

When the *sattrins* “offer themselves”: The plural agency in Vedic sacrifice

Abstract

One of the distinctive features of the *sattra* is commonly considered the fact that each participant in the *sattra* event can play the role of officiant (see e.g. Mylius 1995, s.v.). Thus, there is no “priestly gift”, but Falk (1985; 1986) objects that the sacrificers present themselves, i.e. their *ātman*, as *dakṣiṇā*, as explained in TS 7,4.9 and KB 15,1.23–26. On the other hand, the *sattra* way of performing sacrifices might have been a secondary later step in the history of sacrifice (Bronkhorst 2016: 159). Indeed, ancient Vedic sources include explicit recommendations for performing especially the *dvādaśāha* for oneself, instead of for someone else. Furthermore, the “plural agency of the *sattra*” even became the object of Jaimini’s *Mīmāṃsāsūtras* 10,6.45–59 (*sattrasya bahukartṛkatvādhikaraṇam*). The present paper aims at reconsidering the phrase *ātmādakṣiṇam sattrām* on the basis of Candotti, Neri & Pontillo 2020 and 2021, where the most ancient occurrences of the term *dākṣiṇā* are re-interpreted as the sacrificer’s “magnificence” both in an abstract sense “as an auspicious condition prototypically proper to a successful leader”, and in a more material one “as the outcome of such a condition”, which becomes the ritual substance that allows a community to perform a sacrifice.

1. Introduction

Sattras have been put under the spotlight of Indological research again on some pages in one of J. Bronkhorst’s most recent books, that is *How the Brahmins Won: From Alexander to the Guptas* (2016: 37–38; 159–161). In these pages, Bronkhorst mainly refers to Falk’s interpretation of *sattras* (1985; 1986: 30–44). Indeed, Falk sums up the main features of the classical *sattra* as explained in the most common secondary literature (i.e. in some well-known works by Hillebrandt, Renou, and Keith, among others), and then tries to newly reconstruct the original *sattra* by discussing these points. The features are as follows:

1. only Brahmins can participate in a *sattra*;
2. there is no classic patron of the sacrifice and, although one of the participants assumes this role and this special function, all the fruits of the sacrifice must be shared by all the participants;
3. since there is no patron who instructs the sacrifice, there is no *dakṣiṇā* either;
4. the basic pattern of the *sattra* is the twelve-day sacrifice.

Falk's (1985: 276) objection to point 1 is that in the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*, one of the *sattrins*, i.e. Kavaṣa Ailūṣa is even a *dāsyāḥ putraḥ*, i.e. the son of a slave woman, despite the fact that he is at first removed from the sacrificial arena and ultimately summoned to it again, when waters and gods in general had proven their favour.¹ Against point 2, Falk (1985: 276) quotes a sentence by Śabara (ad JMS 10,6.50 = 57), where the *gr̥hapati* is said to be successful by attaining the highest prosperity *bhūyiṣṭhām ṛddhim ārdhnoti* (see below, section 3). He concludes that this clearly shows that the fruits of the sacrifice are not shared in equal parts among the *sattrins*,² but, as will hopefully be demonstrated by the present reconstruction of the context, the pre-eminence of the *gr̥hapati* at least originally (not necessarily in Śabara's opinion) depended on his success in earning riches for the community (rather than for himself). His personal income was to be found elsewhere, namely in his access to heaven. Indeed, *sattrins* appointed the most trustworthy one among them as *leader*, as the Śrautasūtras e.g. clearly explain.³ In order to reject the fourth point, Falk (1985: 277) quotes a couple of Vedic passages which even document two-day *sattras*,⁴ and, moreover, in the following pages (279–280) he lists several

¹ AiB 2,19: *ṛṣayo vai sarasvatyāṃ satram āsata. te kavaṣam ailūṣam somād anayan. dāsyāḥ putraḥ kitavo 'brāhmaṇaḥ [...]. tam bahir dhanvodavahan. atrainam pipāsā hantu. [...]. yad enam sarasvatī samantam parisasāra. [...]. tam upahvayanta* "The ṛṣis were sitting for a *sattra* on the banks of the Sarasvatī. They expelled Kavaṣa Ailūṣa far from the Soma. He was the son of a slave woman, a cheat, he was not a brahmin. [...] They led him out into the desert: thirst strikes him dead! [...] When the Sarasvatī flowed all around him [...] They summoned him." On the other hand, Kavaṣa Ailūṣa is protagonist of another story involving waters, mentioned as *śruta-* 'famous' and *vṛddha-* 'old' in RS 7,18.12.

² See Falk (1985: 276): "Dies zeigt deutlich, daß die Früchte des Opfers nicht zu gleichen Teilen unter die Sattrins kommen."

