)
<i>sísratāṃ nāry rtáprajāta</i> ¹	10	— — —
<i>ví *párova jihatām sūtaváu</i>	*10	— — —

The archaic nom.-acc. pl. n. form **párova* might have been felt as oddly deprecated and was thus perhaps replaced by its younger variant *párvāni* at that time.

⁸ Soma is mentioned in the ceremony for safe delivery described in KauśS 4.9 [33].1ff. (see the fn. above): KauśS 4.9 [33].7 *yadi somasyāsi rājñāḥ somāt tvā rājño 'dhikrīṇāmi* ... “Mit den Worten: „Wenn du dem König Soma zugehörst, kaufe ich dich vom König Soma los“ ...” (Caland 1900, p. 109). Similarly, Yasna 9.22–23 of the Avestan Hōm Yašt contain verses describing favors which Haoma grants to heroes and women giving birth (and others; the Avestan Hōm Yašt contains other indications that poetic elements were shared by Iranians and Indo-Aryans regarding Haoma-Soma).

pregnation of the bride (attested at e.g. ṚV 10.85.37; at 10.85.26 Pūṣan and the Ásvins are invited to escort the bride to her new husband's home) perhaps recommended him for a role in the present context.

This brings us to the role of the god Aryaman as the ultimate inseminator.

4. Aryaman as inseminator

We can now understand why the god Aryaman is doing the job of the *hotar* in the *Atharvaveda* version of the first stanza. He must be the representative of the ultimate inseminator of the woman giving birth, whereas the divine twins usually only provide assistance for a trouble-free childbirth⁹. As already mentioned, *vāṣaṭ* is an exclamation on hearing which the *adhvaryu* priest casts the oblation into the fire. If we take the locative *asmin* as the place where the oblation is cast into, then the woman's uterus will be the place where the oblation is metaphorically cast into¹⁰. Aryaman symbolizes the *pater familias* and his hospitality. He is the genius of marriage, bringing strangers including wife and husband together. This is done by means of the fire, so that Agni, who is the *hotar* among the gods, can even be identical with Aryaman (Oberlies 2012, pp. 31; 118). We can conclude that Aryaman symbolizes the generational bondage of the family and especially the one between the *pater familias* and his offspring here. As the *pater familias*, he is the one that is ultimately responsible for the impregnation of the bride in the same way as the *hotar* Agni is fertilized by the oblation and is then giving birth to his descendants, i.e. Agni's flames. When read in this way, the body of the woman that is giving birth can be associated with

⁹ Cf. Zehnder et al. 2024: "As for the Āditya Aryaman, since his name is given in the nominative (*aryamā*), it is now he who is characterised as *hótar*- and *vedhás*-, whereas in the ṚVKh, by contrast, these two words appear to describe a human priest who is asked to make the call *vāṣaṭ* to the Násatyas (*vām* 'to you two'). While other Vedic text passages where Aryaman is called *hótar*- are not easily found, ṚV 10.64.5d mentions Aryaman as one "who possesses seven Hotars, at his births (*jánman*-) in diverse forms" (translation by Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1483). In addition, ṚV 10.64.4b contains the word *suṛṛkti*- (see above), so we may hypothesise that ṚV 10.64.4–5 or a related passage may have influenced the wording of PS 1.5.1b."

¹⁰ Cf. Kauś 4.11[35].17 <*prajāpatir* [6.11.3/7.19.1]> *iti prajākāmāyā upasthe juhōti* "Dem Liede VII. 19 kommen (die folgenden Handlungen) zu. Wenn eine Frau sich Kinder wünscht, so bringt er (mit dem citierten Liede) Butterspenden in ihren Schoos dar" (Caland 1900, p. 117).

Agni and his flames. This is confirmed by the second hemistich of the first stanza, where both are invoked to stretch out in order to give birth by the 3pl *sisratām* in 1c, which has troubled so many.

5. Women, fire, and stretching things

Zehnder et al. (2024) are not very optimistic with regard to a final understanding of *pāda* 1c (“it seems unfeasible to find a definitive solution”). There are three issues here: 1. the lack of number agreement of the plural *sisratām* and the singular *nāry*, 2. the problem that the ŚS *padapāṭha* has *ṛtāprajāta*, and 3. the referent of *ṛtāprajāta*. I am more optimistic that we can solve these issues altogether, and I fully agree with Zehnder et al.’s maxim:

Several scholars have suggested emending the form to singular **sisrtām* (see e.g. Whitney and Lanman 1905, 11) to make it agree as a predicate with *nāry*, interpreted as nominative *nārī* (following the ŚS *padapāṭha*). However, we should resist the temptation to alter the text prematurely against the joint evidence of all traditions (RVKh, PS, ŚS), especially in those cases where it does not lead to a convincing solution.

However, having said this about a conjectured **sisrtām*, it must also hold for their conjectured vocative **nār_y* as against the joint evidence of the other traditions (RVKh, ŚS). If it is accented in the texts that mark the accent, this cannot lead to a better solution. The rendering of *nārī* as a vocative **nārī* does not only differ from the ŚS *padapāṭha*, which reads *nārī*, but also entails the deletion of the accent transmitted both in the RVKh and the ŚS. Although this was defended by Roth (1856, p. 15)¹¹, it has never led to a better understanding. In short, PS *nāry* must have had the same grammatical function as *nār_y* in ŚS and RVKh and cannot be read as a vocative (*pace* Zehnder et al.). It must be a nom. sg. f. form. The following *ṛtāprajāta*- can refer to (1) Agni (at RV 1.65.10a, it refers to Agni being like Soma); (2) Bṛhaspati (RV 2.23.15c, repeated in YV, VSM 26.3, etc.); (3) *dhī-* f. ‘thought, poetry’ (RV 10.67.1b)¹²; later

¹¹ Roth also accepts the second conjecture **sisrtām*: “Die leichteste Änderung, um wenigstens grammatische Richtigkeit zu erzielen, wäre *nārī* als Vocativ zu lesen und dem Wort den Ton zu nehmen”. Roth (wrongly, in my view) translates 1c as “es löse sich ab, o Weib, ein zeitiges Kind”.

¹² Cf. RV 2.23.15a *bṛhaspate ... d yād dīdāyac chāvāsa ṛtaprajāta* || “Bṛhaspati! That which will be worth more than what belongs to the stranger, (that which) will radiate

(4) *vīrúdhah* ‘the plants’ (TS^m 3.1.8.2). Agni (RV 1.65.10a) seems to be the best option here because he is typically called *kumārā-* m. and this is mentioned in the subsequent context ŚS 1.11.5d. To sum up, this epithet can refer to Agni, to Brhaspati, the poetic vision and its formulation that is found by the fathers (*dhiyaṃ ṛtāprajātām*), i.e. things that are procreated by truth or according to truth and faithfulness. Since the accent on ŚS *nāry* excludes a vocative function, I conclude that the recent translation of *pāda* 1c as “O woman, let the ones born in accordance with truth extend themselves” (Zehnder et al. 2024) is not adequate. I further claim that previous translations operating with an emendation of *sisratām* to *3sg are not adequate (e.g., Whitney, Lanman’s “let the woman, rightly engendered, be relaxed; let her joints go apart in order to birth” or Bloomfield’s “May (this) woman, (herself) begotten in the proper way, be delivered, may her joints relax, that she shall bring forth!” or Griffith’s “As one who bears in season let this dame be ready to bring forth her child”). Rather, *nāry* and *ṛtāprajātā* must be taken as the subject of the 3pl verb form in simple juxtaposition: ‘Let the woman (**and**) the ones born of truth stretch out!’ Also, the use of the English verb ‘to extend’ is not optimal because its semantics has the notion of an increase in size, which cannot be intended here, since the body of a woman giving birth does not increase in size any longer at that stage. Rather, the body typically stretches out and the extremities are held further apart, so that the use of the English verb ‘to stretch’ fits the context much better. Also, the lexical separation of “1. vs. 2. *sr-*” is an issue. This is not a case of homophony of two verbs but a case of polysemy of one single verb that was labile, i.e. transitive and intransitive at the same time. The polysemy of *sr-* is treated in detail in Pooth (2014). Here, *sr-* means ‘to stretch out (one’s body part/extremity)’ and its polysemy also includes ‘to shoot (forward), stream’, so that the woman is invoked to ‘stretch out’ and Agni’s flames are invoked to ‘stretch out’, too.

A parallel for *sr-* in this meaning is found at RV 10.71.4cd *utá t_u vasmāi tan_uvāṃ ví sasre jāyēva pátya úsatī suvāsāḥ* || ‘And for another she has

among the peoples with brilliance and purpose, and that which will shine by means of your power, o you born through the truth – set that shimmering possession among us” (Jamison, Brereton 2014); RV 10.67.1 *dhiyaṃ ... ṛtāprajātām ...* “This seven-headed insightful thought here, born of truth and lofty, did our father find.” (Jamison, Brereton 2014).

stretched out her body like a wife for her husband, willing (and) well-dressed’¹³.

6. *ṛtāprajātā* and *pārvāṇi* belong to the same category

We can further solve the question of why the ŚS *padapāṭha* has *ṛtāprajātā* by rendering it the same grammatical category as *pārvāṇi* in *pāda* 1d. *pārvāṇi* typically refers to ‘limbs, bones’ and ‘legs’ but does not refer to those referents alone. Its lexical semantics is more superordinate. These ‘limbs, bones’ are referring to the ‘legs’ of the woman giving birth to her child. At the same time, they are referring to Agni’s flames that are metaphorical ‘limbs, extremities’ when he is giving birth to more flames. I argue that we can even take the woman’s *gārbha-* ‘uterus’ m. as belonging to their ‘limbs’ as the uterus/embryo that stretches out (or is stretched forward) and goes apart (*vi pārvāṇi jihatām*). See Zehnder et al. 2024:

A clue to the meaning of the verb *sisratām* is found in a passage of the *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa*, where we find the form *prasāryante*, a passive built on the ... causative (*prā*) *sāraya-* ‘(make) extend’ or ‘stretch forward (hands, feet)’, the latter being the default meaning in the later literature (see, for example, GautDhS 1.9.14: *naitā devatāḥ prati pādau prasārayet* ‘one should not stretch out one’s feet towards these deities’). The passage in question, JBP 1.318:5–6, reads: *yato vai garbhāḥ prasāryante ’tha jāyante* ‘when foetuses are extended (or: pushed forward), then they are born’ (see e.g. Kulikov 2012, 510–511)¹⁴.

pārvan- n. is rendered „Gelenk (am menschlichen und tierischen Körper), Verdickung, Knoten (eines Pflanzenstengels), Zeitabschnitt“ by Mayrhofer (EWAia II, p. 99). We can render it as German ‘Glieder, Gliedmaßen’ as well. “Verdickung”, i.e. ‘thickening’ would refer to the uterus as a torus. On the meaning ‘limb, bone’ of *pārvan-* see Griffiths and Lubotsky (2000–2001, p. 197): “*pārus-* usually refers to the joint proper, whereas *pārvan-* denotes a piece between the joints, and is thus often synonymous with ‘bone’”. Therefore, *pārvāṇi* does not only refer to ‘legs, thighs’ here (*pace* Zehnder et al.), even if this might be suggested by BĀU 6.4.21 *athāsya ūrū vi hāpayati vi jihīthām dyāvāprthivī*

¹³ Compare Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1497.

¹⁴ See <<https://www.atharvaveda-online.uzh.ch/edition/01/005/01>>.

iti “Then he (the husband) spreads apart her (his wife’s) thighs, saying: ‘Spread apart, earth and sky’” (Zehnder et al. 2024). The noun stem *párvan-* n. clearly has a wider semantic scope than just that of English ‘leg’ or ‘thigh’. It is more polysemous and its meaning is more superordinate.

To sum up, both forms, *rtáprajātā* and *parvāṇi*, can be rendered as nom.-acc. pl. n. and specifically as nominative plural neuter here. The advantage of this interpretation is that it does not have to solve the word-final sandhi of *rtáprajātā* to **rtáprajātāḥ* against the transmission of the ŚS *padapāṭha*. The sense is that both the woman, i.e. the woman’s legs (limbs) and Agni’s flames (limbs) shall stretch out and stretch forward in all four directions of the sky – i.e. her and his extremities shall go apart (*vī párvāṇi jihatām*).

PS *diśaḥ* in PS 1.5.2a *cátasro diśaḥ pradiśaś* vs. ŚS 1.11.2a *cátasro diváḥ pradiśaś* is unlikely archetypical but an *Antizipationsfehler*, since ŚS *diváḥ* is syntactically preferable (thus Zehnder et al. 2024). This conforms to my reading that the flames (i.e. *rtáprajātā*) stretch out in all four directions, both on earth (with regard to the woman that is concretely giving birth on earth) and into the sky-heaven. The mentioning of the opposition 2a *cátasro diváḥ pradiśaś* vs. *cátasro bhúmyā utá* can thus confirm the outlined metaphorical comparison: In the same way as the woman’s legs need to concretely stretch out on earth during the birthing process, in the same way will Agni’s flames stretch out to the sky-heaven.

In this image, the woman’s body giving birth to the offspring symbolizes Agni’s body giving birth to his own body and flames and vice versa. Agni is thus giving birth to his flames, inseminated by Aryaman and assisted by Pūṣan or the two Nāsatyas, as much as the woman is giving birth to a real descendant of the *pater familias*. On another (ritual) level, Agni may also give birth to the thought and visions and poetic formulations of the singer, since Agni’s epithet can also refer to Bṛhaspati, the poetic vision and its formulation that is found by the fathers (*dhíyaṃ rtáprajātām*). Since Aryaman is invoked as the *hotar* here and since the libation is into the fire, that is, into the body that is stretching out to give birth, we may say that, in this image, the *hotar* Aryaman is making the *adhvaryu*, who is Pūṣan according to Bloomfield (1897, p. 242), pour something into the body of the fire and the body of the woman giving birth. In this image, he is thus pouring the *pater familias*’ semen into the stretching *gárbha-*, which

is Agni and the woman’s uterus giving birth at the same time. In this complex image with more than one metaphorical level, Agni is the one giving birth to himself like the woman is giving birth to the offspring of the *pater familias*. Aryaman is symbolizing the *pater familias*, which is pouring the (his) semen into the body, so that in the end he is the ultimate genius of the birth here, making the *gárbha-* (= Agni = woman) give the father’s offspring. For the given reasons, I believe that it may well be the *gárbha-* (i.e. the uterus as well as Agni) where the libation is poured in, indicated by the loc. sg. m. *asmin* ‘into this one here’. Therefore, I prefer option 2, i.e. archetypical *asmin suté* making up two independent locative nouns phrases ‘in this one here’ followed by ‘at the (soma-/herb-) pressing’ (see above).

7. Agni, the embryo and ever-youthful child

It is well-known that Agni is called *gárbha-*, e.g. at ŚS 5.25.7 (= PS 12.3.6):

gárbho asy ósadhīnām
gárbho vánaśpātīnām |
gárbho víśvasya bhūtāsya
só agne gárbham éhá dhāhi | |

You are the embryo of the plants, the embryo of the trees, the embryo of all the living [world]. Therefore, O Agni, place the embryo here!
 (Transl. Zehnder et al. 2024)¹⁵

In ŚS 1.11.2d, ŚS *tām* must co-refer to *gárbham*¹⁶, whereas PS 1.5.2d *te* must co-refer to the gods:

¹⁵ Cf. their commentary: “With reference to Agni, *gárbha ósadhīnām* also occurs at RV 3.1.13a, PS 2.32.3a and ŚS 6.95.3a. In a slightly different syntactic construction, the two words also occur at RV 10.183.3, which is ‘spoken by an unidentified spirit responsible for ... fertility?’” (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1657).

¹⁶ Cf. Kim 2021, fn. 104: „So mit SPP. R/Wh und WhI haben *tām*, siehe jedoch Whitneys Kommentar in Wh/L: „Or ‘unclose it,’ *tām*, which SPP reads in text and comm. [...] with the minority of his mss., but against all of ours; Weber and Roth prefer *tām*. The word and its predecessor are quoted in the Prāt. (ii. 30), as the earliest example in the text of a combination of *n* and *t* without *s*; but the form of the quotation (*samāirayantādīnām*) prevents our seeing whether its authors read *tām* or *tām*; the comm. gives *tām*” (zu Prāt. 2.30 siehe weiterhin den Kommentar in Whitney 1862, 86f., Wh/L cxivf. und Deshpande 1997, 295f.). Rh vermerkt: „[Bo.] 1.m. *tām*“. *Tām* lesen SPPs J., R., S^m (A.: *tām* > *tām*) und alle Pp.-Texte einschließlich Nnp. und Np. Die AVP-Parallelstelle hat *te* (= *devās*). Whitney bezieht in Wh/L offensichtlich *tām* auf die in 1.11.1c erwähnte *nārī-* „Frau“

ŚS 1.11.2cd *devā gárbhaṃ sám airayan tám vy ūrṇuvantu sūtave* || (8–8)

PS 1.5.2cd *devā gárbhaṃ sam airayan te vy ūrṇuvantu sūtave* || (8–8)

In its syntactic context, the anaphorical pronoun *tám* cannot refer to the woman, maybe to the subsequent *yóni-* m. (thus Kim see my fn. below), but the best option is to take it as co-referring to the preceding *gárbha-* m.: ‘The gods fitted the (*gárbha-* m. =) embryo-plus-uterus_i together. Let them open it_i to give birth.’ PS is translated by Zehnder et al. (2024) as: “The gods created the embryo. Let them open [the cervix] so that she can give birth”. Even if the object ad sensum of *vy ūrṇuvantu* is the cervix, ŚS *tám* clearly co-refers to *gárbha-* m., so that this cannot only mean ‘embryo’ because you would not open an embryo. The idea that the PS reading *te* ‘they’ would “make more sense in the context than ŚS *tám*” is not indicated in my view (*pace* Zehnder et al.).

The polysemous lexical semantics of *gárbha-* implies colexification of the meanings ‘uterus’ (including ‘cervix’) and ‘embryo/foetus’, so that we must assign a superordinate lexical meaning ‘uterus-embryo-cluster’ with the sub-meanings ‘uterus, including cervix’ and ‘embryo’ to this noun¹⁷. Thus, ŚS *gárbhaṃ* can refer to the combination of the uterus and embryo (semen, seed, fruit). The reference to the entire (embryo-and-)uterus-cluster is indicated by 2a *devā gárbhaṃ sám airayan* ‘the gods made the (embryo-and-)uterus be fitted’¹⁸. Also, in ŚS 1.11.3ab = PS 1.5.3ab, the object of *vy ūrṇotu* must be the preceding 2d *tám* m., co-referring to the acc. sg. m. *gárbhaṃ* (including the cervix).

ŚS 1.11.3ab *sūṣā vy ūrṇotu ví yóniṃ hāpayāmasi* | (5–8)

PS 1.5.3ab *suṣṭā vy ūrṇotu ví yoniṃ hāpayāmasi* | (5–8)

ŚS: ‘Let Sūṣā open it (i.e. the cervix)! We make the vulva go apart’; PS: “Let Suṣṭā open [the cervix]. We spread the vulva apart” (Zehnder et al. 2024). The hemistich 3ab would have 16 (*8–8) syllables if we insert-

(„[let them unclo]se her“). Aufgrund von AVŚ 1.11.3ab (... *vy ūrṇotu ví yóniṃ hāpayāmasi*) und 4.1.1d (*yónim ... ví vaḥ*) ist jedoch *tám* (*yónim*) wahrscheinlicher“.

¹⁷ “Garbha ist also sowohl der Ort, an dem der Embryo sich befindet als auch der Embryo, das Kind im Mutterleib” (<<https://wiki.yoga-vidya.de/Garbha>>).

¹⁸ This 3pl imperfect (pres. X) ind. act. *sám airayan* belongs to *sám* + ²r/ ²ar- ‘to meet, hit; fit, be fit, come together’ with pres. *rcchāti*. Cf. RV 4.19.9d *sám aranta párvatā* “es gelangten/gerieten/fügten (sich) seine Gelenke (wieder) zusammen” (Pooth 2012, p. 280). Pooth (2012) offers a detailed study of the distinction and indistinction of ²r/ ²ar- vs. ¹r/ ¹ar- ‘to rise, to raise’.

ed *sūṣā* **gárbhaṃ v.y ūrṇotu* (5 → *8). This word might have been lost due to its mentioning in 2cd *devā gárbhaṃ sám airayan* and the possibility of zero anaphor in 3ab.

We can conclude that *gárbha-* m. must refer to the closed uterus in this context, and to the closed cervix, because this is part of the uterus and sematic scope of *gárbha-*. For their rendering of it as ‘embryo’ or ‘baby’, Zehnder et al. (2024) give reference to *Āpastambamantrapāṭha* 2.11.18–20:

āitu gárbho ákṣito jīvó jīvantyāḥ ||18|| *tiladé 'va padyasva ná māṃsám asi nódālam | sthavitry áva padyasva ná māṃsésu ná snāvasu ná baddhām asi majjásu* ||19|| *nír aitu prśni sévalam śúne jarāyṃ áttave* ||20||¹⁹

Regarding this question, however, we need to keep in mind that the fact that a Vedic noun like this is polysemous necessarily entails that it has different referents in different contexts and that this noun *gárbha-* must consequently be translated by use of different English nouns. In effect, the PS reading *te* ‘they’ does not make more sense in the context than ŚS *tám* (pace Zehnder et al.). Finally, the presence of *kumārā-* m. ‘ever-youthful man, eternal child’, which is an epithet of Agni, conforms to my hypothesis that the Agni, the embryo, and his descendants, Agni’s flames, are likewise born out of the uterus here.

8. Conclusions

For my interpretation of this hymn, not a single change, emendation or conjecture, of the text against the joint evidence of all traditions is needed. We can finally let the texts stand as they are actually attested. Taking both *nārī* and *ṛtāprajātā* as subject to *sisratām* in juxtaposition goes without any grammatical problems. It immediately solves the given problems and leads to a final understanding of what is poetically described and ritually done during the recitation of this hymn. We can more generally conclude that, when translating the Atharvavedic hymns, we need to always keep an eye on Vedic lexical polysemy and complex interwoven practical and ritualistic metaphorical levels and

¹⁹ “18. Let the baby come here unharmed, alive out of a living one (the mother). 19. O afterbirth, descend. You are neither flesh nor [part of the] abdomen. O thick one, descend. You are not attached in flesh, not in tendons, and not in marrow. 20. Let the speckled, slimy afterbirth come out, so that a dog may eat it.” (Zehnder et al. 2024).

what might be termed “multi-level associations” because – as shown – the Vedic poets were masterminds in this respect.

References

- BHATTACHARYA, Dipak (1997, 2008, 2011, 2016), *The Paippalāda-Saṃhitā of the Atharvaveda*, Vols. I–IV, Asiatic Society, Calcutta.
- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice (1897), *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda. Together with Extracts from the Ritual Books and the Commentaries* (Sacred Books of the East, 42), Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- CALAND, Willem (1900), *Altindisches Zauberritual. Probe einer Uebersetzung der wichtigsten Theile der Kauśika Sūtra*, Verhandelingen der koninkliken Akademie van Wetenschappen, Amsterdam.
- ELIZARENKOVA, Tat'jana Yakovlevna (2005), *Атхарваведа (Шаунака), Том 1. Книгу I–VII 1* (Pamjatniki Pis'mennosti Vostoka 135, 1), Moskva: Vostočnaja literatura.
- GELDNER, Karl Friedrich (1951), *Der Rig-Veda, aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt*, 3 Vols., Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Reprint 2003).
- GRASSMANN, Hermann (1873), *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda. 6., überarbeitete und ergänzte Auflage (bearbeitet) von Maria Kozianka, Harassowitz, Wiesbaden.*
- GRETIL Kauś ed. = Kauśikasūtra. Fifth Edition August 2009. Data entry by Arlo Griffith. Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL), SUB Göttingen. <https://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_kauzikasUtra.htm>.
- GRIFFITHS, Arlo (2009), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda, Kāṇḍas 6 and 7. A New Edition with Translation and Commentary*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen.
- GRIFFITHS, Arlo, and Alexander M. LUBOTSKY (2000–2001), *Paippalāda Samhitā 4.15. To heal an open fracture: with a plant*, in “Die Sprache”, 42, 1–2, pp. 196–210.
- GRIFFITH, Ralph Thomas Hotchkin (1895), *The Hymns of the Atharva-Veda. Translated with a Popular Commentary*, Lazarus. London.
- HETTRICH, Heinrich (2007), *Materialien zu einer Kasussyntax des Ṛgveda*. Würzburg (PDF ms.). <<https://www.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/fileadmin/04080400/Materialien.pdf>>.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (transl.) (2014), *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, 3 Vols., Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York.
- KIM, Jeong-Soo Kim (2021), *Atharvavedasamhitā der Śaunaka-śākhā. Eine neue Edition unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Parallelstellen der Paippalādasamhitā*. Würzburg (PDF ms.). <https://opus.bibliothek.uni-wuerzburg.de/opus4-wuerzburg/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/27703/file/Kim_AVS_Neuedition_2021.pdf>.

- KUBISCH, Philipp (2012), *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā Kāṇḍa 20, Sūkta 1–30. Kritische Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*. Dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn. <<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11811/5241>>.
- LELLI, Duccio (2020), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda: Kāṇḍa Fifteen. Text, Translation, Commentary* (Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora 13), Gorgias Press, Piscataway.
- LIV = RIX, Helmut, KÜMMEL, Martin, Zehnder, THOMAS, LIPP, Reiner, and Brigitte SCHIRMER (2001), *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben. Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstammbildungen. Zweite, erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage*, Reichert, Wiesbaden.
- LUDWIG, Alfred (1878), *Der Rigveda oder die heiligen Hymnen der Brāhmaṇa. Dritter Band: Die Mantralitteratur und das Alte Indien 3*, Tempsky, Prag.
- MAYRHOFER, Manfred (1992, 1996, 2001), EWAia I, II, III [=Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen, Vols. I–III], Carl Winter, Heidelberg.
- OBERLIES, Thomas (2012), *Der Rigveda und seine Religion*, Verlag der Weltreligionen, Berlin.
- ORLANDI, Chatia (1991), *Gli inni dell’Atharvaveda (Śaunaka)*, Giardini Edizioni, Pisa.
- POOTH, Roland A. (2012), *Zum Aufkommen transitiver Verben in frühen Vedischen am Beispiel ṛ̥*, in *The Indo-European Verb. Proceedings of the Conference of the Society for Indo-European Studies, Los Angeles 13–16 September 2010*, edited by H. Craig Melchert, Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden, pp. 267–284.
- POOTH, Roland A. (2014), *Die Diathesen Aktiv vs. Medium und die Verbsemantik im Vedischen der Ṛgveda-Saṃhitā*, PhD Dissertation, Leiden University. <<https://hdl.handle.net/1887/29343>>.
- [VON] ROTH, Rudolf (1856), *Der Atharva Veda*, in *Einladung zur akademischen Feier des Geburtsfestes Seiner Majestät des Königs Wilhelm von Württemberg*, L. Fr. Fues, Tübingen.
- [VON] ROTH, Rudolf, and William Dwight WHITNEY (1856), *Atharva Veda Saṃhitā*, Berlin. Online-Edition: <http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/1_veda/1_sam/avs_acu.htm>, Input by Vladimir Petr and Petr Vavrousek. TITUS redaction by Jost Gippert (31 January 1997). Text of Books 11–20 improved by Arlo Griffiths, Leiden 18 May 2000 and Philipp Kubisch, Bonn 13 March 2007. Revised by Arlo Griffiths, August 2009.
- SCHEFTELOWITZ, Isidor (1906), *Die Apokryphen des Ṛgveda*, Marcus, Breslau.
- VAN NOOTEN, Barend A., and Gary B. HOLLAND (1994), *Rig-Veda: A Metrically Restored Text*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- WEBER, Albrecht (1858), *Erstes Buch des Atharvaveda*, in “Indische Studien”, 4, pp. 393–430.

- WHITNEY, William Dwight, and Charles Rockwell LANMAN (1905), *Atharva-Veda Samhitā. Translated with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, Vols. I–II, Harvard. University, Cambridge.
- ZEHNDER, Thomas, et al. [HELLWIG, Oliver, LEACH, Robert, PLAMADA, Magdalen, MALINAR, Angelika, and Paul WIDMER] (2024), *Atharvaveda Paippalada Zurich Edition Book 1* (Version 1.0.0) [Data set]. Language Repository of Switzerland. <<https://doi.org/10.48656/as99-n988>> [Last accessed on 14.06.2025].

11. The Atharvans and Aṅgirasas as *puróhitas*, founders of the *agnihotra*, and the *vrātya* culture*

Paola M. Rossi

Abstract

The Atharvavedic collection has traditionally been attributed to priests known as Atharvans and Aṅgirasas, figures whose identity belongs to a mythical past. They are associated with the Vala myth, especially the Aṅgirasas, who act as singers supporting Indra-Bṛhaspati, together with the Maruts, in the liberation of the cows-Dawns from the cave of the Vala demon. This myth underlies Kuru sovereignty and the hegemony that promoted the canonization of the R̥gvedic collection, the ecumenical reform of ritual preluding the *śrauta* system, and the redaction of an archetype of what would become the *Paippalāda* and *Śaunakīya* recensions.

A single R̥gvedic hymn from the earlier textual layer (RV 1.83), attributable to the Kuru period, mentions both a single Atharvan and the Aṅgirasas (sts. 4–5) as mythical founders of what would later be formalized as the *agnihotra* rite. In this context, the rising sun Sūrya is invoked with the epithet *vená-* ‘tracker’, a term associated with the *vrātya* milieu, traces of which are preserved in the Atharvavedic tradition and which also contributed to the legitimation of Kuru sovereignty.

This paper therefore examines the relationship between the Atharvan and Aṅgiras figures as mythical ‘authors’ of the Atharvavedic corpus, the debated origins of the *agnihotra* rite, and the *vrātya* context.

Keywords

Atharvan, Aṅgiras, Kuru, *agnihotra*, *vrātya*.

* As far as the Vedic texts are concerned, unless otherwise stated, the translation is mine.

As is well known, the Atharvavedic collection is attributed to priests called Atharvans and Aṅgirasas whose identity has been lost in a mythical past. However, the Aṅgirasas in particular are correlated to the famous Vala-myth, in which they play an important role as the singers who, together with the Maruts, support Indra-Bṛhaspati in freeing the cows-Dawns from the cave of the Vala demon. This is the myth on which the very Kuru sovereignty is based, the hegemony that promoted the so-called ‘canonization’ of the Ṛgvedic collection, the ‘ecumenical’ reform of the ritual that preluded the *śrauta* reform, and the redaction of a sort of archetype of what would become the *Paippalāda* and the *Śaunakiya* recensions. In actual fact, the Atharvavedic textual material is considered the main source of that peculiar science which pertains to the figure of the *puróhita* as ‘royal chaplain’: this figure was established when the role of ruler came to be separated from the priestly one, that is during the Kuru hegemony. However, neither the Aṅgirasas nor the Atharvans are explicitly correlated to the *puróhita*. With the development of the *śrauta* reform, the role of the Aṅgirasas seems to be that of fire priests. As for the Atharvans, they are mostly mentioned as individual figures: their role is related to the lighting of fire and to a mysterious “chief of sacrifice”, which recalls the *pravargya* ritual. A single Ṛgvedic hymn from the earlier textual layer (1.83) that is relatable to the same Kuru period, mentions both a single Atharvan and the Aṅgirasas (stanzas 4–5) as mythical founders of what will be formalized as the *agnihotra* rite in the Brahmanical *śrauta* reform. On this occasion, the rising sun Sūrya is evoked with the epithet *vená-*, or ‘tracker’, which usually refers to the so-called *vrātya*-culture, of which, on the one hand, the Atharvavedic collection itself preserves traces, and on which, on the other, the same Kuru hegemony founded the recognition and legitimization of its power.

As is well known, the Atharvavedic collection is traditionally attributed to priestly categories called Atharvans and Aṅgirasas (*atharvāṅgirás-*): the *dvandva* compound *atharvāṅgirás-* is rarely mentioned in the oldest Vedic textual sources, while it later came to denote the *saṃhitā* of the fourth science (*vidyā*)¹. In actual fact, the Atharvavedic textual collections were accepted by Brahmanical ritualistic science as the ‘fourth *veda*’ presumably between the 4th and 2nd centuries BCE.

¹ Cf. e.g., passages in ŚBM 11.5.6.7; 14.5.4.10; GB 1.1.24; 1.1.29.

The famous late Ṛgvedic *púruṣa* hymn 10.90, which turns the sacrifice into a cosmic sacrificial rite, only mentions (cf. st. 4), the three sapiential textual categories (*ṛc*- ‘stanza’, *sāman*- ‘melody’, *yájus*- ‘liturgical formula’), which belong to the ‘threefold wisdom’ (*trayī vidyā*), and no reference is made to a fourth category. In the very Atharvavedic recensions, only a couple of occurrences of *atharvāṅgiráś-* are attested and these appear in speculative hymns, congruent with the ritualistic concept of the cosmicization of the sacrifice. The first of these is found in ŚS 10.7, a *brahmodya* hymn devoted to the *skambhá* ‘pillar’ or cosmic hypostasis, which resembles the Ṛgvedic *púruṣa*, by means of which the micro-, the meso- and the macro- cosmos reciprocally intertwine. The second occurrence is mentioned in PS 16.84, which is similarly devoted to a ritual element conceived of as the cosmic foundation, that is *úcchiṣṭa*, the ‘remnant of oblation’.

ŚS 10.7.20

yásmād ṛco apātakṣan
yájur yásmād apākaṣan |
sāmāni yásya lómāny
atharvāṅgiráso múkhaṃ
skambháṃ táṃ brūhi katamāḥ svid evā sáh ||

From whom they fashioned off the stanzas, from whom they scraped off the liturgical formula, of whom the melodies [are] the hairs, the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas the mouth — that Skambha tell [me]: which forsooth is he? (Whitney 1905, p. 592, slightly modified)

PS 16.84.6–7

ṛcaḥ sāmāni chandāṃsi
purāṇaṃ yajuṣā saha |
ucchiṣṭāj jajñire sarve
divi devā diviśritaḥ || 6 ||
atharvāṅgirasas brahma
sarpapunyajanās ca ye |²
ucchiṣṭāj jajñire sarve
divi devā diviśritaḥ || 7 ||

² A similar list also appears in TB 3.12.8.1–2: *ṛco yájūṃṣi sāmāni* | *atharvāṅgiráśas ca yé* | *sārvās tāḥ* || *itihāsapurāṇāṃ ca* | *sarpadevajanās ca yé* | *sārvās tāḥ* || ‘The stanzas, the liturgical formulas, the melodies, and all those who are the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas; epic and ancient stories, and all those who are snake beings and divine beings.’

The stanzas, the melodies, the meters, the ancient stories, with the liturgical formula, were born from the remnant of oblation, all the gods, who abide in heaven, [were born] in heaven [from the remnant of oblation].

The Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas, the sacred formulation, and [those] who are snake beings and pious beings were born from the remnant of oblation, all the gods, who abide in heaven, [were born] in heaven [from the remnant of oblation].

It is worth noticing that in the former attestation the compound *atharvāṅgirás-* is correlated with *múkha-* that is the ‘mouth’ of the cosmic pillar, just as the *brāhmaṇá-* or priestly category is identified with the mouth of the *púruṣa* sacrificial body in RV 10.90.12³. In actual fact, the *Śaunakīya* collection probably underwent such a deep process of ‘brahmanisation’ that the Atharvavedic textual material was definitely subordinated to the *śrauta* priestly authority.

On the other hand, the latter occurrence of *atharvāṅgirás-*, mentioned in PS 16.84.6–7, is part of a list of textual categories referring to different forms of *vidyās*, in compliance with phraseology attested in later Vedic texts (e.g., ŚBM 13.4.3.1–14; ChU 3.4.1–2; 7.1.2; etc.)⁴. The same passage mentions peculiar semi-divine beings, as indicated by the compounds *sarpapunyajaná-* ‘snake beings and pious beings’ in PS, and *sarpadevajaná-* ‘snake beings and divine beings’⁵ in TB. While the compound *punya-janá-* can be interpreted in the light of late Brahmanism as indicating “one who has lived a meritorious life in this world with sacrificing, liberality, asceticism and good deed” (Bodewitz 2013, p. 36), the compound *sarpa-jana-*, referring to ‘snake-beings’, seems to hint at that intermediate sphere between *śrauta* ritualism and ritual practices, whose statutes are not fully in accordance with the official ones.

Furthermore, the same terminology appears in similar Atharvavedic lists (e.g., PS 9.26.5ab, PS 10.5.2a, PS 15.4.9b), especially in PS

³ RV 10.90.12: *brāhmaṇò 'sya múkham āsīd | bāhú rājanyāḥ krtāḥ | ūrú tād asya yád vaiśyaḥ | padbhyāṇi sūdró ajāyata ||* “The brahmin was his mouth. The ruler was made his two arms. As to his thighs – that is what the freeman was. From his two feet the servant was born.” (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1540).

⁴ As regards this kind of list of textual categories referring to *vidyās*, cf. Spiers 2025, pp. 257–259.

⁵ As regards the interpretation of these compounds, cf. Bodewitz 1973, p. 97, n. 23; 2013, p. 53.

16.30.5ab = ŚS 8.8.15ab, where the compound *gandharvāpsarás-* is used in place of *atharvāṅgirás-*⁶, and the forefathers are also mentioned:

gandharvāpsarásah śarpān
devān puṇyajanaṁ pitṛṇ |
dr̥ṣṭān adr̥ṣṭān iṣṇāmi
yáthā sēnām amūṁ hānan ||15||

I propel forward Gandharvas and Apsarases, snakes [and] gods, pious beings [and] the forefathers, those who are seen [and] those who are unseen, so that they may slay that army.

Thus, the Atharvans and Aṅgirasas as expressed by the compound *atharvāṅgirás-* seem to be associated with liminal beings, auspicious protectors for their supporters, but terrible foes for their enemies and, especially as regards the *Paippalāda* recension, this sphere is their *vidyā*⁷.

Therefore, on the one hand, the quotation of the compound *atharvāṅgirás-* refers to the Brahmanical process of integration into the *śrauta* system while, on the other, it is associated with sapiential spheres other than the official hieratic one. From a synchronic perspective, this can attest to a textual stage more permeable to a cultural context that is ‘other’ than the official one, and diastatically parallel to it, even though diachronically speaking it could be a token of the pre-*śrauta* culture.

In actual fact, according to Witzel (1997a, pp. 278–280), the *Paippalāda* recension in particular may preserve traces of a proto-Atharvavedic collection, dating back at least to the Kuru period and especially reflecting cultural changes promoted by the Kuru hegemony⁸, in relation to the model of kingship. In fact, it is by the time of the Kuru period that proto-Vedic chieftainship, characterized by the double role of ruler and priest, like the famous mythical case of Indra-Bṛhaspati, came to be considered as supra-tribal sovereignty. The role of ruler came to be separated from the priestly one and attributed to a single supreme and cosmic lord, and the figure of the *puróhita* as ‘royal

⁶ In the same hymn the Aṅgirasas themselves are mentioned in ŚS 8.8.13d ~ PS 16.30.3d: *mādhyena ghnānto yantu | sēnām āṅgirasā mahīm ||* ‘Let the Aṅgirasas go, slaying the great army in the middle.’

⁷ As for a correlation between manifold *vidyās* and these categories of semi-divine beings (snakes, Gandharvas and Apsarases, *puṇyajana-*, etc.), cf. namely Spiers 2025, p. 257.

⁸ Cf. Witzel 1997b.

chaplain' or 'domestic priest of the sovereign' was established, with Br̥haspati himself becoming the prototype of the *puróhita* 'royal chaplain'. In actual fact, in the proto-Vedic phase the term *puróhita* lit. 'one who is placed in front' (*purás-* √*dhā-* "to place in front") referred both to Indra, as warrior leader, and to Agni, the leader in the sacrifice, inasmuch as he is the first one to proceed towards the gods⁹. Brereton's survey (2018, pp. 33–34) has demonstrated that in the earlier Ṛgvedic hymns the term *puróhita* can correspond to the double function of ruler and priest implied by the proto-Vedic chieftainship and personified by the mythical figure of Indra-Br̥haspati, where Br̥haspati as 'Lord of formulation' is an epithet for Indra. When the Kuru hegemony came into existence, the term *puróhita* progressively came to indicate the person responsible for ensuring and protecting royal authority, by means of specific ritual practices, and this ritual science was relied on a textual heritage, transmitted through the proto-Atharvavedic collection. This is the sense in which Lubotsky claims that the "PS is more 'royal-oriented' than the ŚS" (2025, p. 73). In actual fact, in a few Atharvavedic passages especially in the PS, the term *puróhita* denotes the figure of one who ensures the king's victory: in ŚS 3.19.1cd ~ PS 3.19.1cd and ŚS 3.19.4cd = PS 3.19.3cd the term *puróhita* is used in an evident military and royal context:

sámśītaṃ kṣatráṃ ajáram astu jiṣṇúr
yéśāṃ ásmi puróhitaḥ ||

sharpened be the domain, ageless and victorious [for those] of whom I
am the chaplain

índrasya vájráṭ tīkṣṇīyāṃsaḥ
yéśāṃ ásmi puróhitaḥ ||

sharper than Indra's mace, are those of whom I am the chaplain.

And Br̥haspati is declared the *puróhita*-chaplain of the gods (*devānāṃ purohitaḥ*)¹⁰ but, especially in PS 10.4.6d (*purohitena vo rāṣṭraṃ prathayantu devāḥ* 'May the gods expand your dominion through the chaplain') and in PS 4.27.2abcd, he is the priest who supports the ruler:

⁹ As to the meaning of *puróhita*- in the Ṛgvedic collection, cf. Brereton 2018.

¹⁰ E.g., in ŚS 3.19.1cd ~ PS 3.19.1cd, PS 3.9.5 and PS 9.12.10.

*purohitaḥ parameṣṭhī
svaraṅjyāya abhīvardham
asmā akr̥ṇod bṛhaspatiḥ |
tena sapatnān adharān kṛṇuṣva ||*

Bṛhaspati, the supreme chaplain, made a surpassing [libation?] for this [man] here in order that he gains his own dominion. With that, subdue your rivals! (Zehnder, Hellwig, Leach 2024)

On the other hand, the roles of Indra, Bṛhaspati and *puróhita* are still interchangeable in PS 19.42.5¹¹:

*sa na indra purohito
viśvatas pāhi rakṣasaḥ |
abhi gāvo anūṣata
abhi dyumnaṃ bṛhaspate ||*

O Indra, you who are placed in front of us, protect [us] from the demon, from each side; bellow toward the cows, toward the heavenly brilliance, o Bṛhaspati.

Likewise, in RV 8.101.12 = ŚS 20.58.4 Sūrya himself, given his greatness, is called the *puróhita* of the gods, that is the lord of the gods; the reference to his lordly pre-eminence (*asuryā-*) suggests that the sun and the supreme leader are identified with each other which is consistent with the Kuru model of sovereignty.

*bāt sūrya śrávasā mahāñ asi
satrá deva mahāñ asi |
mahná devānām asuryāḥ puróhito
vibhú jyótir ádābhyam ||*

Yes indeed! Sūrya, you are great in fame; in every way, o god, you are great. Because of his greatness the lordly one was set in front for the gods, as the extensive undeceivable light. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1212)

Sanderson (2007, pp. 204–208) highlights that the ideal *puróhita* must be an Atharvavedin brahmin or one who is competent in the Atharvavedic practices; however, the Atharvavedic textual material is traditionally attributed to the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas, which would

¹¹ Similarly, in ŚS 7.8.1b = PS 4.10.1b Bṛhaspati is defined *puraetf-* ‘leader’ from *puraḥ-etf-* ‘one who goes in front’.

mean that, in some way, the status of *puróhita* implies a connection with *átharvan-* and *āṅgiras-*, whoever and whatever these terms may indicate, before and after the Kuru reform. In fact, in the Atharvavedic texts the term *puróhita* is not explicitly correlated to the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas: only in ŚS 10.1.6 = PS 16.35.6 is it declared that the descendant of the Aṅgirasas is placed in front as *puróhita*, as protector from the makers of malicious contrivances.

*praticīna āṅgirasáh
adhyakṣo naḥ puróhitaḥ |
praticīḥ krtyā ākṛtyā
amún krtyākṛto jahi ||*

The descendent of the Aṅgirasas facing [us], placed in front, is our overseer: having made the malicious contrivances turn their backs, slay those makers of malicious contrivances.

Finally, except for the two occurrences of the previously analyzed *dvandva* compound *atharvāṅgiráśas* ‘the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas’, both the Ṛgvedic collection and the Atharvavedic collections mention the terms *átharvan-* and *āṅgiras-* as two separate nouns – even though they frequently appear in the same hymns – both in the singular and plural forms: *átharvan-* is quoted 12x in the Ṛgvedic collection – mainly in the singular (9x sg. vs. 3x pl.) –, 17x in PS (8x sg.; 9x pl.), and 18x in ŚS (12x sg.; 6x pl.), whereas *āṅgiras-* is found 69x in ṚV – mainly in the plural form (23x sg. vs. 46x pl.) –, 49x in PS (3x sg.; 46x pl.), and 41x in ŚS (5x sg.; 36x pl.). Such a textual distribution highlights the clear discrepancy between the term *āṅgiras-*, used predominantly as a plural, especially in the Atharvavedic recensions, and the term *átharvan-*, preferentially in the singular, used especially in the Ṛgvedic and Śaunakīya collections.

Taking into account these premises, the purpose of the article is to explore which cultural role can be attributed to figures defined as *átharvan* and *āṅgiras* in the light of the historical development of the Kuru *puróhita* function.

1. Aṅgirasas and *āṅgiras-*

According to Schmidt (1968, pp. 36ff., namely p. 51) the term *āṅgiras-* denotes an old priestly title, which only later was identified with the eponym of a priestly lineage, which was well represented both by the

plural form, the *āṅgirasas*, and the derivative *āṅgirasá-* ‘descendant of *Āṅgiras*’¹². However, in both the earlier and the later textual stages of the Ṛgvedic collection, the plural form of *āṅgiras* is predominant (46x pl. vs. 23x sg.). Moreover, the textual survey indicates that the plural form almost exclusively denotes the mythical poetic-priestly group associated with Bṛhaspati ‘Lord of formulation’, who, in turn, as an epithet for Indra, represents the poetic-priestly Indraic counterpart of chieftainship, that is the ‘poetic-priestly’ role of ‘formulating’ magically sounding expressions¹³. In this mythical context the Ṛgvedic Aṅgirasas are correlated to the famous Vala myth: the sun/Dawns/cows, hidden in a cave by the Vala demon, are discovered and released by Indra together with his Marut comrades, and supported by Bṛhaspati, accompanied by the Aṅgirasas. Indra himself is defined as *āṅgiras-vat-* ‘one who is accompanied by the Aṅgirasas’ in a couple of Ṛgvedic verses¹⁴; in particular, he is accompanied by the songs of the Aṅgirasas:

ṚV 2.15.8ab

*bhinád valám āṅgirobhir grṇānó
vī párvatasya dṛṇhitāny airat |*

Being sung by the Aṅgirasas, he split the cave. He broke apart the fortifications of the mountain (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 422).

ṚV 3.30.10cd

*sugān pathó akr̥ṇon niráje gāh
prāvan vāñīḥ puruhūtāṃ dhāmantiḥ ||*

[Indra] made the paths easy to travel, to drive out the cows. The choir (vāñī-) [of Aṅgirasas]¹⁵ aided the much-invoked one, breathing out. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 506, slightly modified).

¹² Spiers (2020, p. 56) prefers to consider the term *āṅgiras-* as an eponym of a priestly family, especially in comparison with the term *ātharvan-* interpreted as a mere priestly appellative.

¹³ As regards the etymological reconstruction of *bṛhaspáti-*, cf. Pinault 2016: the correlated term *brāhman-* is ascribable to PIE **bhréǵh-* ‘to formulate’ implying the special power of interacting magically with reality.

¹⁴ ṚV 2.11.20d: *bhinád valám índro āṅgirasvān ||* “Together with the Aṅgirasas, Indra split the Vala cave” (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 415); similarly, in ṚV 6.17.6d: *úd ūrvád gá asṛjo āṅgirasvān ||* “Accompanied by the Aṅgirasas, you sent the cows surging up from the enclosure” (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 795).

¹⁵ This is Schmidt’s interpretation (1968, p. 141).

ṚV 4.50.5

*sá suṣṭúbhā sá řkvatā gaṇéna
valám ruroja phaliḡám ráveṇa |
břhaspátir usríyā havyasúdaḡ
kánikradad vávaśatír úd ājat ||*

He with his flock possessing good rhythm (*suṣṭúbh-*), the flock possessing chant (*řkvat-*) — he broke Vala, broke its bolt with his roar (*ráva-*). Břhaspati drove up the ruddy [cows] who sweeten the oblation, who kept lowing as he was bellowing. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 634)

ṚV 1.62.5ab

*grṇānó āṅgirobhir dasma ví var
uśásā sūryeṇa góbhir āndhaḡ |*

Being sung by the Aṅgirasas, o wondrous one, you uncovered the blinding darkness along with the dawn, with the sun, with the cows. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 182)

In actual fact, the Ṛgvedic verses underline the fact that the Aṅgirasas together with their lord Břhaspati can split the Vala's cave by means of a peculiar "weapon", namely their voice, modulated in the form of natural and animal sounds, of vibrating chants and songs. For example, in ṚV 6.65.5c '(the Aṅgirasas) have split [mountains] apart with their chant (*arká-*) and sacred formulation (*bráhmaṇ-*)'¹⁶; similarly, in ṚV 6.11.3cd the relationship between the Aṅgirasas and their vocal skills is indicated¹⁷:

*vépiṣṭho āṅgirasām yád dha vípro
mádhu chandó bhánati rebhá iṣṭáu ||*

When the most inspired of the Aṅgirasas, the inspired poet (*vípra-*) rhythmically speaks his honey, hoarse-voiced (*rebhá-*) in his quest. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 785)

The distribution of the references to the Aṅgirasas in relation to Indra-Břhaspati's deed throughout all the Ṛgvedic textual layers testifies to the fact that the mythical role of the Aṅgirasas is well aligned with the textual revision and the consequent Ṛgvedic 'canonization' car-

¹⁶ ṚV 6.65.5c: *vy ārkéṇa bibhidur bráhmaṇā ca* | Translations after Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 864.