³ See for instance BŚS 18,24, where the relationship between the leader – called *sthapāti* – and the whole group of consecrated warriors (gathered all around him to perform the *vr̥tyastoma sattra*) is clearly outlined: [...] *te yam abhisamjānate tam sthapatiṃ kurvanti. sa eṣāṃ vratāni carati. so 'dhaḥ samveśy amāmsāśy astryupāyī bhavati. tad dhi dīkṣitavratam* [...] "[...] They appoint one whom they agree on as their leader. He observes vows for them. He becomes one who lies down (on the ground), who does not eat meat, who does not approach his wife. This is what the consecrated man observes. [...]" (trans. Candotti, Neri & Pontillo 2021: 90–91).

⁴ TS 7,1.4.1: *āngiraso vai sattrām āsata. té suvargāṃ lokām āyan tēṣāṃ haviṣmāmś ca haviṣkṛc cāhīyetām. tāv akāmayetām. suvargāṃ lokām iyāvēti tāv etāṃ dvirātrām apaśyatām. tāṃ āharatām. tēnāyjetām. tāto vai tau 'suvargāṃ lokām aitām. yā evāṃ vidvān dvirātrēṇa*

Vedic passages that show how people sat down for a *sattra* because of “The uncertainty of the context, which was determined by the pressure of the participants in specific periods of time”, i.e. because of a “bitter need”. Even the practice of spontaneous poetry (i.e. improvisation) is quoted as a piece of evidence of the uncertainty of the current situation.

Indeed, the crucial point of the series we are surveying is the third one, namely the absence of a genuine patron, i.e. of the *yajamāna*, or, to put it another way, the fact that each participant in the *sattra* event – even a chieftain⁵ – can play the role of officiant, and, as a consequence, there is no *dakṣiṇā*, interpreted as a “priestly gift”. This is commonly considered the distinctive feature of the *sattra par excellence* (see e.g. Renou 1954, s.v. *sattra*;⁶ Mylius 1995, s.v. *sattra*).⁷ Nonetheless, Falk (1985: 276;⁸ 1986: 37) objects that the sacrificers present themselves, i.e. their *ātman*, as *dakṣiṇā*, as explained in TS 7,4.9 and KB 15,1.23–26 (*ātmādakṣiṇam sattrām*) and maintains that self-immolation might have been part of the early *sattra*.⁹

The present paper aims to reconsider these two occurrences of the phrase *ātmādakṣiṇam sattrām* literally “the ritual session whose *dakṣiṇā* is the self”, in order to focus on the agents involved within a *sattrā* and on their specific sacrificial goal. In particular, the present research will attempt to understand whether the mentioned expression has to be interpreted as evidence of a new sacrificial conception or rather should be considered as a form of legacy of the aforementioned reconstructed notion of sacrifice as self-immolation, i.e. as a sort of residual of the pre-Yajurvedic sacrifice.

yájate suvargám evá lokám eti “The Angirases were performing a *sattra*. They went to the world of heaven. Havishmat and Haviskṛt among them were left behind. Their desire was: ‘May we go to the world of heaven!’ These two saw this two-night rite, they grasped it. They sacrificed with it. Then they went to the world of heaven. He who knowing thus offers the two-night sacrifice, goes to the world of heaven.”; AiB 4,32.7: *aṅgirasó vai svargāya lokāya satram āsata, te ha sma dviṭīyaṃ dviṭīyaṃ evāhar āgatya muhyanti. tān vā etac chāryāto mānavo dviṭīye ’hani sūktam āsaṃsayat, tato vai te pra yajñam ajānan pra svargaṃ lokam* “The Angirases were performing a *sattra* to have access to the world of heaven. Whenever they came to the second day they used to be confused. Śaryāta Mānava caused them to recite this hymn on the second day. Thus, they discerned the sacrifice, the world of heaven.”

⁵ In Vedic literature the term *rājarsi* denotes chieftains who are priests at the same time. See Ježić (2009: 259 fn. 73) and bibliography there quoted.

⁶ “‘session’ rituelle, type de cérémonies sômiques qui vont en général de 13 à 61 (ou 100) jours (sans parler de formes susceptibles d’atteindre théoriquement cent années) [...] il n’y a point de *yajamāna*. [...]”

⁷ “n. wörtlich ‘Sitzung’; im Somakult die Opfer mit zwölf und mehr Prebstagen [...] Jeder Teilnehmer muß die Funktion eines Rtvij ausführen können; dennoch sind auch Könige als Teilnehmer eines s. überliefert [...]”

⁸ “die Opferer beschenken sich selbst mit ihrem *ātman*.”

⁹ See Bronkhorst’s comment (2016: 38) on the *Taittirīyasaṃhitā* passage quoted below (7,4.9): “The self-immolation is here described in symbolic terms, but the symbolism may be no more a thin disguise to cover the fact that real self-immolation sometimes took place, or had taken place.”

2. The phrase *ātmādakṣiṇam sattrām* in its plausible foundational context

Let us read the earliest occurrence of our phrase in what is estimated as the later extant Black *Yajurvedasaṃhitā*, i.e. in the *Taittirīyasamhitā*:

TS 7,4,9

suvargām vā etē lokām yanti yē sattrām upayānti. abhīndhata evā dīkṣābhir ātmānam śrapayanta upasādbhir dvābhyām lómāva dyanti dvābhyām tvācam. dvābhyām āsrt. dvābhyām māmśam. dvābhyām āsthi dvābhyām majjānam. ātmādakṣiṇam vai sattrām. ātmānam evā dākṣiṇām nītvā suvargām lokām yanti.

Those who perform a *sattra* go to the heavenly world. With the *upasad* consecrations¹⁰ they kindle themselves,¹¹ with two [days of the *sattra*] they cut their hair, with two, their skin, with two, their blood, with two, their flesh, with two, their bones, with two, their bone marrow.¹² The *sattra* has the self as its *dākṣiṇā*. After bringing themselves as *dākṣiṇā*, they go to the heavenly world.¹³

Indeed, one wonders whether the *ātman* is actually a sacrificial fee or indeed the offering itself, since first of all – as already emphasized by the authors quoted in section 1 – there is no mention of genuine officiating priests, and secondly, the *sattrin*'s body (*ātman*) is evidently cooked as a victim, more than being used as a priestly gift. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the *sattrin*'s target is expressly the *svarga loka*, which he is said to reach through the flame of fire rising up to heaven, as if he were a sacrificial victim.

The second occurrence of our phrase takes place in a Rgvedic Brāhmaṇa, namely in the *Kauṣītakibrāhmaṇa*:

KB 15,1.17–26

huteṣu dākṣiṇeṣu nīyante. atrāpavargo hy abhiṣavo bhavati. atho ātmānam evaitan niṣkrīṇāti yad dākṣiṇā nīyante. atho dākṣiṇābhir vai yajñam dakṣayati. tad yad dākṣiṇābhir vai yajñam dakṣayati. tasmād dākṣiṇā nāma. ātmādakṣiṇam vai satram. tasmād ahar ahar japeyuh. ātmānam evaitat kalyānyai kīrtyai svargāya lokāyāmṛtatvāya dākṣiṇām nayāmīti. ātmānam evaitat kalyānyai kīrtyai svargāya lokāyāmṛtatvāya dākṣiṇām nayanti.

When the *dākṣiṇās* have been offered, they are brought. At that time, the [Soma] pressing indeed stops.¹⁴ Thus, he ransoms himself inasmuch as the *dākṣiṇās* are-

¹⁰ I.e. after the end of the *dīkṣā* and before the Soma pressing (*sutyā*).

¹¹ “they put fire to themselves” (Bronkhorst 2016: 37).

¹² Since six by two makes twelve, it is clear that this is a twelve-day sacrifice, even though this sacrifice is discussed in a previous chapter in Prapāṭhaka 2 and not in Prapāṭhaka 4 of Kāṇḍa VII.

¹³ See the translation by Falk (1986: 37): “Die ein *Sattra* betreiben gehen in die Himmelswelt: mit der *Dīkṣā* zünden sie sich an, mit den *Upasad*-Tagen rösten sie sich, mit zwei (*Sattra*-Tagen) schneiden die die Haare ab, mit zweien die Haut, mit zweien das Blut, mit zweien das Fleisch, mit zweien die Knochen, mit zweien das Mark. Bei einem *Sattra* gibt man sich selbst als *Dākṣiṇā*. Sie führen sich selbst als *Dākṣiṇā* (fort) und gehen in die Himmelswelt.”

¹⁴ Therefore, there is an interruption, but the use of the term *apavarga*- “liberation” is remarkable.

brought.¹⁵ Moreover, he makes the sacrifice effective by means of the *dākṣiṇās*. Since he makes the sacrifice effective by means of the *dākṣiṇās*, therefore *dākṣiṇā* is its name. The *sattra* has the self as its *dākṣiṇā*. Therefore day by day they should mutter: “Here, let me bring myself as a *dākṣiṇā* for noble fame, for the world of heaven, for immortality.” Thus, they really bring themselves as a *dākṣiṇā* for noble fame, for the world of heaven, for immortality.

Here again the achievement of the *svarga loka* is clearly mentioned, and there is no trace of any officiating priest, but two new details emerge, namely:

1. the paronymology of *dākṣiṇā* as something making the sacrifice “effective” (*yajñam dakṣayati*);
2. the notion of redemption (*niṣkrīṇāti*) brought about through a plurality of *dākṣiṇās*.