¹⁷ As to the interpretation of these verses, cf. Jamison's Translation Commentary at: <<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/VI.1%E2%80%932-1-26.pdf>>.

ried out in the Kuru phase. Moreover, the later Ṛgvedic textual layers which are directly correlated with the Kuru hegemony give much emphasis to the motif of an ‘acoustic’ function attributed to the Aṅgirasas: for example, in ṚV 10.67.3 while Bṛhaspati’s comrades are ‘constantly gabbling like geese’ (*haṃsá- iva vāvadad-*)¹⁸, Bṛhaspati himself raises praises and songs:

*haṃsáir iva sákhibhir vāvadadbhir
aśmanmáyāni náhanā vyáśyan |
bṛhaspátir abhikánikradad gāḥ
utá prástaud úc ca vidvāṃ agāyat ||*

Along with his comrades, who were constantly gabbling like geese, while he was throwing open the fastenings made of stone, while he kept roaring to the cows, Bṛhaspati both started the praise song (*pra-√stu-*) and struck up the melody (*√gā(y)-*), as knowing one. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1489)

Here, Bṛhaspati appears to be the mythical counterpart of the priest singer-*udgātṛ-*, who later on in the classical *śrauta* ritual would become responsible for singing the melodies (*sāman-*). On the other hand, the Aṅgirasas are also correlated with the *sāmans* in the later Ṛgvedic sections: for example, in ṚV 10.78.5d the Maruts are said to display all forms ‘like the Aṅgirasas through their *sāmans*’ (*āṅgirasō ná sāmabhiḥ*), and especially in ṚV 1.107.2ab it is declared that the melodies-*sāmans* pertain to the Aṅgirasas:

*úpa no devā ávasā gamantu
āṅgirasāṃ sāmabhi stūyámānāḥ |*

Let the gods come close to us here with help, being praised with the melodies of the Aṅgirasas. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 254)

In these verses, the act of praising through melodies-*sāmans* is expressed by the same root *√stu-* ‘to praise’ which, as mentioned above, is also attributed to Bṛhaspati. The technical term *stótra-*, which denotes the section of *sāmans* sung by the priest singer-*udgātṛ* in the *śrauta* ritu-

¹⁸ A similar image, but more elaborated, is found in ṚV 10.68.1: *udapṛúto ná váyo rákṣamānāḥ | vāvadato abhṛíyasyeva ghóṣāḥ | giribhrájo nórmaýo mádanto | bṛhaspátim abhy árkā anāvan ||* “Constantly gabbling like water birds watching out for each other, like the sounds of booming (thunder) emanating from a cloud, exulting like waves stiff-peaked (like) mountains, the chants (*árka-*) bellowed toward Bṛhaspati.” (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1491).

al, derives from this root. Therefore, as Insler also suggests (1998, p. 17), the Aṅgirasas may represent the sapiential repertoire based on the performative power of the voice, that of the singer-*udgātā* who was well integrated into the *śrauta* reform. In this sense in ṚV 10.68.2a Bṛhaspati himself is called Āṅgīrasa, ‘descendant of *Āṅgīras*’, thus confirming what is declared in ṚV 3.31.7d, in the Vala-myth context: ‘Then he (Indra-Bṛhaspati) became [an] Aṅgīras immediately upon singing’¹⁹.

It is worth noticing that the Atharvavedic recensions contain an important hymn devoted to Vācaspati the ‘Lord of Speech’, but also the ‘Lord of Voice’, ŚS 1.1, that is the first hymn of the *Śaunakīya* collection, and PS 1.6 respectively. Its eminent position in the *Śaunakīya* recension indicates the higher degree of Brahmanical integration of the ŚS; in fact, in the ritualistic tradition Bṛhaspati is also known as *vācāspāti*-²⁰. Moreover, the very Aṅgirasas themselves may be alluded to by the opening expression ‘thrice seven’ (*triṣaptā*-)²¹ in ŚS 1.1.1a; Bṛhaspati himself could be their *puróhita*, that is the leader of the singer-priests.

Therefore, the term *āṅgīras*- appears to mostly denote a mythical figure: by the time of the Kuru liturgical reform, this figure had taken on the important priestly role of poet-singer, just like the assistants of the mythical Bṛhaspati, the *puróhita par excellence*. Outside the mythical context, the profile of the figure called *āṅgīras*-, especially when the term is mentioned in the plural form, fluctuates between that of members of a poetic lineage²² and semi-divine propitious beings, worthy of worship and correlated to the ritual context. This emerges once again in the very recent R̥gvedic books and especially in the Atharvavedic recensions, that is in correspondence to the Kuru hegemony. For example, in a hymn against their enemies, the Aṅgirasas are invited to destroy the enemy’s army in ŚS 8.8.13d ~ PS 16.30.3d, while in ŚS 2.12.4–5 = PS 2.5.4–5 they protect people from evil (*pāpā*), together

¹⁹ ṚV 3.31.7d: *āthābhavad āṅgīrāḥ sadyó ārcan* | Translations after Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 509. On the other hand, in ṚV 7.42.1a the Aṅgirasas themselves are *brahmān*-, that is gifted with the ‘sacred formulation’ (*brāhmaṇ*-).

²⁰ Cf. the commentary by the scholars of the Zurich Project: Thomas Zehnder, Oliver Hellwig, Robert Leach at: <<https://www.atharvaveda-online.uzh.ch/edition/01/006/01>>.

²¹ Cf. Whitaker 2016, namely p. 694.

²² E.g., in PS 11.2.6 the Aṅgirasas are evoked together with poetic lineages such as the Atris and the Gotamas.

with all the gods, the Vasus, the Ādityas and the forefathers²³. They are frequently associated with the plural form of the term *átharvan-*, either in the same stanza or just in the same hymn. For example, in the funeral hymn RV 10.14 the Aṅgirasas are mentioned in stanza 6 together with the forefathers and mythical priestly groups, such as the Bhṛgus and also the Atharvans:

*āṅgirasō naḥ pitāro nāvagvāḥ
átharvāṇo bhṛgavaḥ somyāśaḥ |
tēṣāṃ vayāṃ sumataū yajñīyānām
āpi bhadré saumanasē syāma ||*

The Aṅgirasas, our forefathers, the Navagvas, the Atharvaṇas, the Bhṛgus deserving of soma – may we be in the favor of these who are deserving of the sacrifice; may we be also in their propitious benevolence. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1392)²⁴

This stanza is also found in the Atharvavedic funeral hymns ŚS 18.1.58 and in PS 18.63.1, but even in the mantric Yajurvedic collection (e.g., TS 2.6.12.6; VS 19.50), thus confirming the process of Brahmanization applied to the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas, who have become ‘worthy of sacrifice’ or ‘worthy of worship’ (*yajñīya-*). Moreover, three other stanzas in the same hymns mention the Aṅgirasas: Yama, the king, is strengthened by the Aṅgirasas (RV 10.14.3 = ŚS 18.1.47 = PS 18.61.7); the Aṅgirasas are identified with the forefathers (RV 10.14.4 = ŚS 18.1.60 = PS 18.63.3); the Aṅgirasas, worthy of sacrifice (*yajñīya-*), accompany the deceased (RV 10.14.5 = ŚS 18.1.59 = PS 18.63.2) along the way of the forefathers; finally, only in ŚS 18.1.61d is it said that ‘the Aṅgirasas went by the path to heaven’ (*pathā dyām āṅgirasō yayúḥ*).

Furthermore, in ŚS 11.6.13 = PS 15.14.6 the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas are also mentioned as plural nouns on a list of divine and semi divine beings: the former are defined *deva-* ‘divine’ and the latter *manīśin-* ‘wise’:

*ādityā rudrá vāsavo
divi devā átharvāṇaḥ |*

²³ Similarly, in PS 12.11.1 the Aṅgirasas are evoked together with the Ādityas, as if they were deities.

²⁴ Spiers (2020, pp. 56–57) proposes another interpretation: *pitāraḥ* ‘forefathers’, *átharvāṇaḥ* ‘atharvans’ and *somyāśaḥ* ‘worthy of somic oblations’ are appellatives of the Aṅgirasas, the Navagvas and the Bhṛgus respectively.

*āṅgirasō manīṣiṇas tē
no muñcantō āṇhasaḥ ||*

The Ādityas, the Rudras, the Vasus, the divine Atharvans in heaven, the wise Aṅgirasas, let them free us from oppression. (Lelli 2020, p. 166)

Finally, in ŚS 3.21.8cd = PS 3.12.8cd *āṅgirasah* are the priests who call upon the gods using their vocal skills, but the form *āṅgirasah* can even be interpreted as an accusative, like *devān*. The verse *vīśvān devān āṅgirasō havāmahe | imāṇ kravyādaṇ śamayantō agnīm ||8||* can either be translated as ‘We as Aṅgirasas, call upon all the gods: let them appease the flesh-eating fire here’, or as ‘We call upon all the gods, the Aṅgirasas: let them appease the flesh-eating fire here’. In this case, while the former interpretation considers the Aṅgirasas as those who are committed to inviting the gods to the ritual fire, by means of their singing and vocal skills, the latter correlates the divine Aṅgirasas with the ritual fire. Such an ambiguity regarding their ritual role, between voice and fire, is also present in PS 16.140: in particular, an equivalence involving the plural form *āṅgirasah* is proposed in stanza 2, that focuses on the ritual cow; there are no exact textual correspondences to the Śaunakīya version:

PS 16.140.2ab
*chandāṃsi rūpam āṅgirasah santāpāḥ
brahma padavāyaṇ brāhmaṇo 'dhipatiḥ |*

The meters are [her] shape, the *āṅgirasas* are the burning ones the sacred formulation is [her] guide, Brahmin is [her] over-lord.

In this chain of meso- and micro-cosmic equivalences the fire’s flame-*santāpa-* (lit. ‘the burning one’) corresponds to the plural of *āṅgiras-*, but also Brahmin and sovereign (*brāhmaṇa-* / *ādhipati-*) are equated to each other; in this sense, the plural of *āṅgiras-* can refer to both the flames of the ritual fire and also to members of the ruler’s entourage, somehow associated with cattle, thus mirroring their mythical role as supporters of Indra-Bṛhaspati²⁵.

²⁵ The motif of the Aṅgirasas and the cow is found in PS 16.136.9 ~ ŚS 10.9.9: *gandharvā apsaraso devi | rudrā āṅgirasas tvā | ete tvā sarve gopṣyanti | sātīrātram agniṣtomam ati drava ||* ‘O heavenly [cow], Gandharvas and Apsarasas, Rudra’s sons and Aṅgirasas [will protect] you, all these ones will protect you: run beyond the over-night soma sacrifice, you in person!’. Also in this case, in the corresponding ŚS 10.9.9 the term *āṅgiras-* is not mentioned: the verse *rudrā āṅgirasas tvā* is missing.

Such an ambiguity between the priestly role of singers invoking the presence of the gods with their voices, and the divine ritual fire appears definitively solved in two Atharvavedic stanzas, ŚS 10.7.18 = PS 17.8.9 and ŚS 10.7.34 = PS 17.10.5, from the *brahmodya* hymn ŚS 10.7 = PS 17.8–10, mentioned above with reference to the compound *atharvāṅgiráś-*, which belongs to the later phases of the Brahmanical revision of the Atharvavedic textual material:

ŚS 10.7.18 = PS 17.8.9

yásya śíro vaiśvānarāḥ
cákṣur aṅgirasó 'bhavan |
āṅgāni yásya yātávaḥ
skambhām tāṃ brūhi katamāḥ svid evá sáḥ ||

Whose Vaiśvānarā was the head, [whose] *aṅgirasas* were the eye, whose sorcerers were the members – that Skambha tell [me]: which forsooth is he?

ŚS 10.7.34 = PS 17.10.5

yásya vātaḥ prāṇāpānau
cákṣur aṅgirasó 'bhavan |
díśo yás cakré prajñānīḥ
tásmāi jyeṣṭhāya bráhmaṇe námaḥ ||

That whose wind was breathing in and breathing out, [whose] the *aṅgirasas* were the eye, who made the heavenly directions his tokens of recognition — to the cosmic principle (*bráhmaṇ*), the pre-eminent one, be homage to that.

In these stanzas the term *aṅgiras-* refers respectively to a ritual context – as *vaiśvānará-* fire ‘belonging to all men’ appears to suggest –, and to a micro-macro-cosmic sphere. The plural *aṅgirasas* must be the counterpart of the ‘eye’ (*cákṣus-*), which is correlated to human sight, and cosmically to the sun. The neuter *bráhmaṇ-* suggests that the me-so-cosmic ‘sacred formulation’ and the mythical Bṛhaspati, ‘Lord of formulation’, are turned into a cosmic principle: the ‘Brahmanization’ process is brought about²⁶.

This association of the term *aṅgiras-* with the fire is also found in an earlier textual stage, but only when it is mentioned in the singular: for example, out of the 23 occurrences of the singular form in the Ṛgvedic

²⁶ *Brahmaveda* is another title of the Atharvavedic collection, as indicated in the late Vedic texts: e.g., in GB 1.3.2.

collection, it is frequently used as an epithet for the fire²⁷. In RV 5.11.6 *āṅgiras*-‘fire’ is said to be found in the wood by the *Āṅgirasas* themselves: the mythological *Āṅgirasas* who find the hidden sun are personified by the priests who ‘find’ the fire in the wood, that is, kindle it.

tvām agne āṅgirasō gúhā hitām
ānv avindañ chiśriyāñām vāne-vane |
sā jāyase mathyāmānaḥ sāho mahāt
tvām āhuḥ sāhasas putrām āṅgiraḥ ||

You, Agni, did the *Āṅgirasas* find, though you were hidden in secret, resting in every piece of wood. Being churned, you are born to great strength. You they call the child of strength, o *Āṅgiras*. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 675)

Similarly, in RV 6.16, a peculiar R̥gvedic hymn which probably results from the textual revision carried out in at least the Kuru phase²⁸, the singular *āṅgiras*- is the fire itself²⁹; in RV 1.31.1 Agni is defined as ‘the first *Āṅgiras*’ (*prathamó āṅgiráḥ*); *āṅgirastama*- ‘the best of the *Āṅgirasas*’ is an epithet for Agni, especially in the R̥gvedic stanzas belonging to the later textual stage (e.g., RV 1.31.2; 1.75.2; 8.23.10; 8.43.18; 8.44.8) and even in RVKh 7.34.5; also, in KS 22.12 Agni is defined as *āṅgiras*-.

Therefore, such a close relationship with the fire appears to be especially emphasized in the textual stage directly correlated to the Kuru period and the mantric texts: the aforementioned, stanza RV 5.11.6 is also mentioned in the later Yajurvedic collections (e.g., MS 2.13.7b: 156.4; KS 39.14b; TS 4.4.4.3b), as well as in RV 6.16.11a (TS 2.5.8.1; 4; VS 3.3a). Moreover, the fire-*āṅgiras*- equivalence is congruent with the folk etymology mentioned in the later ritualistic texts (e.g., in *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*

²⁷ An exception is found in RV 1.139.9a, where the singular *āṅgiras*- is mentioned as the name of an ancient poet, together with other ancient seers, such as Kaṇva and Atri; moreover, stanza 10 of the same hymn mentions Bṛhaspati, defined as seeker-*vená* and thus referring to the Vala-myth, where he seeks and finds the cattle-sun together the *Āṅgirasas*.

²⁸ As to the peculiar structure of the R̥gvedic hymns 6.15 and 6.16, see the introduction to their translation in Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 788; 791. In these same hymns the term *ātharvan*- is also mentioned as one who churns the pieces of wood from which the fire is kindled (RV 6.15.17; 6.16.13).

²⁹ RV 6.16.11: *tām tvā samídbhir āṅgiro | ghrténa vardhayāmasi | bṛhác chocā yaviṣṭhya ||* “You (Agni), *Āṅgiras*, with kindling sticks, with ghee do we strengthen. Blaze aloft, youngest one” (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 792).

5.5.4.8): *āṅgiras-* is related to the term *āṅgāra-* ‘coal’, thus referring to the *āṅgiras*’s priestly role of kindling the fire.

Therefore, by the time of the development of the ritual reform promoted by the Kuru hegemony, the plural form of *āṅgiras-* denotes on the one hand the group of singers-priests who evoke deities, especially Agni, just as the mythical Aṅgirasas evoke the sun-cattle by means of their vocal skills; on the other, the single *āṅgiras* is identified with Agni itself, who, in the earlier Ṛgvedic textual layers, is also defined *puróhita* that is as one who, proceeding in front, is the first to bring oblations to the gods. His role is the same as that of Bṛhaspati, the leader of the Aṅgirasas.

In this perspective, it is worth noticing that another etymological reconstruction is possible, albeit questionable³⁰: *āṅgiras-* can be a derivative of a root *√āṅg-* meaning ‘to sing’, together with the term *āṅgūṣā-* ‘song’, attested throughout the Ṛgvedic books (e.g., RV 1.62.1; 1.117.10; 4.29.1; 5.74.8; 6.34.5; 9.90.2), whereas, in the Atharvavedic collections, only a *hapax āṅgoṣṭhya-* ‘praised in songs’ (Griffiths 2009, p. 50) is found in PS 6.3.12b. For example, in RV 1.62.1b the verse *āṅgūṣām gírvanase aṅgirasvát* ‘[we think up] a song for one who longs for hymns, just as the Aṅgirasas did’, suggests a connection between the term *āṅgūṣā-* ‘song’ and the Aṅgirasas, at least as a play on words, that is, as a poetic device.

According to Bailey (1957), *āṅgiras-* may be a cognate of the Greek ἄγγελος (*ángelos*) ‘messenger’ and Old Persian **angarā* ‘horse courier’, attested in the Greek sources as ἄγγαρος (*ángaros*). In actual fact, the Aṅgirasas, as a priestly group, are in charge of finding the sun-fire inasmuch as they call and evoke it by means of sounding calls, chants, or songs as ‘messages’. In this sense, in the second stanza of the same Ṛgvedic hymn 1.62 the connection between the Aṅgirasas and the term *āṅgūṣā-* ‘song’ is once again suggested by means of the derivative *āṅgūṣyā-* ‘singing, songful’, used as an attribute of the term *sāman-* ‘melody’:

prá vo mahé máhi námo bharadvam
āṅgūṣyām śavasānāya sāma |
yénā naḥ púrve pitáraḥ padaññāḥ
ārcanto āṅgirasō gā ávīdan | |

³⁰ Cf. Bailey 1957, p. 52; Schmidt 1968, p. 51; Mayrhofer 1992, pp. 48–49; Pontillo 1996.

Present your great reverence to the great one, a songful melody to the forceful one, with which our forefathers, the Aṅgirasas, knowing the track/word (*padajñā*), chanting, found the cows. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 182)

Here too, just as in the previous verses, the alliteration / *aṅg* / *āṅg* / may have contributed to creating this correlation between the ritual role of the single *āṅgiras*-fire and the mythical function of the Aṅgirasas as singers. However, the footprints of the cows, stolen by the Vala demon, are recognized and decoded as words by the Aṅgirasas themselves through another poetic pun, that is the polysemic term *padā*-, meaning both footprint/track and word.

This would mean that in the Kuru period to which this hymn probably belongs, the mythical Aṅgirasas are assumed as the model for the ritual ‘finders of cows’, that is, as the poets-singers of the songful melody (*āṅgūṣyā- sāmān*-), but we must remember that finding cows in the ritual context means ‘finding fire’, following the track-*padā* of the fire. Similarly, in RV 1.78.3 the adverbial expression *aṅgirasvāt*-, conventionally translated as ‘as the *āṅgiras*- did’ refers to the Aṅgirasas’ mythical role of calling upon the cattle-sun since it is equivalent to that of the priests who evoke – from the root *√hav*ⁱ – the fire during the ritual. As mentioned above, in another late R̥gvedic hymn, RV 10.67, they are defined as ‘heroes of the lord (*ásura*-)’ in stanza 2: now, if we consider that in the R̥gvedic collection the term *ásura*- frequently refers to Agni-fire (Hale, 1986, pp. 38ff.), the Aṅgirasas would seem to be correlated to Agni; the same pun footprint/track-*padā* / word-*padā* is used, and the inspired poetic word of the Aṅgirasas preludes to the ‘foundation of the sacrifice’:

ṛtām śāmsanta ṛjū dīdhyānāḥ
divās putráso ásurasya vīrāḥ |
vípram padām āṅgiraso dādhanāḥ
yajñásya dhāma prathamām mananta ||

Pronouncing the truth, thinking straight, the sons of heaven, the heroes of the lord, the Aṅgirasas, establishing their inspired word/laying their inspired track (*vípra- padā*-), pondered (*√man*-) the first foundation of the sacrifice. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1489).

If it is true that in some other stanzas Agni himself as the conveyor of the oblation (*havyavāh*-) is traditionally considered *puróhita* and divine

‘messenger’ and is called *āṅgiras-*, *vīpra-* ‘inspired poet’ (RV 1.127.2b) and *kavī-* ‘sage poet’ (RV 8.102.17b), in this hymn, instead, the lord-*ásura* is not Agni, but Bṛhaspati, to which the hymn is devoted: Bṛhaspati is not only the leader of the Aṅgirasas, but, as Indra-Bṛhaspati, he is also the personification of kingship. In actual fact, *ásura-* is also an epithet of Indra (Hale 1986, p. 50), especially as overlord, thus representing the Kuru model of sovereignty. Sūrya himself, above-mentioned, is endowed with lordly pre-eminence (*asuryà-*) in RV 8.101.12 = ŚS 20.58.4.

Lastly, in RV 1.83.4 the Aṅgirasas are defined as those ‘endowed with the kindled fire’ (*iddhāgni-*) for the first time, and therefore, as those able to assume ‘vigour’ (*váyas-*), thus ensuring wealth for the community:

*ād āṅgirāḥ prathamām dadhire váyaḥ
iddhāgnayaḥ śamyā yé sukrtyāyā |
sárvaṃ pañéḥ sám avindanta bhójanam
ásvāvantaṃ gómantaṃ á paśúṇi náraḥ ||*

The Aṅgirasas, who had (previously) kindled the fires with ritual labor and good ritual performance, after that first acquired their life-force. They collected together all the sustenance of the niggard, livestock consisting of horses and cows — the superior men. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 211)

The rare *-a* thematized form *āṅgira-* here mentioned³¹ instead of the usual *-as* stem *āṅgiras-* occurs only once more in the R̥gvedic collection, that is in RV 4.51.4c: in this hymn the Dawns are evoked to appear, and, in turn, they dawned on the Aṅgiras (loc. sg. *āṅgire*). There is also a reference to the Vala-myth, since, according to the myth, the Dawns appeared to the mythical Aṅgirasas, who sought them by means of their vocal and poetic skills. However, the term *āṅgira-*, as singular, can also refer to the ritual priestly function, mirrored by the myth: the term *āṅgira-* connotes one who invites the Dawns to appear by means of his vocal and poetic skills; in this way the fire – both as meso- and cosmic fire – burns. Therefore, the ritual Aṅgiras takes part in a morning rite, in which sun-dawns are evoked, and the act of kindling fire is equivalent to the mythical action of ‘seeking sun’, calling upon it.

³¹ It is found in the later Vedic texts, such as MuṇḍU 1.1.2. It is congruent with the Prakrit tendency to reduce *-as* stems into *-a* stems.

In light of this survey, it is evident that the figure called *āṅgiras-* is characterized by a double profile: on the one hand, as a member of the mythological group of Indra-Bṛhaspati's companions who seek the cattle-sun, he contributes to promoting the aetiological motif that legitimizes the formation of the priestly category of poets-singers, which historically emerged in the development of the *śrauta* reform, introduced by the Kuru hegemony. On the other hand, especially as a single *āṅgiras*, he is considered as a sort of *πρῶτος εὐρετής* of the ritual fire: he is literally one who seeks the traces of the fire, evoking it ritually by means of his poetic words and songs, and therefore the fire itself is identified with him.