First of all, if we pay attention to the context, as will be done below, the paronymology might have to be intended in the sense that *dākṣiṇā* “makes the sacrifice possible”, rather than merely “reinforcing” it.¹⁶ Thus, before dealing with the latter point, which is indeed the core of the present paper, let us concentrate for a while on the scenario in which the assumed meaning of the paronymology might have been inscribed. The emphasis Falk places on the “bitter need” that has to be hypothesized as the main reason for performing a *sattra*, was also endorsed by Heesterman, who interpreted the sacrificial Soma pressing *sattra* especially within the framework of the *Vrātyas*, and depicted the protagonists of the *sattra* as acting like *vrātyas*, i.e. consecrated warriors, who in a destitute and rather desperate state, operated as sworn bands under a *sthapati*:

[...] another offshoot of the *vrātya* phenomenon, namely the *sattra*, the so-called sacrificial Soma-pressing ‘session’ [...]. [...] the *sattrins* [...] are all both *dīkṣita* and priest. [...]. They (= the *Sattrins*) are said ‘pressed by hunger’, and so, having nothing to offer but their lives, they are *ātmadakṣiṇā*, offering themselves as *dakṣiṇā* gifts. (Heesterman 1987: 98)

Nevertheless, we are still in need of further clarification in this *vrātya*-oriented reconstruction. Why do the *sattrins* wish to have something to be used as *dākṣiṇās* in the sense of priestly gifts? If the *sattrins* really were desperate, I would imagine that it had more to do with their need to obtain goods to be offered in sacrifice than a priestly gift, seeing that no officiant priest was actually performing the sacrifice. Thus, my proposal for these two passages is to adopt the interpretation of *dākṣiṇā* recently proposed in Candotti, Neri & Pontillo 2020 and 2021, where the most ancient Vedic and Pāli occurrences of the term *dākṣiṇā/dakṣiṇā* have been re-analysed,

¹⁵ Cf. the translation by Keith (1920: 427): “Moreover he ransoms himself in that the fees are taken.”

¹⁶ Cf. trans. Keith (1920: 427): “in that with the fees he makes strong (*dakṣayati*) the sacrifice, therefore has the fee its name.”

showing how the term could not denote a “priestly gift”. In both the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* occurrences, we rendered its meaning as “magnificence”, in an abstract sense “as an auspicious condition prototypically proper to a successful leader”, and in a more material one, as “magnificence made an offering”. The latter is especially frequent in the Atharvavedic occurrences which might document the notion of *dakṣiṇā* closest to our compound *ātmadakṣiṇa*, as the outcome of the leader’s auspicious condition which allows a community to perform a sacrifice. It is ultimately the ritual substance derived from the booty gained during the sacrificer’s successful raids (Candotti, Neri & Pontillo 2021: 25; 42). This “magnificence” consistently ensures great “glory” to the sacrificer, as is clearly shown by the following Śaunakīya occurrence of *dākṣiṇā*, where the obsessive use of the term *yāśas* is not accompanied by any trace of a “sacrificial” or “priestly gift”:

ASŚ 6,58.1–3

yāśasaṃ mēndro maghāvān kṛṇotu yāśasaṃ dyāvāpṛthivī ubhé imé |
yāśasaṃ mā devāḥ savitā kṛṇotu priyó dātūr dākṣiṇāyā ihá syām ||
yāthēndro dyāvāpṛthivyōr yāśasvān yāthāpa óśadhīṣu yāśasvatīḥ |
evā víśveṣu devéṣu vayāṃ sárveṣu yāśasaḥ syāma ||
yāśā indro yāśā agnīr yāśāḥ sómo ajāyata |
yāśā víśvasya bhūtásyāhām asmi yāśastamaḥ ||

Let the bountiful Indra make me glorious, let both these heaven and earth! Let god Savitṛ make me glorious; may I be dear here to the giver of magnificence (i.e. Indra). As Indra is a possessor of glory in heaven-and-earth, as the waters are possessors of glory in plants, so among all the gods may we be glorious among all. Indra [was born] glorious, Agni [was born] glorious, Soma was born glorious; I, glorious, will be the most glorious of the whole creation.

Thus, by means of this *dākṣiṇā*, impelled by Indra, the devotee will become glorious among glorious divine beings. But the most marked occurrences of *dakṣiṇā* are perhaps those contained in the so-called *pañcaudanāja* hymn (ASŚ 9,5), which is a “*sava*-hymn” (also later called a “*dakṣiṇā*-hymn”),¹⁷ in Gonda’s 1965 sense, in other words a hymn accompanying a mere offering, symbolic of the Soma sacrifice.¹⁸ The entire hymn concentrates on a specific eschatological doctrine. Its kernel seems to adopt the iconic value of this special offering of a goat with five dishes of smashed rice, in order to represent the psychophysical self of the sacrificer with his five organs of sense, who has to unite with a body entirely made of light.

ASŚ 9,5.22

áparimitam evá yajñám āpnóty áparimitaṃ lokám áva runddhe |
yò₃ ’jám pañcaudanaṃ dākṣiṇājyotiṣaṃ dádāti ||

¹⁷ As regards this definition of ASŚ 9,5, see Shende (1985: 195–196).

¹⁸ See Gonda (1965: 19) about Atharvavedic sources: “It is, if I am not mistaken, sometimes – or, at first sight – very difficult to make out whether the victims or objects regarded as ‘victims’ mentioned in these rites are primarily presented as ‘offerings’ or as ‘gifts’.”

Indeed, he who gives the goat with five portions of mashed rice, whose light is his magnificence made an offering, gains an unlimited sacrifice, takes hold of an unlimited world.

This hymn is focused on the heavenly light gained by the sacrificer during his life. The offered goat representing the sacrificer is depicted as a fire created out of fire (thus, from the sacrifice) and is invited to conquer the world full of light in the heaven. This special offering is also qualified (nine times in ASŚ 9,5 and once in ASP 8,19) as *dākṣiṇājyotis-*, i.e. as “that whose light is the best the sacrificer can offer”, in other words the sacrificer’s magnificence transformed into an offering. In ASP 16,99.10 *dākṣiṇājyotis-* is replaced on one occasion by the term *akṣiti-* ‘imperishableness’. Thus, the offering (*dākṣiṇā*) which has characterized the sacrificer’s life, will remain permanently in heaven as a new celestial manifestation of its possessor. The amount of light matches the merit that results from his daily sacrifices and is stored day after day in heaven until his death, as it is explained in later sources, for instance at the beginning of JB,¹⁹ where creating a new immortal body²⁰ is explicitly indicated as the purpose of the *agnyādhāna* and *agnihotra* rituals. As emphasised by Bodewitz (1973: 19), the *agnihotra* is also “viewed as an *ātmayajña*”.

JB 1,2

[...] *so 'ta āhutimayo manomayaḥ prāṇamayaś cakṣurmayaś | śrotramayo vānmaya ṛṇmayo yajurmayaś sāmamayo brahmamayo hiraṇyamayo 'mṛtas sambhavati | amṛtā haivāsya prāṇā bhavanti amṛtaśarīram idaṃ kurute [...]*

He (arises) from this (fire) and becomes immortal in the form of an oblation, mind, breath, sight, hearing, speech, *ṛc*, *yajus sāman*, *brahman* and gold. His lifebreaths become immortal. He makes for himself an immortal body here. (Trans. Bodewitz 1973: 20.)

The primal idea of the human being’s reunion in heaven with his magnificent and excellent accomplishments on earth (i.e. of a sublimation – *via* sacrifice – of accumulated merits) could plausibly have originated from some sort of ritual laboratories of speculative reflections on the human chance of gaining a higher permanent status. These might have been the experience of watching what happened to a victim burned in the sacrificial fire and to the body of a deceased man put on the funeral pyre or the fiery pillar of fire and the flames which arise when milk is added to the heated *gharma*-pot during the *pravargya*-ritual, as in RS 1,164 studied by Houben (2000).

I believe that the phrase *ātmadakṣiṇa-sattra-* might have conveyed the sense of a sacrificial session whose “offering” was made up of all the best the *grhapati*

¹⁹ With regard to the hypothesis of a relationship between the inspirational background of ASŚ 9,5 and an eschatological theory, namely the doctrine of the so-called non-decay (*akṣiti*) of what is granted by sacrifices (*iṣṭāpūrtā*) taught by the controversial figure of Keśin Dār̥bhya in JB 2.3-54, see Pontillo forthcoming.

²⁰ As for this Sāmavedic notion, see also Fujii 2012: 108–110.

was able to offer, his auspicious condition, his dexterity, the magnificence of all his deeds – including sacrificial actions – and all the merits he had accumulated, all things which crucially ensured him access to the *svarga loka*. The abovementioned *ātmayajña*- notion in JB could be especially comparable. The inspirational idea may have been that of the sacrificer’s magnificence indispensable to the material performance of the sacrifice, which was so-to-say “placed on the fire” as an offering and which finally went to heaven, transforming the sacrifice into a permanent luminous entity. This sacrificer’s upgrading towards a divine state can perhaps be compared with the story of that type of gods who are not born as gods,²¹ such as Indra, who became the god Indra because of some dramatic and heroic deeds (see e.g. some details of RS 4,18 mentioned below). It is noteworthy that this putting human beings and gods on the same level belongs to the heterodox culture (and perhaps even to the Upaniṣadic *Weltanschauung*), but it is absolutely not part of the classical Brahmanical doctrines.