Similarly, in the mythical context the sounding aspect is combined with light which, in this case, is the solar light that is sought and found. According to such an overlapping between solar and fire imagery, the *Āṅgiras* are able to go along the path to heaven, as messengers. Moreover, the aforementioned attestations of the derivative *āṅgirasá-* 'descendant of *āṅgiras-*' as *puróhita* (ŚS 10.1.6 = PS 16.35.6) are in compliance with this double value conveyed by the term *āṅgiras-*: *āṅgiras-* is one who moves in front as an equivalent to the fire, but also as one of the companions of Bṛhaspati, the prototype of the historical *puróhita*, *āṅgiras-* is one who goes ahead, to the sun.

In a diachronic perspective, the relationship between *āṅgiras-* and solar light is consistent with the model of sovereignty promoted by the Kuru hegemony: the overlord of the clans is a new sun, mounting heaven; in this case *āṅgiras-* as fire can open the path to heaven: he/it is literally the *puróhita-* 'placed in front'. This fire is not only the fire of the royal consecration (*rājasūya*), but a fire which every day re-founds the royal supremacy, by means of the function of the *puróhita* priest, who re-confirms daily kingship through the *agnihotra* rite. It is assumable that this specific function attributed to the *puróhita* priest determined the overlapping between the single *āṅgiras-* and the fire: by kindling the morning fire he evokes the daily-sun, together with sung *mantras*-messages, which magically 'find the sun'.

2. *Āṅgiras*es and the *agnihotra* rite

As Geslani highlights (2018, pp. 78–79), the close relationship between the king and his *puróhita* priest, established by the royal consecration, is reaffirmed daily by means of the morning ritual of kindling the

fire, according to AVParíś 4.1.1–3. Each morning the *puróhita* repeats the ritual performed on the occasion of the consecration prescribed in KauśS 17.28–30: he addresses the king with the hymn ŚS 4.22 = PS 3.21 thereby ensuring his supremacy as *ekavṛṣán-* ‘unique bull’, that is overlord of the clan, gifted with solar splendor (*várcas-*). Moreover, the *puróhita* must kindle the fire while reciting ŚS 5.24 = PS 15.7, a hymn devoted to all the gods, who are evoked one by one to support the king. In the refrain the term *purodhá-* indicating the ‘office of the *puróhita*’³² is repeated to emphasize the close correlation between the morning kindling of the fire, performed by the *puróhita*, and the cosmic overlord.

However, in the *śrauta* systematization, the rite of the morning kindling of the fire corresponds to the *agnihotra*, that is literally ‘offering oblations to Agni’ (Sakamoto-Gotō 2020, pp. 183–184): it is performed twice a day – early evening and early morning –, and consists of an oblation of milk, cooked with a little water on the Gārhapatya fire and poured into the Āhavanīya fire twice. Nonetheless, according to several scholars (Bodewitz 1976, pp. 1–5; 116; Sakamoto-Gotō 2020, pp. 188–189), the classic version of *agnihotra*, as normalized in the *śrauta* manuals, results from the combination of two pre-*śrauta* independent rites, that is, a fire-rite, aiming at maintaining the fire to ensure the continuity of the lineage, and a sun rite, correlated to the *pravargya* rite, at the break of day. The latter is aligned with the Kuru model of sovereignty and is correlated to the warrior sphere: for example, Indra himself is called *janitā sūryasya* ‘generator of the sun’ in RV 3.49.4c and Indra *ājanayat sūryam* also ‘generated the sun’ in 2.19.3c, as well as in RV 8.89.7 it is declared that Indra makes the sun mount in heaven. In particular, in Rgvedic hymn 3.31, devoted to Indra – mentioned above in relation to the Vala-myth and the Aṅgiras (sg.) as an inspired poet (cf. fn. 19) – there are also references to a form of the *agnihotra* rite: in stanza 15 Indra is defined as the shining one (*dīdyāna-*), who generated (*ajanad*) the sun, the dawn, the way and the fire; finally, stanza 17ab refers to the alternation of night and day thanks to the sun:

ānu kṛṣṇé vásudhitī jihāte
ubhé sūryasya maṃhānā yājatre |

³² Cf. Lelli 2020, p. 119.

*pāri yāt te mahimānaṃ vṛjádhyai
sákhāya indra kāmā rjipyāḥ ||*

The two black treasure-chambers [=Dawn and Night], deserving the sacrifice, follow (each other) in succession through the magnanimity of the Sun, when your amiable, straight-flying comrades (gather) round about, to twist your greatness (toward them), Indra. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 510)

Here Indra's comrades are the Maruts, the warrior counterpart of the Aṅgirasas, just as Bṛhaspati is the priestly and 'poetic' counterpart of the warrior Indra in the Vala-myth. The text seems to allude to a sacrificial session (*sattra*), performed by the Maruts (*rjipyā-* 'moving like eagles') and gathered around Indra-Bṛhaspati; in stanza 19 of the same hymn the adverbial form *aṅgirasvāt*, 'like the Aṅgirasas did' evokes the mythological role of the Aṅgirasas as poets-singers who are seeking the sun.

Similarly, in RV 7.42.5 Night and Dawn are invited to take part in a rite, to which the Aṅgirasas go forth as 'possessors of the sacred formulation' (*brahmán-*); the Aṅgirasas themselves foreknow the wide space (e.g., PS 3.38.9 = ŚS 9.5.16), and can ascend to the sun, together with the gods in PS 19.40.15:

*yena devā jyotiṣā dyām udāyan
yenādityā vasavo yena rudrāḥ |
yenāṅgirasah svar āruruhus
tenod ayāva yajamānau svasti ||*

By that light by which the gods rose to heaven, by which the Ādityas and the Vasus, by which the Rudras and the Aṅgirasas ascended to the sun, we both, the sacrificers, may rise to [heavenly] well-being.

The founding myth of the *agnihotra* is referred to in TB 2.1.1³³: here the Aṅgirasas are the mythical performers and the rite itself is a form of *sattra* 'sacrificial session'. The oblation is defined *gharma* 'heat', as it is in the *pravargya* rite, and the milked cow is a spotted cow (*pṛśni*), which recalls the Maruts' mother. In fact, the group of Aṅgirasas is implicitly equated with the troop of Maruts.

The late Vedic ancillary literature of the Atharvavedic tradition also provides us with a description of the *agnihotra* ritual: for example, the

³³ Cf. Dumont 1964, pp. 338–339.

seventh section of the *Vaitāna-Sūtra* and chapter 45 of the *Atharvaveda-Parīṣiṣṭa* are entirely devoted to the early morning and early evening versions. Among the *mantras* employed in the morning version, the reference to heaven as *svargá-*, that is the place to and in which the solar light moves (Scarlati 1999, p. 108), is recurrent: for example, in VaitS 7.8 = AVParís 45.1.26 ‘I lead this sacrificer up here, to the heavenly world’ (*idam ahaṃ yajamānaṃ svargaṃ lokam unnayāmi*); in VaitS 7.10 = AVParís 45.1.28 ‘I place you (‘spoon’, *sruc-*), who has the light of the sun, gifted with wind and breath, heavenly and shining, for (reaching) heaven’ (*sūryajyotiṣaṃ tvā vāyumatīṃ prāṇavatīṃ svargyāṃ svargāyopadhāmi bhāsvatīm*).

The Aṅgirasas are not mentioned, but in VaitS 7.22 = AVParís 45.2.8–10 *sarpetarajana-* ‘snakes and other beings’, *sarpapunyajana-* ‘snakes and pious beings’, and *gandharvāpsaras-* ‘Gandharva and Apsarasas’ are evoked. These beings are listed in the Atharvavedic hymns together with the compound *atharvāṅgirás-* ‘Atharvans and Aṅgirasas’, as mentioned above (e.g., PS 16.84.7; PS 9.26.5ab, PS 10.5.2a, PS 15.4.9b; PS 16.30.5ab = ŚS 8.8.15ab).

Lastly, Ṛgvedic hymn 1.83 refers to the rising-sun in stanza 5 (= ŚS 20.25.5), after mentioning the Aṅgirasas in stanza 4 as those who kindle the fire:

*yajñair ātharvā prathamāḥ pathās tate
tātaḥ sūryo vratapā venā ājani |
ā gā ājad uśānā kāvyāḥ sácā
yamāsya jātām amṛtaṃ yajāmahe ||*

With sacrifices the Atharvan first stretched the paths. Thereupon was the Sun, the protector of commandments, the tracker, born. Uśānā Kāvya drove the cows together. We sacrifice to the immortal birth of Yama. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 211)

In this translation, the last *pāda* refers to Yama who is born immortal inasmuch as he is the son of the sun. However, it could also be interpreted as a reference to Atharvan, who was born mortal, since he is Yama’s son, but who has become immortal, as he is considered to be the first to have paved the path to heaven: it is along this same path that the sun also moves³⁴. In this case the translation would be ‘We sacrifice to Yama’s son, [who has become] immortal’. In both cases the key

³⁴ Cf. Witzel-Gotō 2007, pp. 624–625.

term is *amṛta*-‘immortal’, correlated with both the sun and the function of ‘stretching the paths’. During the sprinkling of water in the *agnihotra* rite, described in the Atharvavedic ancillary repertoire in VaitS 7.5 = AVParīś 45.1.11, the motif of ‘immortality’ is emphasized by the following *mantra*: *amṛtam asy amṛtam amṛtena saṃdhehi* ‘you are immortal: join immortality through immortality’.

Nonetheless, in the Ṛgvedic stanza the role of stretching the paths to the sun and for the sun is attributed to the Atharvan and, in turn, the sun is defined as *vená-*, ‘seeker, tracker’, like Bṛhaspati himself in ṚV 1.139.10. On the other hand, the controversial figure of Uśanā Kāvya³⁵ – mentioned in ṚV 1.83.5 – is frequently associated with both Indra and Bṛhaspati and more generally in correlation to the Vala-myth, as stressed by the expression *á gā ājad* ‘he drove the cows’ which appears in this stanza. Moreover, according to a passage in KauśS. 139.6, analyzed by Jamison (2007, p. 130), he is unexpectedly linked to the Antharvans and the Aṅgirasas of the Atharvavedic tradition but in the later Yajurvedic and *Brāhmaṇa* literature, he is defined as the singer-*udgātṛ* of the Asura, or even *puróhita* of the Asura whereas Bṛhaspati as a descendant of the Aṅgirasas is in turn the singer-*udgātṛ* and *puróhita* of the gods (e.g., JB 1.125). On the basis of convincing argumentation, Jamison (2007, pp. 136–137) concludes that Uśanā Kāvya is the mythical figure who personified the poetic-priestly counterpart of the Indraic chieftainship, a probable heritage of Indo-Iranian cultural unity: the patronymic *kāvyá-* identifies him as a descendant of Kavi, a title that denotes the poetic-priestly role associated with royal and warrior power³⁶. However, especially in relation to the Indo-Aryan development of solar imagery, he was then assigned the epithet *bṛhaspáti-*, so that some obscure tracts of this mythical character, implied by his correlation to Atharvavedic sorcery practices, were removed from the representation of leadership in line with solar imagery and were in turn attributed to those who later became the conventional personification of enemies, that is the Asura.

Such a cultural reconstruction would entail that a sort of proto-Vedic or even Indo-Iranian cultural chain links *uśánā kāvyá* to *bṛhaspáti* as both the mythical and poetic-priestly counterparts of an Indraic chieftain: the former is correlated to magical practices and the latter to solar worship, focused on the sunrise; this role developed into the

³⁵ Cf. Jamison 2007, pp. 124–137; namely, pp. 128–130.

³⁶ Similarly in the Iranian tradition: cf. Schwartz 2013.

later *puróhita* ‘royal chaplain’, who is committed to supporting the king as cosmic overlord, leading him along the paths to heaven, especially at sunrise. In such a reconstruction, the troop of Aṅgirasas represents the mythological counterpart of the Maruts, sometimes even showing their young warrior attitude but, in turn, the single Aṅgiras is an epithet for Bṛhaspati, also, or even identified with Bṛhaspati’s mythical forefather, indicated as an inspired poet and fire priest, a supporter of that solar worship. It is assumable that the more the figure of Bṛhaspati is conceived as being separate from that of Indra and corresponding to the autonomous priestly function, the more the Aṅgirasas assume the role of ritual assistants, closely associated with the ritual fire. However, such an interpretation omits the figure of Atharvan, who in the aforementioned late Ṛgvedic stanza is defined as the first to stretch the paths through sacrifices.

3. Atharvan as head of the sacrifice

Out of the total 47 occurrences of the term *átharvan-* in the Ṛgvedic and Atharvavedic collections, more than half (29x) are in the singular form. The plural is frequently found in the same stanza in which the plural of *āṅgiras-* is also quoted, thus similarly representing forefathers or semi-divine, but especially divine beings³⁷; in PS 5.11.4a and PS 6.26.2 they all are evoked together with the gods, whereas, in the aforementioned ŚS 11.6.13 = PS 15.14.6, the Atharvans are explicitly defined as ‘gods’. Moreover, the plural *átharvan* is mentioned in the Atharvavedic catalogue and in formulaic hymns: for example, in PS 17.22.3 and 17.28.24 as well as in PS 16.94.5–8, PS 18.52.9–12 ~ ŚS 16.8.11–14 they are listed together with the Aṅgirasas, the descendants of Atharvan and Aṅgiras, the Seers and the descendants of the Seers. As regards the other six plural occurrences, the Atharvans appear to be a group of priests and/or magicians: for example, in PS 16.44.3 ~ ŚS 10.6.20 both the Atharvans and the Aṅgirasas are the magicians who ‘bind’ an amulet; in PS 12.7.1a = ŚS 4.37.1a the Atharvans alone are those who in earlier times slew demons with a specific plant; in RV 9.11.2b they prepare the oblation of milk and honey; in RV 6.47.24b they receive gifts from the victorious king.

³⁷ Cf. the aforementioned RV 10.14.6, ŚS 18.1.58 and PS 18.63.1.

However, the majority of the occurrences of the term *átharvan-* refer to the singular form: according to Schmidt (1968, pp. 39–40), it is mainly used as an appellative, especially in relation to Bṛhaspati; for example, in ṚV 10.120.9ab (= PS 6.1.9a; ŚS 5.2.9a; ŚS 20.107.12a) *átharvan-* is an epithet for *Bṛháddiva-* literally ‘one who possesses lofty heaven’ which refers to Indra-Bṛhaspati³⁸. Similarly, the expression *yajñáir átharvā prathamāḥ* ‘with sacrifices the Atharvan first’, mentioned in the very same stanza (5a) in ṚV 1.83 also occurs in ṚV 10.92.10c where the reference is to Indra-Bṛhaspati³⁹. In ṚV 10.48.2a Indra is defined as the ‘bulwark and breast(-plate) of Atharvan’ (*ródho vákṣo átharvaṇas*), whereas, in turn, Indra’s sovereign power is praised by Atharvan’s ‘poetic insight’ (*dhī*) in ṚV 1.80.16a, ‘according to the old style’ (*pūrváthā*).

The same connection between Atharvan, Bṛhaspati and poetry is found in PS 5.2 ~ ŚS 4.1, where the term *vená-* ‘seeker, tracker’ is also quoted (PS 5.2.2 = ŚS 4.1.1; 5.6.1); in particular, in stanza 7 the term *átharvan-* is an appellative for Bṛhaspati which enigmatically refers to *kaví*, as follows:

*evātharvā pitaraṃ viśvadevaṃ
bṛhaspatir namasāvocaḥ aha |
tvam viśvasya janitā dhāsy agre
kavir devān na dābhāya svadhāvaḥ ||*

Thus has Atharvan, Bṛhaspati, called with homage unto the all-divine father: “You, the creator of all, poet, not to be deceived, will place the gods at the top, O self-ruling one”. (Lubotsky 2002, p. 16)

The *Śaunakīya* version (4.1.7) presents a few textual variants, but the same *átharvan-Bṛhaspati* association is found:

*yó 'tharvāṇaṃ pitāraṃ devābandhūṃ
bṛhaspátin namasāva ca gáchāt |
tvám viśveṣāṃ janitā yáthāsaḥ
kavir devó ná dābhāyat svadhāvān ||*

You (*vená-*), who will approach with homage Atharvan, the father, who is related to the gods, Bṛhaspati, may you be progenitor of all

³⁸ ṚV 10.120.9ab: *evā mahān bṛháddivo átharvā | ávocat svām tanvām índram evā* | ‘In this way, the great Bṛhaddiva, the Atharvan, addressed his own self — that is, Indra.’

³⁹ ṚV 10.92.10c: *yajñáir átharvā prathamó ví dhārayad* | ‘with sacrifices the Atharvan first distributed [fame]’: verbal forms derived from the root *vi-√dhar-* ‘to distribute’ are also used with reference to Indra, for example in ṚV 2.13.6a.

[beings]: may the heavenly wise poet (*kaví-*), the self-ruling one, not be deceived.

The same *pāda* 'Atharvan, the father, who is related to the gods' (*átharvāṇaṃ pitāraṃ devābandhuṃ*) occurs in ŚS 7.2.1a = ŚS 5.11.11b, and in PS 8.1.11b and PS 20.1.3a but with the reading *viśvadeva-* 'one who belongs to all the gods', in place of *devābandhu-* 'one who is related to the gods'. There is no reference to Bṛhaspati in these hymns, but the same expression *pitār- viśvadeva-* 'father, who belongs to all the gods' refers to Bṛhaspati in ṚV 5.40.6a. Furthermore, the motif of poetic speech combined with 'poetic insight' (*dhī-*) and 'poetic skills' (*kāvya-*) is present in the Atharvavedic hymns from which these verses are taken: for example, both ŚS 7.1 and PS 20.1 open with this enigmatic stanza⁴⁰:

*dhītí vā yé ánayan vācó ágram
mānasā vā yé 'vadann ṛtāni |
ṛtīyena bráhmana vāvṛdhānāḥ
turīyēnāmanvata nāma dhenóḥ ||*

Those who led the beginning of speech by poetic insight, who spoke truths by the mind, grown by means of the third sacred formulation, by the fourth one they brought to mind the name of the cow.

Similarly, ŚS 5.11 and PS 8.1 are parallel dialogue hymns, with Varuṇa and Atharvan as speakers. Stanzas 2 and 3 of both hymns focus on the poetic contest for the spotted cow (*pśśni-*): the key term is the neuter *kāvya-* 'poetic skill' and especially in stanza 3a Atharvan is declared to be 'truly profound with poetic skill' (*satyám ahám gabhīrāḥ kāvyaena*), so that he is able to obtain the cow. ŚS 7.104.1b ~ PS 20.4.6b hints at the same motif of the spotted cow obtained by Atharvan but also mentions Bṛhaspati as his companion. On the other hand, Atharvan's poetic skills are highlighted in stanzas 5ab in the complex hymn ṚV 10.21, when the fire is referred to:

*agnír jātó átharvaṇā
vidád víśvāni kāvya |
bhúvad dūtó vivásvato [...]*

⁴⁰ In PS 20.1 the first two stanzas are identical to the two stanzas that make up ŚS 7.1, whereas the third stanza of PS 20.1 is parallel to the only stanza of ŚS 7.2: despite a few variants, the three stanzas constitute a unique sequence.

When Agni, just born, found all the poetic skills by means of Atharvan⁴¹, and became the messenger of Vivasvant [...].

Here the motif of the fire-messenger occurs once again, but Atharvan and not Aṅgiras is quoted. In actual fact the figures of Atharvan and Aṅgiras only seem to overlap in relation to the fire, especially with regard to its kindling, thus alluding to the role of fire priest attributed to both of them. For example, the adverb form *atharvavāt* ‘as Atharvan does/did’ refers to a primordial and archetypic ritual act attributed to the *átharvan-* in RV 6.15.17ab, who has to ‘churn’ ($\sqrt{\text{manth-}}$), the sticks, that is rub the wooden sticks against each other in a rotary movement to cause friction to light the fire:

*imám u tyám atharvavád
agním manthanti vedhásah |*

this Agni here the ritual adepts churn, as Atharvan (did). (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 790)

Therefore, the Atharvan appears to be associated with the ritual fire, once again, but in the same stanza it is also declared that in this way the priests lead the fire along a crooked path, from dark places (*śyāvyā*): this image can refer also to the sun emerging from the darkness of the night.

In actual fact, in RV 10.87.12 = PS 16.8.1 ~ ŚS 8.3.21, the fire is evoked to smite the sorcerers, as Atharvan did: here Agni as the eye (*cákṣus-*) endowed with heavenly light is equated to the sun, which once again recalls the motif of Indra-Bṛhaspati’s discovery of the sun. Therefore, the adverbial form *atharvavāt* ‘as Atharvan does/did’ appears to refer to Indra-Bṛhaspati’s role:

*tád agne cākṣuḥ prāti dhehi rebhé
śaphārújaṃ yéna páśyasi yātudhānam |
atharvaváj jyótiṣā daívyena
satyám dhūrvantam acítam ny òṣa | |*

O Agni, in the hoarse-voiced [singer] fix that eye with which you see the hoof-breaking sorcerer. As Atharvan did, with heavenly light burn

⁴¹ As regards the interpretation of the function of the instrumental *átharvaṇā*, cf. Jamison’s commentary at: <<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/X.1%E2%80%939360-2-1-26.pdf>>.

down the unobservant who injures the truth. (Jamison, Brereton 2014, p. 1530, slightly modified)

Moreover, in Ṛgvedic hymn 6.16 Aṅgiras, Atharvan and Atharvan's son (Dadhyañc) are mentioned in stanzas 11, 13 and 14 respectively, all employed in the *śrauta* ritual of the establishment of the fire (*agny-ādheya*)⁴². However, the term *āṅgiras-* is used as an epithet for the kindled fire itself, whereas the term *átharvan-* is one who 'churned forth' the fire, with reference once again to a primordial and archetypic ritual act of lighting the fire, enigmatically correlated to 'the head of the whole' or 'the head of everyone':

*tvām agne púṣkarād ádhi
átharvā nír amanthata |
mūrdhnó víśvasya vāghátah ||13||*

You, Agni, did Atharvan churn forth from the lotus, did the cantors [churn] from the head of everyone⁴³.

The last *pāda* is really puzzling: the term *vāghát-*, which is only attested in the Ṛgvedic collection (22x) and conventionally translated as 'cantor'⁴⁴, can be reconstructed as PIE **h₁uog^{uh}-et-* correlated to PIE **h₁ueg^{uh}-* 'to speak solemnly, to promise', from which the root *√oh-* 'to announce' also derives, as a reduplicated present form (< PIE **h₁eh₁ug^(uh)-*)⁴⁵. Therefore, its literally meaning is 'one who speaks solemnly'. As Jamison highlights⁴⁶, the term *vāghát-* is correlated to vocal skills and "verbal products", so recalling the role of the Aṅgirasas: in actual fact, in RV 10.62.7 *vāghátah* is quoted as synonym of Aṅgirasas, in relation to the Vala-myth.

The motif of the head is more clearly combined with the term *átharvan-* in the Atharvavedic collections, that is in ŚS 10.2.26–27 ~ PS 16.59.9–10:

⁴² For example, in MS 2.7.3.4–6; TS. 4.1.3.2; 5.1.4.3; KS 19.4.26; ŚBM 6.4.2.2.

⁴³ As regards the problematic interpretation of this stanza, cf. Jamison's commentary at: <<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/VI.1%E2%80%939329-2-1-26.pdf>>.

⁴⁴ Cf. Jamison's commentary ad 1.3.5 at: <<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/I.1-99-2-1-26.pdf>>, p. 3.

⁴⁵ This is a cognate of Av. *aojaite* 'to proclaim solemnly, to announce', Gr. εὐχομαι 'to promise solemnly', and Lat. *voveō* 'to vow': cf. Beekes 2010, p. 486.

⁴⁶ Cf. fn. 44.

mūrdhānam asya saṃśīṣya
ātharvā hṛdayaṃ ca yāt |
mastiṣkād ūrdhvāḥ prāirayat
pāvamāno 'dhi śīrṣatāḥ | 126 |
tād vā ātharvaṇaḥ śīro
devakośaḥ sāmubjitaḥ |
tāt prāṇo abhi rakṣati
śīro ānnam ātho mānaḥ | 127 |

Atharvan, having sewed together the head of this one and what is the heart, upright, raised [it] forth from the brain, the self-purifying one [raised it forth], above his head.

That is the head of Atharvan, [that is] the well closed vessel for the gods; the breath protects it, [that is] head, food and mind.

These stanzas are taken from an enigmatic hymn in which the parts of the human body are correlated to cosmic elements, but throughout the ritual meso-cosmos, according to the speculative method of micro-meso-macro cosmic equivalence (*bāndhu*). In actual fact, the term *kośā-* indicates the ritual vessel in which the somic liquid – generally defined *pāvamāna-* ‘the purified one, the filtered one’ – is collected, but also the head of the man, who is stretched through the different cosmic layers, like the macranthropic *puruṣa* of Ṛgvedic 10.90. Here, the expression *ātharvaṇaḥ śīras-* translated simply as ‘head of Atharvan, appears to refer firstly to a priest (*adhvaryú?*) who raises the somic vessel above his head, secondly to the somic oblation itself, collected in the vessel, offered up and raised to the gods, and lastly even to Soma himself, identified with ‘the self-purifying one’ (*pāvamāna*)⁴⁷. In other terms, *ātharvaṇaḥ śīras-* can be interpreted as the ‘head belonging to the priest Atharvan’; the ‘head, which is the somic vessel for Atharvan, as god’, or even as the ‘head of the Soma god’. However, these three interpretations are not mutually exclusive, but may refer to three different stages of the ritual, by which the head-vessel of the offerings rises to the heavenly sphere, assuming the role of the

⁴⁷ The *Paippalāda* version (16.59.9–10) presents a few minimal variants: *mūrdhānam asya saṃśīṣya | ātharvā hṛdayaṃ ca yāt | mastiṣkād ūrdhvam prairayat | pāvamāno 'dhi śīrṣatāḥ | 19 | tad vā ātharvaṇaḥ śīro | devakośaḥ sāmubjitaḥ | tat prāṇo abhi rakṣatu śīriyam annam ātho mānaḥ | 10 |* ‘Atharvan, having sewed together the head of this one and what is the heart, raised [it] forth upright, from the brain, the selfpurifying one [raised it forth], above his head. That is the head of Atharvan, [that is] the well closed vessel for the gods; let the breath protect it, [that is] head, food and also mind.’

cosmic head. It is noteworthy that the same identification between container-vessel and content-offering, or rather the same equivalence between this ritual tool and the human head, and the same scenario of the content's ascent to heaven are the core of a specific *śrauta* rite called the *pravargya*. This is the early morning rite of the heating of milk-*gharmá* offered to the Ásvins in a pot, which is also called *gharmá*-heated: the term *gharmá* denotes not only the oblation, but also the pot that contains the latter and even the ceremony itself⁴⁸. Moreover, as an early morning rite performed at the rising-sun, it is an old sun rite, to which an ancient form of *agnihotra*, at the break of day, may also be referred. As mentioned above, the oblation of the *agnihotra* is defined as *gharma* 'heat' in TB 2.1.1. In actual fact, the *gharmá*-pot is identified with the sun-Āditya, and its/his rays with the Maruts (e.g., TĀ 5.4.8–9), which recalls the role of the Maruts as the finders of the sun together with Indra-Bṛhaspati, in the Vala-myth. But above all, the milk-pot has the same shape as a human head, and is therefore called *yajñasya śiras*- 'head of the sacrifice'. Is such a head-container of the milk oblation the same head-*śiras*- attributed to Atharvan? It might seem hazardous, but according to the diachronic reconstruction of the *pravargya* proposed by scholars⁴⁹, the earliest ritual stage did not include any somic oblation, which came to be incorporated into the only somic liturgy by the time of the *śrauta* reform: this would mean that the somic-bowl and the simple milk-pot overlapped, and the role of the later somic priest, especially the *adhvaryú*, is puzzlingly superimposed on the figure of the so-called *átharvan*-⁵⁰. Moreover, in RV 8.9.7cd = ŚS 20.140.2cd which is devoted to the Ásvins, an ambiguous locative form *átharvani* occurs with the meaning of both the officiant somic priest and the container of hot milk/somic oblation:

⁴⁸ As regards the description of this rite according to the Vedic text, cf. van Buitenen 1968; Houben 1991.

⁴⁹ Cf. Houben 2000; 2010.

⁵⁰ In this sense, cf. Geldner's interpretation (1951, pp. 304–305) of the term *átharvan*- in RV 8.9.7cd, mentioned here below, and the above-mentioned RV 9.11.2b. On the other hand, given a certain similarity in sound, the term *átharvan*- was likely correlated to the *-r/-n* heteroclitic noun *ádhvān-/ádhvān*- 'road', from which *ádhvāna*- as 'ceremonial course' and 'somic sacrifice' are also derived, as well as the name of the officiant priest *adhvaryú*- 'one who paves the way for offerings to the gods'. In actual fact, the term *atharyú*- translated as 'seeking the way', mentioned in RV 7.1.1c, is also constructed with the same morphemic affix *-yú* added to *athar*-.

ā sómam mādhumattamaṃ
gharmāṃ siñcād átharvaṇi ||

Here he will pour the most honeyed soma and the hot milk in the presence of the fire-priest/into the container of the oblation⁵¹.

Significantly, in the *pravargya* rite, this is the core of the rite, because when the milk is poured into the hot pot, already filled with clarified butter, a flame bursts forth from the hole on the top of the pot, rising to heaven.

Finally, the same *pravargya* milk-pot is also defined as *makhá-*, a term denoting a warrior figure, that is a fighter, like Rudra (RV 4.3.7), Indra (RV 5.41.14; 3.34.2), and the Maruts themselves (RV 6.66.9). Similarly, *mahāvīra* ‘great hero’ is another name for the *gharmá*-pot which occurs as a compound in the R̥gvedic stanzas in RV 1.32.6b used as an epithet for Indra, thus once again associating the *pravargya* milk-pot with the warrior *milieu*. Therefore, the *gharmá*-pot as *yajñasya śiras-* ‘head of the sacrifice’ synecdochically denotes a heroic warrior, who reaches heaven through the fire, like a newly rising-morning sun, exactly when the flame bursts out of the pot.

All these previously highlighted elements – that is the recurrent reference to the single *átharvan-* as Indra-Bṛhaspati, and as one who is involved in the mythical discovery of the sun; the epithet *devābandhu-* ‘one who is related to the gods’ (ŚS 4.1.7) and the emphasis on divine status (e.g., ŚS 11.6.13 = PS 15.14.6); the role of ‘father’ (ŚS 7.2.1a = ŚS 5.11.11b; PS 8.1.11b; PS 20.1.3) and the epithet ‘the first’ (*prathamá-*) – indicate that the term *átharvan-* denotes an archetypic human figure elevated to heavenly status, especially as someone who was responsible for both warrior and sacred practices, just like Indra-Bṛhaspati.

Such an interpretation also seems to be assumable from the etymological point of view: according to Pinault (2003), the Avestan term *āθrauuān-*, equivalent to the Indo-Aryan *átharvan-*, denotes a category of priests, but also members of the warrior class and owners of live-stock (e.g., Yašt 13.88); moreover, Tocharian A *atār* and Tocharian B *etre* mean ‘hero’. Therefore, the hypothesis that OIA *átharvan-* and YAV *āθrauuān-* may be derivatives of a root-noun compound from PIE **h₂at-h₂ar-* meaning ‘Wanderweg’ (Mayrhofer 1992, p. 805), especially with

⁵¹ Jamison and Brereton (2014, p. 1047) opt for the first of these two translations. However, Oldenberg (1912, p. 86) hypothesizes that *átharvan-* can be the name of the *pravargya* vessel, also called *mahāvīra*.

reference to the fire (Av. *ātar-*), is not convincing. Pinault considers them as outcomes of a reconstructed stem **athr-*, borrowed from the BMAC linguistic substrate.

Similarly, the OIA term *kavi-* as a noble title, signifying a member of the royal clan, and the Av. *kauui-*, which also indicates the chieftain's military function, appear to reflect the same 'heroic' context, or better, pre-Kuru leadership that entailed the double function of ruler and priest, just like Indra-Bṛhaspati. Therefore, *átharvan-* may be a term of Indo-Iranian matrix, but one that was borrowed from the BMAC culture and used to indicate the pre-Kuru role of chieftain, likely as a sort of earlier Atharvan-Uśanā Kāvya pair⁵², equivalent to the later pair Indra-Bṛhaspati: Uśanā Kāvya is a sort of *puróhita ante litteram* of Atharvan, just as Bṛhaspati is a *puróhita* of Indra.

Furthermore, the 'great hero'-*mahāvīra* as the *gharmá*-pot of the pre-somic *pravargya* might be Atharvan as warrior chieftain, and the 'head of the sacrifice' (*yajñasya śiras-*) could be the 'head of Atharvan'-*átharvaṇaḥ śiras-*. This is because not only is the *gharmá*-pot synecdochically the head belonging to *átharvan-* denoting the great hero, but also because *átharvan-* is an appellative for one who, 'placed in front' (*puróhita*), like the Ṛgvedic Indra, proceeds forward: he is 'the chief, the first one', mounting to heaven, by means of his head. In actual fact, when the flame bursts forth from the top of the pot, it is bursting from the head of the *mahāvīra*: such a flame is called the sun's ray (ŚBM 14.2.1.21; TĀ 4.8.4). White (2023, p. 128) comments such a ritual phase in this way: «the climax of the *pravargya* rite may be interpreted as the ritual enactment of a warrior's apotheosis, his fusion with a column of flame, that rising from his head and identified with the solar ray, effected his accession to a heavenly realm situated beyond the orb of the sun».

Atharvan's son Dadhyañc is also mentioned in the same hymns in which his father's name is quoted (ṚV 1.80.16; 6.16.14; 1.116.12; 1.117.22) and, significantly, he is correlated to both the *pravargya* rite and to its 'head', especially in ṚV 1.116 and 117, both devoted to the Aśvins⁵³. In the aetiological myth of the *pravargya*, associated with the *mahāvīra*-pot, narrated in Brahmanical literature (e.g., ŚBM 14.1.1–25), he knows the secret science by which one's head, if cut off, can be re-

⁵² As regards the possible relationship between Atharvans and Uśanā Kāvya or Kauui Usan, cf. Jamison 2007, pp. 126–131, namely p. 130.

⁵³ In ṚV 1.116 also a reference to Uśanā Kāvya is found in st. 14.

stored, that is he can put the head of the ‘great hero’ back again just as he can put the ‘head of the sacrifice’ on again, thus making the sacrifice complete (ŚBM 14.1.1.18). This can hint also at sacrificial practices implying the cut of the head of the sacrificial victim, and even human sacrifices⁵⁴; however, they aimed to confer immortality upon the victims, turning them into gods.

In the light of these remarks, it has recently been suggested that the *pravargya* rite is remotely associated with the *vrātya* culture⁵⁵. The reference to the heated pot as being equivalent to both the head of the great hero and the head of the sacrifice can allude to esoteric healing practices applied to the deceased hero in order to make him rise to heaven, like fire-sun, as well as to peculiar heroic practices of self-immolation, implied in the prototypical version of the *sattra* ritual, which was well associated with *vrātya* milieu⁵⁶. In this case, the term *vāghāt-* may also denote one who is a solemn speaker inasmuch as he solemnly promises to follow specific rules of life, as a member of a ‘brotherhood’, even at the cost of losing his own head. He is Indra’s companion⁵⁷, like the Aṅgirasas are the companions of Indra-Bṛhaspati. Similarly, in ŚS 10.10.12;17 the term *átharvan-* indicates one who is consecrated (*dīkṣitá-*): he is involved in the somic liturgy, and brings the bowl containing somic juice to Indra (ŚS 18.3.54a = PS 18.74.6a), as his symposiac companion.

Finally, the term *átharvan* is correlated to the term *vená-* ‘seeker, tracker’: in RV 1.83.5b = ŚS 20.25.5b *vená-* is an appellative of *átharvan-*; furtherly, in the hymns ŚS 4.1 = PS 5.2 the two terms refer each other, in spite of being mentioned in two different stanzas (st. 1 and st. 7). The figure of the ‘seeker, tracker’ is combined with the solar imagery, especially in relation to the rising sun; moreover, it is associated with the figure of the *gandharva*, which in turn refers to the *vrātya* milieu⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ Thus Heesterman 1993, pp. 71ff.

⁵⁵ Cf. Parpola 2005, and af Edholm 2021.

⁵⁶ Cf. Pontillo 2023.

⁵⁷ E.g., in RV 10.62.7; 3.37.2; 7.32.1; 8.78.4.

⁵⁸ Cf. Köhler 2008; Dore 2016.

4. Conclusions

This survey has pointed out that in the Ṛgvedic and Atharvavedic collections, which result from the textual revision carried out in the Kuru period, both the Aṅgirasas and Atharvans are represented as primordial figures of a remote past. In actual fact, Ṛgvedic and Atharvavedic texts refer frequently to them as 'Forefathers' (*pitáraḥ*), founders of an ancient ritual, whose fire is associated with the sun, in particular with the rising sun. They are defined as the first ones (*prathamá-*), and acting like them means acting according to the old style (*pūrváthā*). Therefore, they belong to the pre-Kuru past, and the fire-sun ritual performed by them belongs to the pre-*śrauta* ritual phase, which can even be traced back to the Indo-Iranian cultural unity. As for the so-called old style of performing rituals, it is likely that it consisted of magical practices, also linked to funeral rites, designed to ensure the continuity of life despite death, particularly for warriors: they had to make the hero a god, re-emerging from darkness like the rising sun, by means of the fire.

In actual fact, on the one hand, the Aṅgirasas are able to make the sun appear by applying their vocal and poetic skills, based on a magical power that connects the voice to light. On the other hand, the Atharvans are able to make the fire rise to heaven, thanks to a secret science involving the 'head of the hero': by replacing the pot into which the oblation is poured with the hero's head the hero himself can ascend to heaven, like a sun-flame, thus becoming a god. These two functions could be attributed to the tribal chief himself, especially in his role as priest equivalent to the figure of Bṛhaspati. However, if the Aṅgirasas are Bṛhaspati's companions, that is, the supporters of the priestly role of the tribal chief, in line with the pre-Kuru chieftainship, the Atharvan is not simply equivalent to Bṛhaspati, that is, the personification of priestly function of the chieftain, but may himself be the 'great-hero', that is, the clan leader in his role as ruler and warrior personified by Indra.

The term *ātharvan* as singular can indicate the 'head of the sacrifice' not only as the fire-priest, who leads 'in front' the oblations to heaven, like the *puróhita* Bṛhaspati, but also as the warrior leader, who rises to heaven with his own head: he is *puróhita* inasmuch as he, 'placed in front', is the first one to reach heaven. Such a relationship between hero and heaven is based on the sun: only the mythical Indra-Bṛhaspati

can find the sun, that is, out of the mythical context, the chieftain as Bṛhaspati can magically act on the fire-sun, as Indra can himself reach the sun, becoming immortal. Both these functions of the pre-Kuru chieftain are especially performed in an old form of the *pravargya* rite, which preludes to the later *agnihotra*, as systematized by the *śrauta* reform. The Aśvins themselves, young ‘knights’ who drive the dawn every morning, thus marking the rising of the sun, are expressions of this ancient warrior belief. Finally, it is assumable that these ancient rites and magical beliefs, which correlate the sun to the figure of the warrior, were part of the *vrātya* culture: it entailed the training of the young male members of the clan in warfare through initiation practices and sapiential trials, which involved poetic and vocal skills and expertise in healing practices, as well as the technique of lighting fires⁵⁹. Against such a scenario, the figure of *puróhita*, ‘royal chaplain’, as defined and established during the Kuru hegemony, is the epigone of such a remote warrior tradition: from the one who is ‘placed in front’ in the search for the sun and related to immortality he becomes the one who safeguards sovereignty by managing ritual practices, among which the *agnihotra*, especially at the rising sun, is essential. In actual fact, on the one hand the Aṅgirasas are those who first light the fire, that is, they find the sun, after following its tracks; on the other hand, the Atharvan is one who raises the hero in front, to heaven, or even reaches himself heaven as a ray of sunlight, by means of his own ‘head’, which in turn proceeds ‘in front’.

Lastly, it is assumable that these ancient figures, the related *vrātya* rituals and their remote magical practices were modified as a result of a revision promoted by the Kuru reforms, in particular by the establishment of the specific priestly category. By the development of Brahmanic ritualism, centred on fire, these figures were integrated into the *śrauta* system as *adhvaryú* or *udgātá*, the ‘head of the sacrifice’ as head of sacrificial victims, and the related bloody sacrifice was replaced by forms of unbloody sacrifice; the *pravargya* was incorporated into the somic ritual on the one hand, and on the other hand reshaped in the *agnihotra*. The *agnihotra* itself was precluded to the *kṣatriyas*: according to the earlier Brahmanical texts the performer must be always a priest, whereas a ruler cannot be performer, and

⁵⁹ Cf. Rossi 2023.

only in exceptional cases can be sacrificer⁶⁰. However, Heesterman (1985, pp. 89–91) already points out that a pre-classical form of *agni-hotra* could be associated with a warrior context. In the light of the Brahmanical oriented ritual development, it is worth noticing that in the Atharvavedic ancillary literature, intended for the *puróhita* as ‘royal chaplain’, the *agnihotra* is prescribed, as aforementioned. Only the *puróhita* as ‘royal chaplain’ continue to preserve the ancient wisdom, in the service of the sovereign.

References

- BAILEY, Harold Walter (1957), *Dvārā matinām*, in “Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies”, 20, pp. 41–59.
- BEEKES, Robert Stephen Paul (2010), *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, with the assistance of Lucien van Beek, E. J. Brill, Leiden–Boston, 2 Vols.
- BODEWITZ, Hendrik Wilhelm (1973), *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I*, 1–65. *Translation and Commentary. With a Study: Agnihotra and Prāṇāgnihotra*, E. J. Brill, Leiden.
- BODEWITZ, Hendrik Wilhelm (1976), *The Daily Evening and Morning Offering (agnihotra) according to the Brāhmaṇas*, E. J. Brill, Leiden.
- BODEWITZ, Hendrik Wilhelm (2013), *Vedic terms denoting virtues and merits*, in “Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengeellschaft = Études asiatiques: revue de la Société Suisse-Asie”, 67, pp. 31–73.
- BRERETON, Joel P. (2018), *The early evolution of the puróhita*, in Joel P. Brereton, Theodore N. Proferes (eds.), *Creating the Veda, Living the Veda: Selected Papers from the 13th World Sanskrit Conference*, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, pp. 31–43.
- BUITENEN, Johannes Adrianus Bernardus van (1968), *The Pravargya: An Ancient Indian Iconic Ritual. Described and Annotated*, Deccan College, Poona.
- DORE, Moreno (2016), *Men’s relationship with gods in vrātya culture*, in Tiziana Pontillo et al. (eds.), *Cross-cutting South Asian studies: An interdisciplinary approach*, D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, pp. 199–223.
- DŌYAMA, Eijiro, and Toshifumi GOTŌ (2022), *Rig-Veda – Das heilige Wissen: Sechster und siebter Liederkreis*, Verlag der Weltreligionen, Frankfurt am Main–Leipzig.
- DUMONT, Paul-Emile (1964), *The Agnihotra (Or Fire-God Oblation) in the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa: The First Prapāṭhaka of the Second Kāṇḍa of the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa with Translation*, in “Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society”, 108, 4, pp. 337–353.

⁶⁰ Cf. MS 1.8.7, in Bodewitz 1976, p. 116.

- EDHOLM, Kristoffer af (2021), *Rudra Mahāvīra: Vrātya-elements in the Vedic pravargya-complex*, in "Studia Orientalia Electronica", 9, 1, pp. 1–30.
- GELDNER, Karl Friedrich (1951), *Der Rig-Veda*, Vol. 1, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- GESLANI, Marko (2018), *Rites of the God-King. Śānti and Ritual Change in Early Hinduism*, Oxford University Press.
- GONDA, Jan (1975), *Purohita*, in *Selected Studies*, Vol. 2, E. J. Brill, Leiden, pp. 320–337.
- GRIFFITHS, Arlo (2009), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda, Kāṇḍas 6 and 7: A New Edition with Translation and Commentary*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen.
- HALE, Wash Edward (1986), *Asura- in Early Vedic Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi–Varanasi–Patna–Madras.
- HEESTERMAN, Jan C. (1985), *The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London.
- HEESTERMAN, Jan C. (1993), *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- HOUBEN, Jan E.M. (1991), *The Pravargya Brāhmaṇa of the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.
- HOUBEN, Jan E.M. (2000), *The ritual pragmatics of a Vedic hymn: the 'riddle hymn' and the pravargya ritual*, in "Journal of the American Oriental Society", 120, 4, pp. 499–536.
- HOUBEN, Jan E.M. (2010), *Structures, events and ritual practice in the Ṛg-Veda: The gharma and Atri's rescue by the Aśvins*, in David Shulman (ed.), *Language, ritual and poetics in ancient India and Iran: Studies in honor of Shaul Migron*, Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, pp. 87–135.
- INSLER, Stanley (1998), *On the recensions of the Atharva Veda and Atharvan hymn composition*, in "Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasasiens", 42, pp. 5–21.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. (2007), *The Ṛgveda between Two Worlds. Le Ṛgveda entre deux mondes. Quatre conférences au Collège de France en mai 2004*, de Boccard, Paris.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. *Rigveda Translation Commentary*: <<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/I.1-99-2-1-26.pdf>; <http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/VI.1%E2%80%939329-2-1-26.pdf>; <http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/X.1%E2%80%939360-2-1-26.pdf>>.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W., and Joel P. BRERETON (transl.) (2014), *The Rigveda. The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, 3 Vols., Oxford University Press, New York–Oxford.
- KÖHLER, Frank (2008), *Die Dichter und die Sonne im Rgveda*, in XXX. *Deutscher Orientalistentag. Freiburg, 24.–28. September 2007*, Online-Publikation:

- <<https://opendata.uni-halle.de/bitstream/1981185920/114534/63/100277196X.pdf>> [Last accessed 15 November 2025].
- LELLI, Duccio (2020), *Atharvaveda Paippalādasamhitā: Kāṇḍa Fifteen, text, translation, commentary* (Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora), Gorgias Press, Piscataway.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2002), *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda, kāṇḍa five, text, translation, commentary*, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- LUBOTSKY, Alexander (2025), *Remarks on the Chronology of the Paippalāda Samhitā*, in Robert Leach, Oliver Hellwig, Thomans Zehnder (eds.), *Studies in the Atharvaveda. Proceedings of the 3rd Zurich International Conference on Indian Literature and Philosophy*, De Gruyter, Boston–Berlin, pp. 73–82, available at: <<https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783111244433/html>> [Last accessed 5 August 2025].
- MAYRHOFER, Manfred (1992), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, I. Band, Carl Winter, Heidelberg.
- OLDENBERG, Hermann (1912), *R̥gveda: textkritische und exegetische Noten. Bd. II: Siebentes bis zehntes Buch*, Abh. der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaft. zu Göttingen, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, Berlin.
- PARPOLA, Asko (2005), *Gandhāra graves and the gharma pot, the Nāsatyas and the nose: In pursuit of the chariot twins*, in “Ancient Pakistan”, 16, pp. 73–107.
- PINAULT, Georges-Jean (2003), *Une nouvelle connexion entre le substrat indo-iranien et le tokharien commun*, in “Historische Sprachforschung / Historical Linguistics”, 116, 2, pp. 175–189.
- PINAULT, Georges-Jean (2016), *On Brhaspati’s name*, in Jan E.M. Houben, Julieta Rotaru, Michael Witzel (eds.), *Vedic Śākhās: Past, Present, Future. Proceedings of the Fifth International Vedic Workshop, Bucharest 2011*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp. 993–1007.
- PONTILLO, Tiziana (1996), «agni, angāra, āṅgiras»: il fuoco messaggero, in “Aevum”, 70, 1, pp. 3–16.
- PONTILLO, Tiziana (2023), *When the satrins “offer themselves”: The plural agency in Vedic sacrifice*, in Ivan Andrić, Petteri Koskikallio, Kresimir Krnic, Sven Sellmer, Przemysław Szczurek (eds.), *Medhótá śrávaḥ: Felicitation Volume in Honour of Mislav Jezic on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb/Dev Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pp. 197–220.
- ROSSI Paola M. (2023), *Conquering the Sun: Sovereignty and Liminality in the Vedic Mahāvratā Rite*, in Paola M. Rossi (ed.), *Liminal Spaces, and Identity Transformations in South Asian Literatures and Arts*, Milan University Press, Milan, pp. 81–110.
- SAKAMOTO-GOTŌ, Junko (2020), *The Agnihotra, the Agnyupasthāna and the Rājanya*, in Norbert Oettinger, Stefan Schaffner, Thomas Steer (eds.), „Denken sie einfach!“ *Gedenkschrift für Karl Hoffmann* (Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft, Beiheft 30, Neue Folge), Verlag J. H. Röll, Dettelbach, pp. 183–234.