3. Plural agency in the *sattra*

Now, let us concentrate on the second new detail proposed by KB 15,1.17–26 and first of all on the plurality of *dākṣiṇās* mentioned there.²² It could be quite a surprise for any scholars who believe that there is no *dākṣiṇā* in the *sattra* performance (as seen in section 1) to actually find several *dākṣiṇās* in this passage (which is evidently related to a *sattra*). We are thus forced to wonder: how many *dākṣiṇās* are there in a *sattra*? None or more than one? But, above all, how many officiants are there? As is well-known, the latter question also became the focus of technical and exegetical-philosophical reflections, for instance, in the *Jaiminimīmāṃsāsūtra* (JMS) in which a quite technical section is devoted to govern the so-called “plural agency of the *sattra*”, i.e. that which is enunciated in Adhikaraṇa 14 (*sattra-sya bahukartykatvādhikaraṇam*) of Adhyāya 10. As is well known, this work is later than the earliest Śrautasūtras and it might have been contemporary to the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra*, but the plural agency of the *sattra* in the latter text is taught in just three words:

KŚS 12,1.7–8

yajamānāḥ sarve sattreṣu. adakṣiṇāni ca svāmiyogāt

In the case of *sattras* all are sacrificers and, due to the connection of the masters [with the priesthood], they (i.e. the *sattras*) are without *dakṣiṇās*.

²¹ As for this specific way of achieving the godlike state as a heroic option, often connected with esoteric knowledge, see Horsch 1966: 405–410.

²² The plurality of *dākṣiṇās* is far from uncommon even in the earliest texts – see e.g. RS 3,36.5; 3,62.3; ASŚ 9,6.54; 18,4.7 – but the *sattra*-context cannot be guaranteed there.

The relevant discussion in the *Mīmāṃsā* takes much longer. Therefore, from the ritualistic point of view, the absence of professional officiants and the absence of *daksinās* are taught as an indisputable orthodox feature of the *sattras* in the latest *Śrautasūtras*, but the *Mīmāṃsakas* discuss on this rule.

JMS 10,6.45–50

sattram ekaḥ prakṛtivat | 45 |
vacanāt tu bahūnām syāt | 46 |
apadeśaḥ syād iti cet | 47 |
naikavyapadeśāt | 48 |
sannivāpañ ca darśayati | 49 |
bahūnām iti caikasmīn viśeṣavacanam vyartham | 50 |

(45) Only one man [should perform] the *sattra* according to the archetype.²³ (46) But because of a [specific] statement, it should be proper to several [agents]. (47) If you say that this should be a [mere] assertion, (48) the reply is no, due to the designation of “one” [which is mentioned elsewhere].²⁴ (49) And [there is a passage which] shows the commingling of fires.²⁵ (50) And when it is said “of several” if there were only one [agent], then the specific statement “of several” would be meaningless.

In commenting on *sūtra* 50, Śābara quotes the same sentence he used in his *Bhāṣya* on *sūtra* 57. As we have already seen above, this is also quoted by Falk (1985: 276) in order to show how a higher form of prosperity is obtained by the *grhapati*, i.e. to go against the common statement according to which the classic patron of the sacrifice is lacking in a *sattra*:

Śābara ad JMS 10,6.50 = 57

itaś cārtvijeṣu yajamānā eva. kutaḥ. evam āha. yo vai bahūnām yajamānānām grhapatih sa sattrasya pratyeta, sa hi bhūyiṣṭhām ṛddhim ārdhnoti.

And hence the sacrificers are precisely among the officiants. Why? He said in this way. “Among the several sacrificers, the one who is the ritual holder of the *sattra* is the *grhapati*: he is successful with the highest prosperity.”

This is indeed an untraced *Śruti* sentence, where however *bahu-* is used in the superlative form *bhūyiṣṭha-* “the maximum amount of prosperity”: it thus follows that if there were no plurality of the agency in the *sattra* ceremony, this linguistic use of a superlative form would make no sense. As announced in section 1, my transla-

²³ I.e. according to the *darśapūrṇamāsa* which as is well known constitutes the model of sacrificial descriptions.

²⁴ This mentioned singularity according to the commentator Śābara is found in TS 7,2.10.2–3 which reads: *evam āha. eṣā ha vai kuṇāpam atti yāḥ sattré pratigrhñāti [...] eka eva yajeta.* “The one who accepts at the *sattra*, does indeed eat a dead corpse: [...] Only one should perform the sacrifice!” As regards the context, see below.