- SANDERSON, Alexis (2007), *Atharvavedins in Tantric Territory*, in Arlo Griffiths, Annette Schmiedchen (eds.), *The Atharvaveda and Its Paippalāda Śākhā: Historical and Philological Papers on a Vedic Tradition*, Shaker Verlag, Aachen, pp. 195–311.
- SCARLATA, Salvatore (1999), *Die Wurzelkomposita im Ṛg-Veda*, Reichert, Wiesbaden.
- SHENDE, N. J. (1950), *Angiras in the Vedic Literature*, in “Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute”, 31, 1/4, pp. 108–131.
- SCHMIDT, Hanns-Peter (1968), *Brhaspati und Indra. Untersuchungen zur vedischen Mythologie und Kulturgeschichte*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.
- SCHWARTZ, Martin (2013), *Avestan kauui-and the Vocabulary of Indo-Iranian Institutions*, in Jamsheed K. Choksy, Jennifer Dubeansky (eds.), *Gifts to a Magus, Indo-Iranian Studies Honoring Firoze Kotwal*, Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, New York, pp. 63–76.
- SPIERS, Carmen Sylvia (2020), *Magie et poésie dans l’Inde ancienne: édition, traduction et commentaire de la Paippalādasamhitā de l’Atharvaveda, livre 3*. Littératures. Université Paris sciences et lettres, available at: <<https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03180907>> [Last accessed 5 August 2025].
- SPIERS, Carmen Sylvia (2025), *The Marginality of the Atharvaveda in Its Historical Context*, in Robert Leach, Oliver Hellwig, Thomas Zehnder (eds.), *Studies in the Atharvaveda. Proceedings of the 3rd Zurich International Conference on Indian Literature and Philosophy*, De Gruyter, Boston–Berlin, pp. 253–276, available at: <<https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783111244433/html>> [Last accessed 5 August 2025].
- WHITAKER, Jarrod (2016), *Numbers, Names, Trials, and Tradition: Reconsidering the Phrase “Thrice Seven” in the Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda*, in “Journal of the American Oriental Society”, 136, 4, pp. 689–704.
- WHITE, David G. (2023), *The Hero’s Head in Indo-European Myth, Ritual, and Iconography*, in “Rivista degli Studi Orientali”, 96, 2–4, pp. 117–139.
- WHITNEY William Dwight and Charles Rockwell LANMAN (1905), *Atharva-Veda Samhitā. Translated with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 2 Vols., Harvard University, Cambridge.
- WITZEL, Michael (1997a), *The Development of the Vedic Canon and Its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu*, in Michael Witzel (ed.), *Inside the Texts. Beyond the Texts. New Approaches to the Study of the Vedas. Proceedings of the International Vedic Workshop, Harvard University, June 1989*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp. 257–345.
- WITZEL, Michael (1997b), *Early Sanskritization: Origins and Development of the Kuru State*, in Bernhard Kölver (ed.), *Recht, Staat und Verwaltung im klassischen Indien / The State, the Law, and Administration in Classical India*, Oldenbourg Verlag, München, pp. 27–52.

WITZEL, Michael, and Toshifumi GOTŌ (2007), *Rig-Veda. Das heilige Wissen. Erster und zweiter Liederkreis*, Verlag der Weltreligionen, Frankfurt am Main–Leipzig.

12. Jealousy, Envy, and Other Disruptive Emotions in the *Atharvaveda*

Marianna Ferrara

Abstract

This essay examines the *Atharvaveda*'s representation of emotions as ritually actionable forces embedded in conceptions of illness, healing, and social relations. Drawing on approaches from medical anthropology and the history of emotions, it explores how emotions such as jealousy, envy, and harmony are culturally codified and ritually managed as factors affecting both individual well-being and collective stability. By analysing a range of healing, protective, and restorative practices, the essay shows how emotional disturbances are understood alongside bodily afflictions and other forms of disorder, and how they are transformed into matters of communal concern through ritual intervention. It argues that the *Atharvaveda* presents a model of emotional regulation in which affective life, healing, and ritual efficacy are inseparable from social cohesion and a relational understanding of personhood, offering new insights into the emotional grammar encoded in the text.

Keywords

Jealousy; Envy; *Atharvaveda*; Emotional Communities; Emotional Practices.

* This research was funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU (Mission 4, Component 2, Investment 1.1, CUP B53D23023280006) under the PRIN PNRR 2022 project “Entangled chronotopes: language, power, bodyscapes and religion in the first ten books of the Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā [ŚS]” (PI: Tiziana Pontillo), within the Rome Research Unit coordinated by Marianna Ferrara.

1. Introduction: Healing Beyond Magic

In recent decades, the study of emotions in ancient texts has become a productive lens through which to explore how societies conceptualize the individual and the collective – understood as both a relational and an affective domain. In this regard, medical anthropologists Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock offer a heuristic framework for conceptualizing the interplay between the “individual body”, the “social body”, and the “body politic”, understood as “regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and in leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference” (Scheper-Hughes, Lock 1987, pp. 7–8).

Building on this framework, this paper examines the treatment of emotions in the *Atharvaveda* as an analytical lens through which to explore how Atharvavedins understood the interrelation of body, mind, and social life. By focusing on ritual responses to emotional disturbance, it investigates how Atharvavedic healing practices articulated a relational conception of personhood in which physiological processes, affective states, interpersonal relations, and ritual efficacy were understood as deeply interconnected dimensions of existence. Through this perspective, the paper argues that Atharvavedic healing discourse is best understood not through the category of ‘magic’ but as a mode of regulating and restoring relational balance across physiological, affective, and social domains, whereby ritual knowledge is mobilized whenever emotional disturbances threaten social and interpersonal equilibrium.

Such an approach becomes all the more necessary in light of the *Atharvaveda*’s complex reception history. Long occupying an uneasy position within traditional exegesis, in part because of its association with healing practices and forms of ritual intervention concerned with bodily affliction (Spiers 2025b, pp. 263–269), the *Atharvaveda* has been consistently evaluated in modern scholarship through comparison with other Vedic *corpora*, frequently to its detriment. At the same time, Western Indology has been shaped by a complex interplay of fascination, amusement, and a sense of cultural distance or superiority towards these ancient practices, often framed as ‘spells’ and ‘charms’, thereby catering to the curiosity of its readers and contributing to a preconfigured interpretative horizon.

These multiple trajectories have made the *Atharvaveda* a particularly original and theoretically productive field of inquiry, not least for reconstructing the history of scholarship devoted to its cultural and intellectual significance across different academic traditions (Ferrara 2021). At the same time, in dialogue with religious studies and in light of a growing awareness of the biases embedded in earlier translations, some Vedic scholars have increasingly engaged critically with the category of ‘magic’, seeking instead to read Atharvavedic texts through the lenses of agency and performance (e.g., Whitaker 2025; Spiers 2025a, 2025b). In particular, recent anthologies and translations have undoubtedly contributed to making the *Atharvaveda* more accessible. Yet, by focusing primarily on hymns concerned with healing, fertility, protection, and conjugal harmony¹, they often reinforce the text’s association with the ritual anxieties of everyday life and downplay not only the hymns’ political significance and connections to kingship but also the ways in which these hymns mobilize and regulate individual emotions in the service of social and political order².

Although recent scholarship no longer employs the category of ‘magic’ with the overt Victorian biases that once informed it, the impulse to label as ‘magical’ those practices that resist easy incorporation into normative definitions of ‘religion’ has not entirely disappeared³. Yet it is precisely this conceptual instability that has sustained ongoing debates about whether ‘magic’ can still function as a useful heuristic category for understanding ancient societies and their religious practices (see Sanzo 2020). Whether Atharvavedic practices should ultimately be classified as ‘magical’ tells us less about the *Atharvaveda* itself than about the conceptual frameworks through which modern scholarship has sought to classify it. More fruitful, by contrast, is the question of how ritual-healing practices came to occupy a marginal position within the intellectual traditions that gradually negotiated the status of the Atharvavedic corpus within the Vedic canon, for it is

¹ Ambrosini 1980; Orlandi 1992; Sevilla Rodríguez 2002; Elizarenkova 2005–2010; Rossi 2025.

² For references to political life, see, for instances, Kubisch 2012; Selva 2019; Lelli 2020; Spier 2025b. For medieval time, see Witzel 2016.

³ Cf. the nuanced but ultimately deliberate use of the term magic in Spiers 2025a, pp. 17–84, where the notion is defended in a structural rather than descriptive sense, insofar as it marks the discursively constructed alterity of Atharvavedic knowledge in relation to the other Veda.

through such processes of classification and exclusion that notions of authority and alterity were articulated and maintained.

The issue extends far beyond the classification of the *Atharvaveda* itself, as it calls into question the persistence of Cartesian dichotomies – such as rational/irrational, religious/magical, and mind/body – that continue to shape modern ways of conceptualizing the body and, more broadly, the scholarly tendency to marginalize non-normative traditions through the label of ‘magic’ (Bell 2006). As Philippe Descola (2005) has persuasively argued, the opposition between nature and culture, often treated as self-evident, belongs to a specific modern naturalist ontology rather than to a universal mode of classification. Approaching the *Atharvaveda* from a fresh perspective therefore requires engagement with both the possibilities and the limitations of these recent debates, which concern not only the categories through which modern scholarship interprets and classifies the past, but also the ways in which textual traditions themselves have assembled, organized, and transmitted bodies of knowledge, producing and negotiating hierarchies, taxonomies, and forms of marginalization in the process.

In order to situate Atharvavedic healing practices within a broader analytical context, and to move beyond the *vexata quaestio* of whether ‘magic’ constitutes a useful interpretive category, a different perspective is required, one that avoids the uncritical reproduction of these inherited dichotomies. Anthropological approaches to illness and healing have long emphasized the plurality of explanatory frameworks through which suffering is understood (e.g., Hahn 1984), highlighting that affliction may be attributed not only to physiological dysfunction but also to disruptions in social relations, moral order, or extra-human forms of agency. Particularly relevant here is the “mindful body” framework developed by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), whose emphasis on the interrelation of bodily experience, social relations, and political structures has remained highly influential in medical anthropology. Subsequent research has further developed these insights (e.g., Kirmayer and Valaskakis 2009; Sax 2009; Sax et al. 2010; Dein 2020; Kirmayer et al. 2015), treating illness and healing as phenomena emerging through the interaction of biological, social, cultural, emotional, and experiential dimensions.

This perspective is particularly useful for approaching Atharvavedic materials, where bodily afflictions, emotional disturbances, hostile ritual actions, interpersonal tensions, and extra-human agencies fre-

quently overlap and are addressed through a repertoire of ritual practices. It allows us to observe which binaries are at work in the *Atharvaveda* and how they are discursively produced and maintained, rather than presupposing oppositions such as magic versus religion. In doing so, it reveals a mode of understanding reality that interrelates the bodily, emotional, social, and transpersonal dimensions of experience.

This reading converges productively with recent reflections on Vedic conceptions of personhood⁴, which emphasize a porous and relational understanding of the individual rather than the notion of a bounded self, highlighting the continuity between the self and the wider world of human, cosmic, and extra-human relations. For instance, Matthew I. Robertson argues that early Vedic texts such as the *R̥gveda* and the *Atharvaveda* portray personhood as so expansive and inseparable from the world itself that the notion of “worldhood” more adequately captures their underlying anthropology than that of “personhood” (Robertson 2024, p. 5). Building on Descola’s critique of modern naturalism (2005, pp. 16ff.), one may further ask whether the Vedic material points towards a different distribution of agency, materiality, and interiority. If so, it not only challenges the sharp distinction between nature and culture, but also invites us to rethink illness, healing, and ritual efficacy in the *Atharvaveda* as processes unfolding within a relational world.

It must be acknowledged, however, that this idea is not entirely new within Vedic studies. Already in 1978, Karel Werner observed that the Vedic understanding of the human being and of personality does not conceive of either as an isolated entity, but rather in terms of their essential connectedness with the whole of existence. More recently, Joanna Jurewicz (2018, pp. 261–266) has shown that the conceptualization of reality in the *Śaunakīya* recension of the *Atharvaveda* is articulated through the figure of the human being, in a manner comparable to its elaboration in the *Puruṣasūkta*. Such perspectives, grounded in close philological engagement with the Vedic texts, encourage a more nuanced understanding of how permeability and the circulation of affective and material influences are foregrounded. These analytical categories are essential for grasping the ways emotions are encoded in the *Atharvaveda* and for recognizing how conceptions of the body shape the ritual management of affliction and emotional disturbance. In turn,

⁴ Cf. Norelius 2023, esp. chaps. 1 and 11; Robertson 2024, chap. 1.

this logic clarifies how ritual healing, as conceived and practised by Atharvavedic specialists, was understood to intervene in response to everyday anxieties and concerns about ritual harm.

Further insights emerge from examining the ways in which these healing rituals are themselves structured and imagined to operate. In this regard, Jonathan Z. Smith's (1987) conception of ritual as a practice that does not simply mirror reality but actively reorders it through micro-adjustments provides a particularly useful analytical framework. More recent experimental anthropological research has further argued that ritual efficacy should not be sought primarily in supernatural causation but in its capacity to coordinate attention, regulate emotion, reinforce commitment, and strengthen social cohesion (Xygalatas 2022). Drawing on these insights, Atharvavedic utterances may be interpreted as operations that relocate emotional disturbance within a controlled ritual frame, where its effects are neutralized, reversed, transformed, or redirected. The emotions invoked in these utterances are never merely individual states; rather, they are embedded in a social arena where personal experience and collective expectations intersect through conceptions of healing, protection, vulnerability, affliction, and social belonging. It is precisely this dual individual and social dimension that leads emotions to be ritually encoded as shared expressions. Rather than providing direct access to subjective inner states, these practices disclose how communities conceptualized vulnerability, conflict, protection, well-being, and social integration. In this sense, Atharvavedic rituals are significant not only for what they sought to accomplish, but also for what they disclose about the concerns, aspirations, anxieties, and social imaginaries that made such practices meaningful and effective in the eyes of their users⁵.

To capture this intersection between individual experience and collective life, historians Barbara Rosenwein (2002, 2006) and William M. Reddy (2001) developed influential analytical frameworks that place emotions at the centre of social organization and cultural life. Rosenwein coined the term "emotional communities" to identify groups that interpret, judge, and respond to emotions according to collective standards – standards that serve simultaneously to foster social cohesion and to mark symbolic boundaries. Reddy, in turn, introduced the notion

⁵ On the *Śaunakīya* tradition as a distinctive interpretative milieu centred on the practical application of mantras to everyday concerns, see Patton 2011.

of “emotional regimes” to refer to the set of normative emotions sanctioned by a given culture, together with the rituals, institutions, and ‘emotives’ (performative expressions of emotion) that reinforce and sustain them. More recently, the cultural anthropologist Monique Scheer (2012) expanded this framework, suggesting that emotions should be understood as “practices”, techniques that mobilize and reconfigure affective states through embodied, material, and linguistic means.

In this light, emotions become a valuable object of historical inquiry not because they provide access to subjective inner states, whose reconstruction remains ultimately elusive, but because they disclose how Atharvavedins conceptualized the relationship between body, mind, and world. They also shed light on the historical formation of Atharvavedic expertise itself: a distinctive form of knowledge situated at the intersection of ritual practice, religious authority, bodily healing, and the management of emotional distress.

2. Feeling and Healing Socially

Within the framework of the cultural study of emotions, certain emotions emerge as cultural and psychosocial phenomena whose significance lies in their impact on collective life (Morris 1992). This is particularly evident in Atharvavedic healing practices that address states of emotional disturbance such as fear, anxiety, madness, envy, and jealousy, treating emotional disequilibrium as a potential source of illness (cf. Prabhakar Sardeshmukh 1987). We can thus see how Atharvavedic knowledge contributes to the ritual domestication and reconfiguration of affective states – what modern observers might describe as “inner” experiences – in the interest of communal stability, giving them expression through socially regulated forms. As Victor Turner (1974, pp. 39–41) has suggested, ritual action may provide a redressive framework through which crises can be symbolically addressed. From this perspective, Atharvavedic healing practices may be understood as contexts in which emotional disturbances linked to illness, affliction, or ritual threat are rendered intelligible and subjected to controlled ritual intervention.

The Atharvavedic material likewise allows us to trace the contours of “emotional communities” (Rosenwein) and “emotional regimes” (Reddy), insofar as healing discourses delineate the boundaries of acceptable affect and integrate individual vulnerability into a shared cul-

tural grammar of emotions. Within this framework, inner experience and outer expression converge in the materiality of ritual. This process is not enacted through language alone but is materially embedded in ritual objects and substances. Objects such as amulets, plants, and herbs become emotionally significant and acquire the capacity to mediate, shape, and sustain socially desirable relationships (Tarlow 2012; Foxhall 2012). As Arjun Appadurai (1986, p. 5) has famously argued, “we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, and their trajectories.”

Von Scheve and Ismer understand collective emotions as “the *synchronous convergence in affective responding*” and suggest that collective emotions emerge from mechanisms of social appraisal, expressive behaviour, and cultural practice⁶. If emotions are understood not as isolated psychological experiences but as part of a broader system of relational knowledge (cf. Sacha 2023), closely tied to cosmological representations, social norms, and ritual efficacy, similar mechanisms can be identified in Atharvavedic utterances concerned with emotional disturbance and its consequences, aimed at restoring mental balance or social order (Chakraborty 1977).

Rather than classifying these utterances solely according to their domains of application – such as agriculture, love, battle, or health – it is also possible to classify them according to the mechanisms through which they were expected to operate⁷. I propose to synthesize these mechanisms as *removing*, *turning back*, and *restoring*. While the Atharvavedic text does not explicitly employ this classification, the underlying logic can nevertheless be reconstructed from the material and allows us to foreground the emotions implicated in what Jonathan Z. Smith (1987, p. 65) terms “modes of engagement” with situations perceived as dangerous.

2.1 Removing

The class of utterances that I propose to categorize as ‘removing’ consists of formulas intended to dispel harmful influences – such as curs-

⁶ Von Scheve, Ismer 2013, p. 407 (italics in the original), and pp. 409–411.

⁷ Cf. Elizarenkova 2005–2010, Vol. 1, pp. 46–47, who emphasizes the functional dimension of utterances while resisting their confinement within rigid categories of magic, religion, or science.

es, malevolent beings, or diseases – often through the use of plants, water, or symbolic acts of transference. In several instances, rites aim to ‘wash away’ or displace illness onto another entity; fever, for example, may be transferred to an animal. The act of driving away an affliction is often conveyed through verbal prefixes such as *nír*, *āpa* or *úd*, combined with verbal roots denoting movement, including (1) *nud* ‘to expel, remove’, (2) *nī* ‘to lead away’, (3) *nāśay* in the causative form ‘to cause to be lost or disappear, drive away, expel, remove, destroy, efface’, or (4) *vas* ‘to drive away by shining’:

- (1) *sārād etv āpa nudāma enām* ‘Afar, let her go: away we drive her’ (ŚS 10.1.1c ~ PS 16.35.1);
- (2) *tātas pári... úd imāṃ nayāmi* ‘I lead this one here away from there’ (ŚS 1.10.1cd ~ PS 1.9.1d);
- (3) *nāśáyāmaḥ / nír ... ajāmasi / cātayāmahe* ‘[We, Atharvavedins] make x disappear’ / ‘we cast x out’ / ‘we banish x from y’ (ŚS 2.14.1d/2a/2b) (cf. PS 17.12–17.15 infra/ PS 2.4.4a; 17.44.2d, 17.44.3b);
- (4) *āpeyaṃ rātry uchatv āpochantv abhikṛtvārīḥ* ‘Let this night be shone away, let the maleficent ones be shone away’ (ŚS 2.8.2ab).

These acts do not annihilate affliction but displace it, relocating danger from the afflicted body into a ritually defined elsewhere.

2.2 Turning back

The class of utterances that I understand as ‘turning back’ utterances aims at harming an adversary or repelling a curse and often relies on verbal and symbolic aggression. Unlike formulas of removal, these utterances do not seek to eliminate danger but to reassign it to its point of origin, thereby neutralizing it through controlled reversal. Their purpose is not merely to defend, but to redirect danger back to its source (5, 6, 7), as in ritual counteractions that return poison to a snake or curses to the one who uttered them. The distinction proposed here is not based on the semantic content of the formulas, but on the type of ritual operation through which danger is spatially and symbolically reconfigured.

Recurrent formulas read as follows:

- (5) reversal through redirected movement, where movement is without direct aggression and explicitly aims to create spatial distance:

- *pári vṛṇaktu* ‘He shall ward off x’ (ŚS 1.30.3d);
- *púnar yantu* ‘Let [them] go back again’ (refrain in ŚS 2.24);
- *apa nayantu* ‘Let [them] go away’ (ŚS 2.24);
- *pratyág úpa padyatām* ‘Let [it] go back unto x’ (ŚS 4.18.2d);
- *pratyák pratipráhiṇmo* ‘Backward(s) we send [it]’ (ŚS 10.1.5c);

(6) reversal through enforced retreat. In this subset, reversal takes the form of forced retreat, in which the hostile agent is compelled to withdraw rather than merely redirected:

- *té páráñco vyathantāṇi* ‘Let them stagger away’ (a recurring refrain throughout ŚS 4.40);
- *pratyák kṛtyá dūṣáyann eti vīráh*, ‘As a hero, it goes forth repelling the maleficent ritual act backward’ (ŚS 8.5.2cd);

(7) reversal through counter-attack. Here, reversal is explicitly expressed by the adverb *pratyāñc*, which marks a symmetrical counter-action whereby the very substance or force of the danger is redirected against its originator:

- *pratyág ví bhindhi* ‘Split you turning towards [the attacker]’ (ŚS 4.19.5c ~ PS 5.25.5c);
- *pratyág abhy ètu tvā viśám* ‘Let the poison come back towards you’ (ŚS 5.13.5d ~ PS 8.2.3d);
- *pratyág enaṁ śapáthah sṛṣṭāḥ yantu* ‘Let the unleashed curses return back towards it’ (ŚS 8.3.14b ~ PS 16.7.4b);
- *pratyák kartāram ṛchatu* ‘Let [counteraction] reach back the one who made [the hostile action]’ (ŚS 4.19.6d);
- *pratīcī ni hi paptat / pratyak kartāram ṛcchatu / pratīcī śarur ṛchatu* ‘Let it [i.e., lightning] fall back in reverse / Let it reach the one who made it / Let the arrow, turned backward, reach him [who launched it]’ (PS 19.3.1b/1c/19.3.2c).

The logic of reversal at work in these formulas exemplifies what Smith identifies as a ritual strategy of mirroring danger back onto its source, thereby neutralizing its disruptive potential through controlled inversion⁸. Taken together, these modes form a gradient of ritual intensifi-

⁸ On ritual as a practice that does not mirror reality but actively reorders it through processes of controlled placement and rectification, see Smith 1987, esp. pp. xii–xiii, 96–117. Smith draws on Lévi-Strauss’s notion of ritual “micro-adjustment” to argue that ritual action operates through the meticulous repositioning and regulation of elements within a structured symbolic field. The logic of reversal discussed here

cation, ranging from simple redirection to enforced retreat and, finally, to active counter-attack.

2.3 Restoring

Utterances of restoration seek to reconstitute a desirable state – whether health, prosperity, or emotional balance – and often employ amulets or precious substances such as gold and pearls, which symbolize continuity and well-being (Whitaker 2004). Restoration thus implies a return to harmony, often associated with good health or with positive states such as peace, gratitude, and joy. A striking example of this restorative mode is provided by PS 4.15, a healing hymn for “open fractures” (Griffiths, Lubotsky 2001, p. 196), in which the Atharvavedin effects a ritual recomposition by repeatedly enjoining the separated parts of the body to come together again:

saṃ majjā majjñā bhavatu
sam u te paruṣā paruḥ |
saṃ te māṃsaya viśrastam
saṃ snāva sam u parva te || 1 ||
majjā majjñā saṃ dhīyatām
asthāsthy api rohatu |
snāva te saṃ dadhmaḥ snāvnā
carmaṇā carma rohatu || 2 ||
loma lomnā saṃ dhīyatām
tvacā saṃ kalpayāt tvacam |
asṛk te asnā rohatu
māṃsaṃ māṃsena rohatu || 3 ||

Let marrow come together with marrow, and your joint together with joint, together what of your flesh has fallen apart, together sinew and together your bone.

Let marrow be put together with marrow, let bone grow over with bone. We put together your sinew with sinew, let skin grow with skin.

Let hair be put together with hair. [The *rohiṇī*-plant] shall fit together skin with skin. Let your blood grow with blood; let flesh grow with flesh. (Griffiths, Lubotsky 2001, pp. 197–198)

may be understood as one such form of ritual rectification, whereby disorder is not eliminated but relocated and contained within a controlled frame.

Through these utterances, the fragmented body is returned to a state of wholeness, a condition that Joanna Jurewicz has identified as belonging to the “domain of the ‘full’ (*pūrṇa*)” (2018, p. 293). While Jurewicz develops this argument primarily in philosophical terms, her discussion of the ritual semantics of “the full” (*pūrṇa*) and “the empty” provides a useful framework for rethinking Atharvavedic healing practices. Rituals addressing disease, injury, emotional disturbance, or other states of imbalance may be seen as bringing into the ritual space the ideal of ‘the full’ as an optimal condition, understood both as individual well-being and as a socially legible expression of wellness.

Restoration, however, does not operate only through positive re-composition. Rather, it is reinforced by a complementary, oppositional logic directed against the adversary, functioning through the strategic production of depletion. By contrast, the opposite condition, that of diminished well-being resulting from rupture or loss, is ritually portrayed as a state of emptiness. In a hymn attested in both recensions, the Atharvavedin who seeks to weaken a man in the assembly utters a malediction that explicitly enjoins the dispute to become ‘devoid of sap’ (*arasā*), repeated as a refrain six times, thereby emptying it of its dialectical force:

ŚS 2.27.1 ~ PS 2.16.1
néc chātruh prāśaṇ jayāti
sāhamānābhibhūr asi |
prāśaṇ prātiprāśo jahy
arasān kṛnv oṣadhe ||

May [my] adversary by no means win the dispute; you are overpowering and dominant. Strike the dispute of [my] counter-disputant. O [efficacious] plant, make them sapless/tasteless.
 (Refrain in vv. 1–6)

In this case, restoration for the supplicant operates through the construction of a desirable advantage that harms the adversary. Significantly, this process is articulated through the metaphor of a juice-bearing plant, a choice that is far from accidental: the plant embodies substance, vitality, and *rāsa* (i.e., sap or consequential taste), and thus provides the very measure against which emptiness is defined. By ritually mobilizing the plant to ‘drain’ the dispute of its sap, the utterance stages a contrast between the presence and the absence of substance, making the loss of efficacy both intelligible and operative within the

ritual frame. Moreover, *ósadhī* denotes a specific class of plant, typically curative or medicinal (Pinault 2003–2004), yet in this context it is directed against a target and thus produces a harmful effect, comparable to a form of ritual poisoning.

Outside competitive or political contexts, the restorative logic unfolds in explicitly beneficial ways. When *ósadhī*-type plants are employed for beneficial aesthetic or relational purposes, their efficacy is invoked by the Atharvavedins to secure for the supplicant a socially desirable or functional status: black hair (PS 19.40.1) or longevity (ŚS 19.32.1) for one who is ageing; a husband for a woman who does not yet have one (ŚS 3.18.1); or exclusive conjugal allegiance, ensuring that the husband belongs wholly to her and becomes the father of her sons, in cases of rivalry (PS 19.39.12).

In their therapeutic use, such plants are portrayed as actively restoring bodily order. Indeed, from a botanical perspective, the vegetal world provides the very language through which disorder, including illness as a form of disorder, is conceived and treated among the Atharvavedins. The attribution of such agency to specific herbs, such as *ósadhī*-type plants, is not arbitrary, but can be understood as reflecting an epistemic orientation grounded in the observation of vegetal processes. The observable resilience of plants, including their capacity to seal wounds, regenerate, and repel pathogens or invasive organisms, thus offers a tangible model for imagining vegetal intervention against intrusive or destructive agents.

In this sense, the spectrum of emotions ritualized in the *Atharvaveda* along the fullness–order / emptiness–disorder axis is strikingly broad, ranging from serenity, harmony, gratitude, and well-being to anxiety, guilt, jealousy, envy, and hostility. Such emotional disturbances are conceptualized as tangible states and are often described using the same vocabulary applied to physical afflictions, such as wounds, coughs, fevers, or sores⁹. The lexicon attests to a cultural understanding of emotions as simultaneously bodily and psychological, and therefore susceptible to ritual intervention. If the body is not conceived as a closed container but as an open site, always already in contact with

⁹ The symbolic weight of fullness (*pūrṇa*) in Vedic and post-Vedic ritual culture, as Minoru Hara (2003–2004) has shown, extends far beyond material abundance, signifying integrity, auspiciousness, and cosmic order. Within such a framework, depletion denotes a desirable lack when attributed to adversaries, but an undesirable and destabilizing condition when affecting the self, one that calls for ritual redress.

its environment and traversed by global planes (cf. Robertson 2024), it can be treated as a space to be cleansed, with afflictions perceived as foreign agents that must be expelled. This spatial metaphor often contrasts ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, linking illness or emotional disturbance to unwanted intrusion. Among the defining features of the *Atharvaveda* is precisely this practical concern with healing, protection, and the regulation of interpersonal tensions. Its hymns and rituals attest to practices that aim to transform feelings into objectified and operative forces that must be expelled, neutralized, or restored. Together, these three modes – removing, turning back, and restoring – outline a repertoire of ritual strategies through which affective danger is rendered intelligible and governable.

3. Jealousy and harmony within a social dialectic

Within the broader framework of socially significant emotions in the *Atharvaveda*, targeted by utterances aimed at removing, turning back, or restoring, jealousy and envy constitute a particularly revealing case. In Atharvavedic discourse, they can be read in opposition to harmony within the same social dynamic: jealousy and envy threaten social cohesion, whereas harmony sustains it. In Turner’s terms (cf. 1969), jealousy and envy function as breaches within the social field, triggering ritualized forms of redressive action through which the community seeks reintegration rather than rupture. Such processes exemplify what von Scheve and Ismer (2013, p. 410) describe as “We-mode” emotions, in which affective states are experienced and managed on behalf of the group, reinforcing social identity and collective stability. The *Atharvaveda* consistently emphasizes the interdependence of private and collective life: safeguarding the latter is crucial for securing the former. This dynamic is especially evident in the sphere of political life (assemblies, preparation for battle), where emotions can either undermine or strengthen familial and communal bonds. Yet even a glimpse into private life, such as jealousy over a woman or hostility among suitors, proves useful for understanding how the private sphere supports the political body, insofar as harmony in the micro-dimension contributes to reinforcing harmony in the macro-dimension.

The Atharvavedic hymns frequently portray jealousy and hostility as tangible forces that must be expelled, cleansed, or neutralized, often through ritual operations that drain the body or the social field of their

harmful charge. The language employed to describe these emotions mirrors that used for diseases and bodily afflictions – wounds, coughs, fevers – underscoring the perceived materiality of negative affect¹⁰.

Conversely, emotions such as gratitude, joy, and well-being are cultivated and preserved through rituals that restore or stabilize desirable states, thereby re-establishing conditions of fullness associated with health, longevity, prosperity, offspring, fertile crops, and thriving livestock. The ritualization of emotions hinges on their materialization. Disturbing feelings are conceived as forces requiring ritual intervention. Rituals entail action and are inherently transformative, whether they bring about a new condition, restore a previous one, or prevent an adverse change. In this sense, the ritual recitation of specific Atharvavedic verses functions as a therapeutic intervention, comparable to the use of amulets or efficacious formulas, while other utterances operate as forms of ritual counteraction designed to neutralize or reverse harmful acts.

3.1 Jealousy (*īrṣyā*) as heat and inner agitation

In the *Atharvaveda*, the notion of *īrṣyā*, often translated as ‘jealousy’, emerges as a rich emotional category, both linguistically and ritually. In Vedic usage, *īrṣyā* denotes a state of agitation rooted in rivalry and fear of loss, frequently linked to relationships marked by possession and desire. Its destructive potential – psychological as well as social – is reflected in its recurrent association with fire, illness, and the loss of self-control. Recent philosophical analyses, however, have sought to clarify the conceptual distinction between jealousy and envy, a nuance that proves crucial for interpreting Atharvavedic emotional categories. As the philosopher of emotions Sara Protasi (2017) argues, jealousy and envy are distinct emotions: envy stems from the perception of lack, while jealousy arises from the perception of loss. This “lack vs. loss” model resonates strongly with the Atharvavedic representation

¹⁰ Such a conceptual overlap is not isolated to the Atharvavedic corpus: early Indian traditions more broadly attest to a tendency to classify and personify disease as a quasi-agentive force, suggesting a shared epistemological framework in which bodily, moral, and affective disturbances are treated as actionable entities. Cf., for instance, Bollée 2003–2004 on the classificatory and quasi-agentive treatment of disease in the Śvetāmbara Jain canon.

of *īrṣyā́* as a burning force that threatens to deprive one of an already possessed good, rather than of a merely desired one.

Etymologically, the Vedic root *īrṣ-* conveys meanings such as ‘to be emotionally agitated’, ‘to feel rivalry’, or ‘to be resentful’. While its Indo-Iranian cognates point primarily to envy and jealousy (Mayrhofer 1992, pp. 206–207), the broader semantic network associated with related Indo-European forms includes anger, malevolence, strife, insult, and violent hostility (Pokorny 1959, pp. 336–337). In Atharvavedic hymns where *īrṣyā́* is explicitly mentioned, this emotional disturbance is not depicted as a fleeting mood but as an autonomous force lodged in the heart, capable of destabilizing both individual balance and communal harmony. If we consider the Vedic notion of the person as porous, as Norelius (2023) and Robertson (2024) have suggested, emotional disturbances such as envy or jealousy are not merely internal states but disruptive intrusions into the person–world continuum that can be extracted from one person and relocated elsewhere. The fact that several hymns preserve ritual strategies through which communities sought to construe jealousy as an externalized threat requiring ritual neutralization provides a strong basis for viewing its domestication as a social necessity. Equally significant is the narrative efficacy of transferring a harmful emotion onto an enemy.

In PS 20.14.4c, the remedy for this emotion is described as *saṃvegasya bheṣaja*, ‘a remedy against agitation’, whereas elsewhere it is referred to simply as ‘the remedy called against jealousy’ (*īrṣyā́yā nāma bheṣajām*, PS 20.14.3c; 20.14.4b ~ ŚS 7.45). Yet the same hymn also preserves the inverse operation: whereas the therapeutic rite removes anger (*manyu*) from the heart of the afflicted person, the malediction implants that same anger in the heart of a rival:

PS 20.14.6

*apa māṛjmy apanayan
manyuṃ te hṛdayād adhi |
amuṣminn īrṣyām ā dadhmas
tatro enāṃ ni dadhmasi ||*

I wipe away, removing [it], the anger from your heart. Upon that one we place jealousy; there we lay it down. (Cf. Kubisch 2012, p. 89)

In the *Śaunakīya* recension, jealousy is largely portrayed as a burning flame within the heart (*hṛdaya*), an affective fire that must be ritually

extinguished, whereas in the *Paippalāda* version it appears as a disquieting emotion:

ŚS 6.18.1

īrṣyāyā dhrājīṇi prathamāṇi
prathamāsyā utāparām |
agnīṇi hṛdayyāṇi śokaṇi
tāṇi te nīr vāpayāmasi ||

The first impulse of jealousy **and the one after the first, the fire, the sorrow in the heart** – we extinguish it for you.

~ PS 19.7.13

īrṣyāyā dhrājīṇi prathamām
adhamām uttamām uta |
manyuṇi hṛdayyāṇi śokaṇi
tāṇi te nīr mantrayāmahe ||

The first impulse of jealousy, **the lowest, and also the highest, the rage, the sorrow in the heart** – we dispel it for you.

In both recensions, jealousy is located in the heart and presented as a consuming emotion. In the *Śaunakīya* recension, it appears as an impulse that follows another, like a sudden blast (Whitney), or as something that springs forth and must be extinguished. In the *Paippalāda* recension, by contrast, it takes the form of a disquieting and destabilizing flux that pervades the person and must be ritually dispelled. The hymns thus explicitly locate jealousy in the heart (*hṛdaya*), describing it as a fire or an intense inner agitation. The *Kauśikasūtra*, however, shifts the locus of ritual intervention from the heart to the *vakṣaṇāḥ* ('flanks', 'sides of the chest'), directing the officiant's actions towards this part of the body¹¹.

From the perspective of the *Kauśikasūtra*, Atharvavedic ritual appears to render an affective disturbance accessible to ritual intervention by acting upon it through *mantra* recitation (*pratijāpa*), administration of ritually prepared substances (*pradāna*), and ritual contact with the afflicted parts of the body (*abhimarśana*)¹². Keśava's later

¹¹ KauśS 36.26: *prathamena vakṣaṇāsu mantroktam*, "Mit dem zuerst citierten Liede (VI. 18 also) (thut er) auf den Bauch (die Weichen? der eifersüchtigen Person) das im Liede Genannte." (Caland 1900, p. 123)

¹² KauśS 36.25: *iti pratijāpaḥ pradānābhimarśanāni*, "Den Liedern VI. 18, VII. 45 und der Strophe VII. 74. 3 kommen zu das Gegenflüstern, das Übergeben, das Berühren

commentary further explicates the gestures of the Atharvavedic specialist, describing how he intervenes upon the jealousy-afflicted person¹³ by first directing a ritual gaze upon him (*dr̥ṣṭvā*), then blowing upon his chest (*dhamati*), touching him (*spr̥ṣtvā*), and giving him ritually prepared mixtures to consume, all while reciting specific *mantras*: ŚS 6.18a (*īr̥ṣyāyā dhr̥ājīṃ prathamām*), ŚS 7.45.1a (*jānād viśvajānīnāt*), and ŚS 7.74.3a (*tvāṣṭrēṇāhām*). As a result, according to Keśava's gloss, *īr̥ṣyā vinaśyati*, 'jealousy disappears'.

3.2 Jealousy (*īr̥ṣyā*) as a ritual depletion

There is, however, one aspect that neither the *Kauśikasūtra* nor Keśava's commentary allows us to recover but that proves particularly significant in ŚS 6.18. Several verses point to a subtle liminal condition between the loss of *mānas*, 'will' or 'mind', and a condition described as *mṛtāmanas*, generally rendered as 'dead-minded'. The notion of *mṛtāmanas* thus establishes an important connection between the experience of *īr̥ṣyā* and a progressive depletion of *mānas*, suggesting that this emotional impulse is conceived as a force capable of weakening or draining vital cognitive and affective capacities.

Whitney, for instance, translates the relevant passage as follows:

ŚS 6.18.2

yāthā bhūmir mṛtāmanā
mṛtān mṛtāmanastarā |
yāthotā mamrūṣo māna
evēr̥ṣyōr mṛtāṃ mānaḥ | |

As the earth [is] dead-minded, more dead-minded than a dead man, and as [is] the mind of one who has died, so of the jealous man the mind [be] dead. (Whitney 1905, p. 293)

(d.h. wer sich von der Eifersucht einer Frau oder eines Mannes befreien will, flüstert eins der hier citierten Lieder, wenn er dieser Person begegnet, gibt ihr einen beliebigen Gegenstand, den er mit dem Liede eingeseget hat, oder berührt sie, das Lied flüsternd.)" (Caland 1900, p. 123). On this point, cf. also Bahulkar 1994, p. 224, fn 1: "He [Dārila] means that the *abhimar̥ṣana* should be done to those parts of body which are afflicted."

¹³ This ritual is directed at men, as Keśava introduces the section under the heading *strīviṣaya īr̥ṣyāvīnāśakāni* ("remedies for the removal of jealousy concerning a woman").

However, in this stanza, the analogies point to a subtle limen between a death of ‘will’ or death of ‘mind’ (*mānas*) and a condition of ‘mortal peacefulness’ (the state of being *mṛtāmanas*), which, when associated with the earth, may suggest the absence of seismic or subterranean movement. From such a perspective, to help the jealous man acquire a mind like that of the dead is to help him become calm like the earth after an earthquake. His healing, therefore, consists in pacifying jealousy, here conceived as an inner seismic disturbance that unsettles the mind. We could, thus, interpret the stanza as follows:

As the earth is still [*mṛtāmanas* ‘dead-minded’], more still than the dead (themselves), and just as the mind of one who has just died¹⁴ [ceases to move, even while the body remains warm], so may the mind of the jealous man become stilled (*mṛtā*) [even if the body is inflamed by the fire of jealousy].

If this interpretation is correct, the imagery portrays jealousy as an inflaming process that agitates the inner faculties. What I describe as an ‘inner earthquake’ subsides only when mental activity itself is suspended, as in the case of one newly dead, whose body remains warm while the mind no longer moves. The healing formula in this hymn thus appears as an attempt to restore self-mastery by extinguishing jealousy, understood as a disruptive force to be brought back within an ideal of balance – like the earth once its tremors have ceased.

Following Protasi (2017, p. 317), jealousy arises when a subject perceives a threat to a valued possession or relationship. It therefore involves a triadic structure composed of the subject, the valued object whose loss is feared, and a rival who threatens that object. This relational pattern is clearly reflected in the Atharvavedic material. Some hymns (ŚS 5.6; 6.138) present jealousy as an antagonistic force mobilized against a rival, prompting the jealous individual to seek Atharvavedic intervention. Others (ŚS 6.18; 7.46; 7.47) frame jealousy as a disruptive emotion within conjugal relations and prescribe rites performed by women to extinguish male ‘burning’ emotions and restore harmony.

¹⁴ I thank Prof. Alexander Lubotsky for pointing out that *mamrúṣa*, a perfect participle of the verbal root *mṛ-*, denotes precisely the moment immediately following physical death, when the body is still warm.

In ŚS 6.18, the recurring healing formula – *nīr vāpayāmasi* ('we extinguish it') and, in other cases, *adūduṣam* ('we have damaged it', that is, rendered it ineffective or inoperative) – employs the same vocabulary used for expelling diseases or counteracting a malediction. The ritual procedures described in the *Kauśikasūtra* and clarified by Dārila's comments on *abhimarśana* show that jealousy was approached through the same therapeutic framework as bodily affliction¹⁵. Unlike physical fire, ritually identified with Agni and requiring constant nourishment and maintenance (Jurewicz 2018, pp. 266ff.), the fire of jealousy is precisely the kind of flame that must be ritually extinguished and depleted. In both cases, however, the Atharvavedic officiant emerges as a specialist in the management of fire, capable of discerning which flames must be sustained and which must be extinguished.

In sum, the references to *īrṣyā* as an emotion to be extinguished illustrate how destructive affects such as jealousy and envy were ritually managed and culturally disciplined, a view facilitated by the Atharvavedins' experience with diseases. The ritual treatment of these disturbances thus provides valuable evidence for understanding how these specialists conceived the relations between body, mind, and affective states. The ultimate aim of the Atharvavedic healing techniques was, indeed, the transformation of inner instability into a socially legible and controllable condition. In this sense, following Monique Scheer's insight that emotions are not merely felt but socially *done*, jealousy and envy in the *Atharvaveda* emerge not as purely private inner states but as embodied and socially situated emotional practices through which affect is constituted, mobilized, communicated, transformed, and regulated.

3.3 Reconsidering *īrṣyā*: when 'jealousy' becomes 'envy'

In psychological terms, jealousy (*īrṣyā*) is defined by the fear of losing something one already possesses, whereas envy stems from the desire to obtain what belongs to another. In the Atharvavedic context, envy is not primarily associated with conjugal relations but rather with social comparison and status anxiety. Although the lexicon does not always sharply distinguish between jealousy and envy – suggesting *prima facie* that these emotional states were not perceived as entirely different – the ritual treatments reveal nuanced understandings of their social

¹⁵ See above fn. 12.

functions and emotional tones. This, in turn, indicates that they were in fact regarded as distinct, depending on the kinds of consequences they could entail. The distinction was grounded in whether their effects extended into domestic life or into collective life.

Envy often appears as a contaminating force that produces social fragmentation (Bahulkar 2025). It thrives where individual failure or misfortune is contrasted with another's success, generating bitterness, resentment, or spite. In the Atharvavedic material, this emotion is represented less as a discrete affective state than as a feature of situations involving rivalry, competition, and the fear that another may appropriate possessions, status, authority, or ritual prestige. The *Atharvaveda* does not offer an explicit account of emotional life but records such situations, revealing how communities sought to contain such tensions and preserve social order. Although unnamed, envy emerges from the text's depiction of rivalry and threatened loss, reflecting what Protasi (2017, p. 318) describes as the frequent asymmetrical "co-occurrence of envy and jealousy": the latter almost always involves some degree of the former, whereas the reverse does not necessarily hold. This may explain why certain hymns blur the distinction while others emphasize it.

ŚS 4.18, for instance, presents a ritual counteraction that focuses not on the outright elimination of harmful actions but on depriving them of their efficacy. In this hymn, the malicious ritual acts of others are described as being drawn away and thereby rendered ineffective:

ŚS 4.18.2

*yó devāḥ kṛtyāṁ kṛtvā
hārād āviduṣo grhām |
vatsó dhārúr iva mātāraṁ
tām pratyág úpa padyatām ||*

To him who, having done a maleficent ritual act, shall take possession of the house of someone unaware, O gods, let [the maleficent ritual act] attach by turning backward to him just as a suckling calf [attaches to its] mother [by turning backward to her]. (Cf. Mocci, Pontillo forthc.)

In this attempt to counteract the effects of envy, the Atharvavedin treats the *kṛtyā* as a harmful ritual act through which the hostility of the envious person assumes an operative form and thereby becomes susceptible to ritual neutralization. Rituals that 'send back' or 'dissipate' the envious intentions of others serve not only as acts of self-defence but also as strategies for reaffirming one's proper place within

the emotional community. The officiant reassures the afflicted person by ritually reordering the domains of social life – fields, cattle, and household relations:

ŚS 4.18.5

*anáyāhām óṣadhyā
sárvāḥ kṛtyā adūduṣam |
yām kṣétre cakrúr yām góṣu
yām vā te púruṣeṣu ||*

By means of this curative plant, I have damaged all maleficent ritual acts: [the one] which they performed against [your] fields, [the one] against [your] cows, and [the one] against [your] people. (Cf. Mocci, Pontillo forthc.)

In this regard, a brief excursus on the term *óṣadhī* helps clarify the logic of counteraction that underlies Atharvavedic healing practices. What modern scholarship has often dismissed as a harmful or simply ‘magical’ countermeasure may also be understood as a form of healing aimed not at the envious person but at protecting the subject from the destructive effects of another’s envy. The association of a botanical element, conceived as a material agent acting on behalf of the supplicant, illustrates how healing operates through the neutralization of hostile forces, while the association of *īrṣyā* with flame calls for a corresponding art of managing fire. Such curative plants are portrayed as engaging in a struggle against hostile forces in order to restore bodily order, repel harmful intentions, or release the individual from a negative bond.

As Georges-Jean Pinault (2003–2004, p. 148) observes, the *óṣadhī* operates like a curfew that extinguishes fire, suppressing the destructive force it confronts. Its semantic richness within rituals designed to halt harmful forces is thus twofold: on the one hand, the *óṣadhī* counters the ‘fire’ of disease; on the other, as a botanical agent, it furnishes the very language through which illness is treated and the harmful effects of maleficent ritual acts are neutralized. The attribution of such agency is not arbitrary: the observable resilience of plants – their capacity to seal wounds, regenerate, and repel pathogens or invasive organisms – offers a perceptible model for imagining vegetal intervention against intrusive or destructive forces.

Furthermore, envy operates as a marker of exclusion. Those driven by it are portrayed as being out of harmony with the social and cosmic order and therefore as positioned outside the boundaries of legitimate

group membership. Protecting individuals from the envy of others thus reinforces their integration into the community and contributes to the maintenance of the social and ritual distinctions upon which collective order depends.

An analogy for this restorative logic may be found in PS 4.15 (cf. Griffiths, Lubotsky 2001), where the purpose is bodily restoration but where harmony is also at stake – not conceived as an inner feeling, but as a ritually assembled condition in which words, gestures, and substances re-knit the bonds of the collective body. Envy brings precisely this issue into focus: it may arise between members of the group or be directed by a leader towards a Brahmin. This dynamic appears to underlie several stanzas in which the Brahmin offers guidance on how to avert it:

ŚS 5.18.1

*náitāṃ te devā adadus
tubhyaṃ nṛpate áttave |
mā brāhmaṇásya rājanya
gām jighatso anādyām ||*

The gods did not give you this [cow], O king, for you to eat. Do not desire (anymore), O Rājanya, to consume the Brahman's cow, which is not to be eaten. (Lelli forthc.)

ŚS 5.18.5

*yá enaṃ hánti mṛdúṃ mányamāno
devapīyúr dhānakāmo ná cittāt |
sám tásyéndro hīdaye 'gním indhe
ubhé enaṃ dviṣto nábhasī cārantam ||*

He who strikes him [i.e., the Brahmin], thinking that he [is] weak, despising the gods, desirous of wealth, not upon reflection – Indra kindles a fire in [his] heart. Both Heaven and Earth hate him as he moves. (Lelli forthc.; cf. RV 10.34)

In a political context, envy, conceived as the desire for what belongs to another, offers a more convincing explanation for the discord that may arise within the assembly. The verses of ŚS 5.18 depict a Rājanya who covets the Brahmin's cow and, by extension, challenges the symbolic and ritual capital that undergirds Brahmanical authority. This aggression is framed not as relational jealousy but as acquisitive rivalry that destabilizes established hierarchies. Yet the text

goes further: the king's desire is represented as a transgression of a divinely sanctioned boundary. What might appear as social competition is thus recoded as impiety, transforming political tension into cosmic disorder. In this sense, the hymn exemplifies what Bruce Lincoln (1989) has described as the capacity of religious discourse to authorize and naturalize hierarchy. Precisely for this reason, it must be ritually addressed, so as to prevent fragmentation and reaffirm the Brahmin's status within both the political and the social order.

3.4 Harmony, despite the envious

Although the *Atharvaveda* does not explicitly theorize the social consequences of envy, these consequences can be inferred *ex negativo* from the prominence accorded to unity, concord, and shared intentionality. Hymns that emphasize the collective alignment of cognitive orientation (i.e., *citta*), ritual speech (i.e., *mantra*), and regulated action (i.e., *vrata*) articulate a vision of social life that a disruptive emotion such as envy would fundamentally undermine. Envy, understood as the desire to appropriate what belongs to another or to usurp another's position – as in ŚS 5.18, concerning the covetous Rājanya – presupposes comparison and rivalry. Such an affective disposition is structurally incompatible with the ritual ideal of *samāna* ('sameness' or 'sharedness'), a value that recurs throughout Atharvavedic discourse.