²⁵ The quotation is taken from *ĀpSS* 21,2.12–13: *sāvitrāṇi hoṣyantah (= hoṣyamānāḥ) nirmathya saṁnivaperan. pañca paśubhir yakṣyamānāḥ saṁnivaperan* “When they are about to make offerings to Savitr, they should commingle [their fires] after having churned them out. When they are going to perform the five animal-sacrifices they should commingle [their fires].”

tion is different from Falk's,²⁶ because I interpret the *bhūyīṣṭhā- rddhi-* the *grhapati* gains (*ārdhnoti*) as that by means of which he results as being successful, i.e. as the premise of and the input to the sacrificial performance and not its outcome. As we have already seen (section 1, fn. 3) in the plausibly most ancient Śrautasūtra, namely in BŚS 18,24, the leader is appointed by the *sattrins* on the basis of the high esteem in which he is held. As Falk (1985: 276) himself emphasizes, the *grhapati* is in fact the trusted man in the *sattra* context (literally “der Vertrauensmann des Sattras”) and I consider that this trust on the part of the other participants in the sacrificial event is derived to him from the successes achieved, from the goods consequently guaranteed to the community. The general cultural background might match with the highly competitive and brotherhood-oriented situation depicted in a famous hymn in the *Ṛgveda*:

RS 10,71.10

sārve nandanti yaśásāgatena sabhāsāhēna sākhyā sākhyāyaḥ |
kilbiśasprī pituṣānir hy eṣām āraṃ hitó bhāvati vājināya ||

All comrades rejoice with the comrade who reached glory, with the comrade pre-eminent in the assembly. Truly he rescues [them] from sin, he wins food for them; he is destined for competition as he is fit for it.²⁷

The following set of Mīmāṃsāsūtras discusses the function of officiants which is also proper to the sacrificers themselves, a principle which is once again contra the archetype.

JMS 10,6.51–52

anye syur ṛtvijaḥ prakṛtvat | 51 |
api vā yajamānāḥ syur ṛtvijām abhidhānasamyogāt teṣāṃ syād yajamānatvam | 52 |

(51) The others should be officiants in accordance with the archetype.

(52) Otherwise, they (i.e. the officiants) should also be sacrificers, due to the connection with the name of officiants (*ṛtvij-*). Let the characteristic of being sacrificers be proper to them!

However, the most important points of this chapter are the absence of a *dakṣiṇā* (JMS 10,6.59) and the intriguing lack of any opposition between the designation of consecrated and non-consecrated participants in the *sattra* (JMS 10,6.58), an opposition which is also emphasized elsewhere in quite ancient Vedic sources, as we shall see below.

²⁶ “Wer den vielen Opferherren als Gṛhapati gilt, der ist der Vertrauensmann des Sattras, denn er erlangt den meisten Erfolg.” (Trans. Falk 1985: 276.)

²⁷ A comparable *scenario* of exchange between sin and food even emerges from a passage in ASŚ 9,6.25–26: *sārvo vā eṣā jagdhāpāpmā yāsyānnam aśnānti || sārvo vā eṣó 'jagdhāpāpmā yāsyānnam nāśnānti* “Indeed everyone whose food they attain has his sin devoured. Verily everyone has his sin undevoured whose food they do not attain.”

JMS 10,6.57–59

bahūnām iti ca tulyeṣu viśeṣavacanam nopapadyate | 57 |
dīkṣitādīkṣitavyapadeśaś ca nopapadyate 'rthayor nityabhāvitvāt | 58 |
adaḥkṣinatvāc ca | 59 |

(57) And the specific mention “of several” (see above *bahūnām* in *sūtra* 46), among equals, does not take place.²⁸ (58) The designation of the consecrated and non-consecrated men does not take place, on the basis of the permanent existence of both meanings.²⁹ (59) And because of the absence of the *dakṣiṇā*.

Of course, what is crucial for our research is to understand if this opposition is really ancient and, in a broader perspective, whether the collective way of performing a sacrifice, which Mīmāṃsā tradition seems to take for granted, is something innovative or *vice versa* conservative in the complex history of Soma sacrifices. In fact, within his fascinating hypothesis of the Brahmins’ complex action of “re-inventing themselves”, Bronkhorst explains the absence of the patron of sacrifice (*yajamāna*) as a sort of increasing asociality, which would have led the priests to perform sacrifices in their hermitages, where there were no non-officiating participants:

If you leave a Brahmin to himself, not only will he interact as little as possible with society, he will engage in rites for whose performance he does not need anyone else. The Brahmanical sage in his hermitage passes his time performing sacrificial rites, so much so that smoke is a constant feature of a hermitage. (Bronkhorst 2016: 159)

Bronkhorst (2016: 161) assumes that this happened when Brahmins “had lost, or were losing, their positions as priests in a primary religion, and were re-inventing themselves, mainly by turning inward.” There are indeed Vedic sources that document the sense of discouragement affecting anyone wishing to assume the role of an officiating priest, such as this passage from the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, which Bronkhorst himself quotes (2016: 158–159):

ŚB 9,5.2.12–13

[...] *sá ha śváḥ śva eva pápīyān bhavati yá etāni párasmai karóti*. [...] *śréyān bhavati yá etāni párasmai ná karóty áthaiśá ha vā asya daívo 'mṛta ātmā sa yá etāni párasmai karóty etám ha sa daívam ātmānam párasmai práyachat*. *átha śúṣka evá sthāṇuḥ páriśiṣyate*.