In this sense, the repeated injunctions to 'be in agreement' (*samjānīdhvam*), to share a common thought, offering, and purpose, do not merely promote harmony as a positive moral good, but implicitly diagnose rivalry and envy as forces of disintegration. Where concord ritualizes inclusion, envy marks exclusion; where unity sustains the collective body, envy corrodes it from within. The Atharvavedic emphasis on social and cosmic cohesion thus allows us to reconstruct an implicit emotional logic: envy is dangerous not only because it afflicts individuals, but because it threatens the very conditions under which collective life – ritual, social, economic, and affective – can persist.

From this perspective, the ritual neutralization of envy does not aim at suppressing emotion as such, but at restoring the possibility of coexistence. Emotional regulation emerges as a prerequisite for social continuity, with concord functioning as its most visible and ritually cultivated counter-image.

This implicit opposition between envy and concord becomes particularly evident in the Atharvavedic stanzas that explicitly ritualize unity and solidarity, presenting them as the necessary counterweight to rivalry and social comparison:

PS 19.7.1 ~ ŚS 6.63.4

*saṃsam id yuvase vṛṣaṇṇ
agne viśvāṇy aṛya ā
iḍas pade saṃ idhyase
sa no vasūny ā bhara ||*

You gather together, O Bull Agni, all [the riches] of the *aṛya*¹⁶. You are kindled at the place of the offering. Bring us riches!

PS 19.7.2 ~ ŚS 6.64.1

*saṃ jānīdhvaṃ saṃ prcyadhvaṃ
saṃ vo manāṃsi jānatām |
devā bhāgaṃ yathā pūrve
saṃjānānā upāsate ||*

Be in agreement! Join together! Let your thoughts/feelings be in agreement, as the gods of old, being in agreement, sit beside [their] share.

PS 19.7.15

*samāno mantrāḥ samitiḥ samānī
samānaṃ cittam saha vo manāmsi |
samānena vo haviṣā juhomi
yathā saṃmanaso 'satha ||*

Shared [be] the speech, shared the assembly, **shared the purpose, united [be] your thoughts/feelings**. With a shared offering, I worship you, **so that you may be of one mind**.

~ ŚS 6.64.2

*samāno mántrāḥ sámitiḥ samānī
samānám vratám sahá cittám eṣám |
samānéna vo haviṣā juhomi
samānám céto abhisámviśadhvam ||*

Shared [be] the speech, shared the assembly, **shared the vow, united [be] their purpose**. With a shared offering, I worship you. **Come together in shared understanding**.

¹⁶ The figure is interpreted as “the enemy” by Orlandi (1992), whereas Elizarenkova (2005–2010) understands it as “the pious one” (*blagočestivogo*).

In this way, the Atharvavedic emphasis on unity and shared intentionality delineates the affective limits beyond which envy and jealousy become socially disruptive.

The *Atharvaveda* also ritualizes positive emotional states that sustain social cohesion and personal well-being. Among these, harmony emerges as a central affective and moral condition, reflecting the alignment of individual desire, interpersonal relationships, and transcendent order. The *Atharvaveda* bears witness to ritual attempts to cultivate and preserve harmony not as a spontaneous inner feeling, but as a fragile and essential condition of collective life.

For the Atharvavedins, a prayer for concord operates within the family and among members of the wider community. The hymns that express this sentiment employ metaphors of musical unison and shared purpose to frame harmony as a collective emotional and cognitive state:

ŚS 3.8.5 = ŚS 6.94.1 (~ PS 19.15.2)

sāṃ vo mánāṃsi sāṃ vratā

sám ākūtīr namāmasi |

amī yé vívratā sthāna

tān vaḥ sāṃ namayāmasi ||

We bend together your thoughts/feelings, together [your] customs, together [your] intentions. Those of you there who are of divergent customs, we make you bend [them] together.

In the *Paippalāda* parallel, the imperative of keeping individuals aligned in conduct and intention emerges more clearly when the final *pāda* reads *saṃ jñāpayāmasi* – literally, ‘we cause (them) to know together’, i.e., ‘we bring (them) into agreement’ through persuasion – in place of *saṃ namayāmasi*, which instead implies an act of coercive alignment, forcing agreement where observances are not shared:

PS 19.15.2cd

ime ye vívratā stha

tān vaḥ saṃ jñāpayāmasi ||

You here who are of divergent customs, you we cause to be united in understanding.

At the heart of both versions lies the notion of *saṃjñāna*, understood as the capacity to align intentions, dispositions, and social conduct. This ideal of concord is further reinforced by the intervention of the Aśvins,

whose role in Atharvavedic ritual highlights the restorative – or even curative – dimension of social integration.

Samjñāna ('mutual recognition'), a compound generally rendered as 'harmony', constitutes a crucial condition whose restoration warrants the intervention of the *Ásvins*; their presence here is therefore far from incidental. As divine twins, they embody coordinated complementarity and thus provide a paradigmatic model of unity within duality. Moreover, as deities associated with transition, mediation, and restoration, they intervene at moments of crisis to re-establish equilibrium. Their renowned therapeutic power further frames discord as a form of social or relational pathology requiring ritual healing (Ginevra 2019). Invoking the *Ásvins*, therefore, situates harmony not merely as the absence of conflict, but as an actively restored condition of integration, achieved through divine agency that restores unity to what has become divided and reinforces what is at risk of disintegration:

ŚS 7.52.1 ~ PS 19.15.5

saṃjñānam naḥ svébhīḥ
saṃjñānam āraṇebhīḥ |
saṃjñānam āśvinā yuvām
ihāsmāsu ní yachatam ||

Mutual recognition for us with our own [people], mutual recognition with strangers. You two *Ásvins*, establish mutual recognition here among us.

Yet the Atharvavedins also acknowledge that harmony is not always achieved through mutual recognition alone. Alongside ideals of reciprocity and shared understanding, some hymns foreground more directive forms of social alignment.

The semantics of coercive action resonate in other stanzas of the *Śaunakīya* corpus:

ŚS 3.8.6 = ŚS 6.94.2

ahāṃ grbhṇāmi mānasā mánāṃsi
māma cittām ānu cittébhir éta |
māma vāśeṣu hīdayāni vaḥ kṛṇomi
māma yātām ānuvartmāna éta ||

[Your] thoughts/feelings I grasp with [my] thought/feeling. With [your] purposes, go after my purpose. Your hearts I place under my control. With [your] paths following my course, go.

These passages exemplify the performative power of ritual language to generate or promote social and affective alignment. Whether achieved through persuasion, ritual authority, or divine mediation, concord is represented as a condition that must be actively produced and sustained. Emotional states are presented as deeply communal: the well-being of the group depends on the coordination of its members' affective dispositions. Harmony thus emerges in the text as an expression of emotional governance, reinforcing values such as ritual commitment and mutual recognition¹⁷. In this sense, the Atharvavedic tradition does not constitute an abstract discourse on emotions but rather documents the ways in which ritual regulated domestic and collective life. Prescriptions addressing disruptive emotions such as jealousy and rivalry, as well as those promoting states such as harmony and concord, suggest that the management of affect was regarded as essential to familial stability and political cohesion. The fact that, at least symbolically, the Brahmanical class presides over such contexts indicates that ritual acts were intended to transform individual affect into collective order, thereby rendering individual bodies and emotional states instruments of social governance and, more broadly, of a transcendent order.

Building on Lelli's (2020) discussion of PS 15, particularly his treatment of the healing and protective powers of the herb Arundhatī and of cosmological enumeration as a means of securing and legitimating kingship¹⁸, I suggest that the Arundhatī hymns can also be read as linking bodily healing with the management of fear and collective well-being, while the enumerations contribute to the reaffirmation of political order. By framing harmony as both a relational and a cosmological principle, the *Atharvaveda* presents its ritual specialists as guarantors of this process, positioning them at the centre of both domestic and collective life through the management of affect.

4. To Conclude: A Place for Emotions in Atharvavedic Discourse

Following Monique Scheer's proposal to conceive of emotions as "practices" rather than as inner states (Scheer 2012), emotions emerge

¹⁷ See Mandal 2014 on *Kauśikasūtra*.

¹⁸ Lelli 2020, esp. on PS 15.1; 15.15 and 15.17.

as embodied, learned, and enacted ways of doing affect, inseparable from ritual action. Indeed, the emotional practices described in the *Atharvaveda* are not confined to the inner life of the individual. These texts show how ritual strategies channel private affect into communal action, situating feelings within a broader network of ritual, kinship, and cosmic correspondence. Atharvavedic hymns thus reveal a consistent concern with governing not only the body but also the social spaces within which bodies move, interact, and relate to one another.

In this sense, emotions act as mediators between individual vulnerability and collective stability. The afflicted body, as often described in the *Atharvaveda*, becomes the ‘site’ where ritual interventions sought to manage both inner disorder and external imbalance. Whether disruptive or cohesive emotions are at stake, the textual evidence records attempts to ritualize emotional tensions and attachments in order to reintegrate the subject into the emotional and social order.

This dynamic is especially visible in rituals performed within the household or extended family. Here, emotions are not treated as isolated or abstract experiences, but as relational forces that bind or disrupt kinship ties and social cohesion. The *Atharvaveda* preserves the traces of these practices, showing how ritual language and symbolic gestures were mobilized as symbolic means of restoring a sense of consonance – an essential condition for the survival and prosperity of the social group. The *Paippalāda* tradition, in particular, connects emotional regulation with political stability, as in the royal investiture hymns of PS 15, where ritual garments and invocations serve to ensure both physical protection and communal harmony¹⁹.

It should be noted, however, that the Atharvavedic repertoire resists a strict division between public and private. Emotional suffering is not silenced or relegated to the individual sphere; rather, the *Atharvaveda* records its ritual treatment as a shared concern, addressed collectively and resolved through symbolic labour. Such treatment links the individual body to the social body, making emotional signals legible in terms of social order and shared values, while social meanings in turn shape the interpretation of bodily states. It also operates at the level of what Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987, p. 7) term the “body politic”: the regulation, surveillance, discipline, and control of bodies through discourses of disease, fertility, and bodily depletion or plenitude.

¹⁹ Cf. Lelli 2020, pp. 85–109 on PS 15.5 and PS 15.6.

Emotions are thus not only targets of ritual intervention but also operative media through which ritual efficacy is produced. They move through bodies, words, plants, and objects, and their management reveals symbolic strategies for restoring cohesion, marking boundaries, discouraging division, and stabilizing collective life. The recurrent contrast between fullness and depletion – expressed through images of sap, taste, and loss – structures this ritual logic. As Minoru Hara (2003–2004) has observed with regard to *pūrṇa*, fullness denotes not simply material abundance but a state of integrity and auspicious completeness; its opposite signifies a condition of imbalance requiring redress. What is at stake is therefore not the marginal management of private feelings – as the Western label ‘magical’ might suggest – but a disciplined engagement with affect as a domain of agency and moral consequence²⁰.

References

- AMBROSINI, Riccardo (1980), *Magia e sapienza dell'India antica. Inni dell'Atharva-Veda*, CLUEB, Bologna.
- APPADURAI, Arjun (1986), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge–New York.
- BAHULKAR, Shrikant (2025), *The Śaunaka and the Paippalāda Śākhās of the Atharvaveda. A Comparative Study of Their Domestic Rituals*, in Robert Leach, Oliver Hellwig, and Thomas Zehnder (eds.), *Studies in the Atharvaveda*, De Gruyter, Berlin–Boston, pp. 349–372. <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111244433>>.
- BELL, Catherine (2006), *Embodiment*, in Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek and Michael Stausberg (eds.), *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts, Vol. 1*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 534–543.
- BOLLÉ, Willem B. (2003–2004), *Notes on Diseases in the Canon of the Śvetāmbara Jains*, in “Studia Asiatica” IV–V [Du corp humain, au carrefour de plusieurs savoirs en Inde. Mélanges offerts à Arion Roşu à l'occasion de son 80^e anniversaire], pp. 161–196.
- CALAND, Willem (1900), *Altindisches Zauberritual. Probe einer Uebersetzung der wichtigsten Theile des Kauṣika Sūtra*, Johannes Müller, Amsterdam.
- CHAKRABORTY, Chhanda (1977), *Common Life in the R̥gveda and Atharvaveda: An Account of the Folklore in the Vedic Period*, Puntrhi Pustak, Calcutta.

²⁰ Cf. Whitaker 2025; Spiers 2025a; 2025b.

- DEIN, Simon (2020), *Religious healing and mental health*, in "Mental Health, Religion & Culture", 23, 8, pp. 657–665, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2020.1834220>>.
- DESCOLA, Philippe (2005), *Par-delà nature et culture*, Gallimard, Paris.
- ELIZARENKOVA, Tat'jana Yakovlevna (2005–2010), *Атхарваведа (Шаунака), В 3-х томах*, Издательская фирма «Восточная литература» РАН, Москва.
- FERRARA, Marianna (2021), *Magical Persistence. Rethinking the Vedic Taxonomy of Wisdom with Jonathan Z. Smith's Approach to Alterity and Canon*, in "Annali di storia dell'esegesi", 1, pp. 209–236, <doi: 10.69071/109364>.
- FOXHALL, Lin (2012), *Family time: temporality, materiality and gender in Ancient Greece*, in John Marincola, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and Calum Maciver (eds.), *Greek Notions of the Past in the Archaic and Classical Eras: History without Historians*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, pp. 183–206.
- GINEVRA, Riccardo (2019), *Vedic bhiṣáj- 'healer' (*b^hh₂s-h₂ég- 'the one who leads to the light'), the Indo-European poetics of [LIGHT] as [LIFE] and the mythology of the Aśvins*, in "Incontri Linguistici", 42, pp. 67–85.
- GRIFFITHS, Arlo, and Alexander M. LUBOTSKY (2001), *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā 4.15. To heal an open fracture: with a plant*, in "Die Sprache. Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft", 42, 1–2, pp. 196–210.
- JUREWICZ, Joanna (2018), *Fire, Death and Philosophy: A History of Ancient Indian Thinking*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.
- HAHN, Robert A. (1984), *Rethinking "Illness" and "Disease"*, in "Contribution to Asian Studies", XVIII (1984), pp. 1–23.
- HARA, Minoru (2003–2004), *A Note on pūrṇa-kumbha*, in "Studia Asiatica", IV–V [Du corp humain, au carrefour de plusieurs savoirs en Inde. Mélanges offerts à Arion Roşu à l'occasion de son 80^e anniversaire], pp. 515–535.
- KUBISCH, Philipp (2012), *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā Kāṇḍa 20, Sūkta 1–30. Kritische Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, PhD Dissertation, University of Bonn.
- KIRMAYER, Laurence J., and Gail Guthrie VALASKAKIS (eds.) (2009), *Healing Traditions: The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*, UBC Press, Vancouver.
- KIRMAYER, Laurence J., LEMELSON, Robert, and Constance A. CUMMINGS (2015), *Re-Visioning Psychiatry: Cultural Phenomenology, Critical Neuroscience, and Global Mental Health*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- LELLI, Duccio (2020), *Atharvaveda Paippalāda: Kāṇḍa Fifteen. Text, translation, commentary*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway.
- LELLI, Duccio (transl.) (forthc.), *Atharvaveda Śaunakīya Book 5* (Nuova Biblioteca di Studi Classici e Orientali), Pisa University Press, Pisa.
- LINCOLN, Bruce (1989), *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, Oxford University Press, New York.

- MANDAL, Samir Kumar (2014), *Society as Reflected in Kausika Sutra: An Atharvavedic Text*, in "Karatoya: North Bengal University Journal of History", 7, pp. 1–6.
- MAYRHOFER, Manfred (1992), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindiarischen*, Band I, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg.
- MOCCI, Davide, and Tiziana PONTILLO (transl.) (forthc.), *Atharvaveda Śaunakiya Book 4* (Nuova Biblioteca di Studi Classici e Orientali), Pisa University Press, Pisa.
- MORRIS, Peter E. (1992), *Cognition and consciousness*, in "Bulletin of the British Psychological Society", 5, pp. 3–8.
- NORELIUS, Per-Johan (2023), *Soul and Self in Vedic India*, Brill, Leiden–Boston.
- PATTON, Laurie L. (2011), *Traces of Śaunaka: A Literary Assessment*, in "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 79, 1, pp. 113–135.
- PINAULT, Georges-Jean (2003–2004), *Sur l'étymologie de Skr. oṣadhi- «plante médicinale»*, in "Studia Asiatica" IV–V [Du corp humain, au carrefour de plusieurs savoirs en Inde. Mélanges offerts à Arion Roşu à l'occasion de son 80° anniversaire], pp. 133–157.
- POKORNY, Julius (1959), *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Band I, Francke, Bern–München.
- PRABHAKAR SARDESHMUKH, Vaidya Sadanand (1987), *Contribution of the Atharvaveda to Ayurvedic Chikitsa*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Poona.
- PROTASI, Sara (2017), 'I'm not envious, I'm just jealous!': On the Difference Between Envy and Jealousy, in "Journal of the American Philosophical Association", 3, 3, pp. 316–333. <doi:10.1017/apa.2017.18>.
- REDDY, William M. (2001), *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- ROBERTSON, Matthew I. (2024), *Puruṣa: Personhood in Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York.
- ROSENWEIN, Barbara H. (2002), *Worrying about Emotions in History*, in "The American Historical Review", 107, 3, pp. 821–845, <<https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/107.3.821>>.
- ROSENWEIN, Barbara H. (2006), *Emotional Communities of the Early Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- ROSSI, Paola Maria Antonietta (2025), *Incantesimi d'amore. Il desiderio nell'India dell'Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā*, Unicopli, Milan.
- SACHA, Małgorzata (2023), *Stati affettivi in India*, in Giuliano Boccali, Małgorzata Sacha, Raffaele Torella (eds.), *Eros, passioni, emozioni nella civiltà dell'India*, Carocci, Rome, pp. 31–49.
- SANZO, Joseph E. (2020), *Deconstructing the Deconstructionists: A Response to Recent Criticisms of the Rubric "Ancient Magic"*, in Attilio Mastrocinque, Joseph E. Sanzo, Marianna Scapini (eds.), *Ancient Magic: Then and Now*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, pp. 25–46.

- SAX, William S. (2009), *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- SAX, William S., QUACK, Johannes, and Jan WEINHOLD (2010), *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- SCHEER, Monique (2012), *Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion*, in "History and Theory", 51, 2, pp. 193–220.
- SCHEPER-HUGHES, Nancy and Margaret M. LOCK (1987), *The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology*, in "Medical Anthropology Quarterly", New Series, 1, 1, pp. 6–41.
- SCHEVE, Christian von, and Sven ISMER (2013), *Towards a Theory of Collective Emotions*, in "Emotion Review", 5, 4, pp. 406–413. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073913484170>>.
- SELVA, Umberto (2019), *The Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda. A New Critical Edition of the Three 'New' Anuvakas of Kanda 17 with English Translation and Commentary*, PhD Dissertation, University of Leiden – University of Turin.
- SEVILLA RODRÍGUEZ, Martín (2002), *Conjuros mágicos del Atharvaveda. Estudio, transcripción del texto sánscrito, traducción y comentario*, Universidad de Oviedo, Oviedo.
- SMITH, Jonathan Z. (1987), *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- SPIERS, Carmen Sylvia (2025a), *Charmes Védiques. Édition, traduction et commentaire du Livre 3 de la Paippalādasamhitā de l'Atharvaveda avec un essai critique sur la « magie » dans l'Atharvaveda et sur l'usage rituel de ses hymnes*, Institut français de Pondichéry - École française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris.
- SPIERS, Carmen Sylvia (2025b), *The Marginality of the Atharvaveda in Its Historical Context*, in Robert Leach, Oliver Hellwig, Thomas Zehnder (eds.), *Studies in the Atharvaveda*, De Gruyter, Berlin–Boston, pp. 253–276.
- TARLOW, Sarah (2012), *The Archaeology of Emotion and Affect*, in "Annual Review of Anthropology", 41, pp. 169–185.
- TURNER, Victor (1969), *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- TURNER, Victor (1974), *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca–London.
- WERNER, Karel (1978), *The Vedic Concept of Human Personality and its Destiny*, in "Journal of Indian Philosophy", 5, 3, pp. 275–289.
- WHITAKER, Jarrod (2004), *Ritual power, social prestige, and amulets (maṇi) in the Atharvaveda*, in Arlo Griffiths, Jan E.M. Houben (eds.), *The Vedas: Texts, Language and Ritual*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 565–580.
- WHITAKER, Jarrod (2025), *Believing in Magic and Other Pitfalls with Interpreting the Atharvaveda*, in Robert Leach, Oliver Hellwig, Thomas Zeh-

- nder (eds.), *Studies in the Atharvaveda*, De Gruyter, Berlin–Boston, pp. 231–252.
- WITZEL, Michael (2016), *A Prosopography of the Śaunakiya Atharvaveda Families of Gujarat*, in Joel P. Brereton (ed.), *The Vedas in Indian Culture and History: Proceedings of the Fourth International Vedic Workshop (Austin, Texas 2007)*, Società Editrice Fiorentina, Florence, pp. 333–382.
- XYGALATAS, Dimitris (2022), *Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living*, Profile Books, London.

CONSIGLIO SCIENTIFICO-EDITORIALE
SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE

Presidente

AUGUSTO ROCA DE AMICIS

Membri

MARCELLO ARCA

ORAZIO CARPENZANO

MARIANNA FERRARA

CRISTINA LIMATOLA

ENRICO ROGORA

FRANCESCO SAITTO

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO
SERIE RICERCHE SULL'ORIENTE

Responsabile

MATILDE MASTRANGELO (Roma, Sapienza)

Membri

MARIA ANGELILLO (Statale di Milano)

MARIO CASARI (Roma, Sapienza)

ELISA GIUNIPERO (Università Cattolica di Milano)

ANGELA DAIANA LANGONE (Università di Cagliari)

NOEMI LANNA (Orientale di Napoli)

BRUNO LO TURCO (Roma, Sapienza)

E. MARINA MIRANDA (Roma, Sapienza)

Opera sottoposta a peer review. Il Consiglio scientifico-editoriale, anche attraverso i comitati scientifici di serie, assicura una valutazione trasparente e indipendente delle opere sottoponendole in forma anonima a due valutatori ignoti agli autori e ai curatori. Per ulteriori dettagli si rinvia al sito: www.editricesapienza.it

This work has been subjected to a peer review. The Scientific-editorial Board, also through the scientific committees of series, ensures a transparent and independent evaluation of the works by subjecting them anonymously to two reviewers, unknown to the authors and editors. For further details please visit the website: www.editricesapienza.it

COLLANA STUDI E RICERCHE

Per informazioni sui volumi precedenti della collana, consultare il sito:
www.editricesapienza.it | *For information on the previous volumes included
in the series, please visit the following website: www.editricesapienza.it*

200. Cinquant'anni di AIF

Il contributo dell'Associazione Italiana Formatori alla formazione
in Italia dal 1975 al 2025

a cura di Beatrice Lomaglio e Adriana Apuzzo

201. Confabulare

Percorsi tra fiabe, traduzioni e riscritture

Serena Sapienza, Luca Baruffa, Chiara Maciocci

202. Unveiling the Atharvaveda

Mapping the Cultural and Linguistic Peculiarities of a Vedic Text

edited by Marianna Ferrara and Duccio Lelli



Long regarded as a marginal text, overshadowed by its association with “magic” and “incantation”, the *Atharvaveda* is emerging as one of the most intriguing and conceptually rich *corpora* of early Indian thought. Far from being a peripheral collection, it offers a unique window into the ways in which ancient societies confronted vulnerability, disorder, and the uncertainties of human existence.

Bringing together insights from linguistics, philology, the history of religions, and anthropology, this volume invites readers to reconsider the *Atharvaveda* as a dynamic field where language, the body, ritual practice, and power intersect. Here, healing, protection, and harm are not merely themes, but processes through which knowledge is produced, authority is negotiated, and the boundaries of the human are continuously redefined.

Structured around three interconnected domains – language, lexicon, and ritual – the essays collected in this volume illuminate the distinctive logic of the *Atharvaveda*: a text deeply rooted in tradition, yet marked by a striking originality. By moving beyond reductive categories, this book presents the *Atharvaveda* as a central site for exploring the entanglement of body, knowledge, and power in the religious world of ancient India.

Marianna Ferrara is Associate Professor of History of Religions at Sapienza University of Rome. Her research focuses on Vedic ritual traditions and the intellectual history of ancient India, with particular attention to the relationship between ritual language, the body, gender, and authority in Vedic texts.

Duccio Lelli holds a PhD in the linguistic history of Eurasia from the University of Macerata and a second PhD from Leiden University, where he prepared a critical edition, with translation and commentary, of the fifteenth book of the *Atharvaveda Paippalāda*. His research focuses on the philological, linguistic, and comparative dimensions of Vedic literature within the Indo-European context.

ISBN 978-88-9377-469-7



9 788893 774697