²⁸ This *sūtra* might hint at TS 7,2.10.1: see below.

²⁹ This *sūtra* probably hints at KS 34,9: see below. Here the sense of the aphorism seems to be that the designation of the consecrated and non-consecrated men could not arise, if both the items denoted by these two words were simultaneously and permanently existing. It is not possible to read the injunction which distinguishes the *sattra* from the *ahina* way of performing the twelve-day sacrifice in the *Āpastambaśrautasūtra*, if the two roles of consecrated and non-consecrated men overlap with each other, that is, they are both permanently present.

[...] Indeed, the one who performs these rites³⁰ for another man becomes more miserable day by day. [...] The one who does not perform these [rites] for another becomes more excellent. Indeed this is his divine immortal body; and he who performs them for another person, makes over to another his divine body, and a withered trunk is all that remains.

Bronkhorst (2016: 158) interprets such a document as a secondary later step in the history of sacrifice, when “sacrificing for someone else came to be looked upon as inferior”. Nonetheless, I cannot help but notice that the recommendations for performing sacrifices (especially the *dvādaśāha*) for oneself, instead of for someone else, as will be seen below, are anything but late and isolated. Furthermore, we have already seen that this subject had also been the focus of technical and philosophical discussions, seemingly aimed at attaining the correct exegesis of ancient sources rather than inventing and justifying some new features for an emerging sacrificial pattern. On the one hand, Bronkhorst’s reading of the *sattra* is overtly inspired by some later inscriptions³¹ where the term *sattra* designates an institution for the feeding of ascetics and needy people, as a sort of charitable almshouse, so that his final hypothesis on *sattras* reads: “Presumably all *sattras* were ways of extracting donations from sponsors, whatever the texts say about it” (Bronkhorst 2016: 161). On the other, the scholar (2016: 157) is persuaded that, in the history of ritual ceremonies, “The distinction between officiant and sacrificer was as clear as daylight” from the beginning and that everything only changed after Alexander’s meteoric transit through Northwestern India, the period when both *sattras* and domestic (*grhya-*) rites – both private rites carried out by the sacrificer himself in his opinion – started to be performed. Of course, Bronkhorst is well aware that, according to Heesterman (1962; 1985; 1993; 2012), the pattern of the classical sacrifice represents the end of a long process that moves towards a lower and lower level of social complexity, but towards a higher degree of ritual technicalisation. He also explicitly refers to these studies, but, as is well-known, does not give any credit to the reconstruction of the “pre-classical sacrifice” (Bronkhorst 2016: 158).

By contrast, in recent years other scholars have expressed some doubts about the date of the stage when the distinction between officiant and sacrificer might have been stated. For instance, Kyoko Amano (see e.g. 2016: 35) explains how “forming and developing these concepts”, i.e. the officiant-patron distinction and the orthodox sacrificial arena,³² might have been realized secondarily and for the

³⁰ This statement refers to three rites respectively devoted to the fire-altar of the Yajus-formulas (*agniryājus-*), the *mahāvratā* of the Sāman-melodies (*mahāvratam sāmnam*) and the Great Litany of the Ṛc-stanzas (*mahād ukthām ṛcām*).

³¹ See Willis 2009: 104.

³² See Amano 2016: 35: “[...] a ritual whose core act is offering oblations with recitation of ṛc hymns by the Hotṛ priest and to which also some other priests are invited to play their own role, so that it makes some social meaning in their society in benefit for the ritual holder (sacrificer).”

first time by the bearers of the Yajurveda culture. Her analyses are grounded on the earliest Black Yajurveda sources, namely *Kaṭhaka-* and *Taittirīyasamhitā*, which have chapters expressly devoted to the *sattra*, and especially *Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā*, which has no special *sattra* chapter, but includes several passages devoted to *sattras* and above all myths about the *sattras*. All the relevant notions such as the officiant-patron distinction and the orthodox sacrificial arena, in her opinion are connected with non-orthodox ways of thinking and acting, outside the cultural mainstream of the Yajurveda itself (Amano 2016: 40; 63).

Nonetheless, as eccentric as such an institution might have been in its original format, at a certain time the *sattra* became embedded “successfully and also positively, so that we can recognize that the *sattra* culture was not regarded with hostility” in the so-called *śrauta* context (Amano 2016: 63–64). In the *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra* (commonly classified as middle, i.e. belonging to the second out of three chronologically ordered Śrautasūtra layers – see e.g. Brucker (1980: 58) – the absence of opposition between consecrated and non-consecrated men that was hinted at in JMS 10,6.58 (quoted above) especially in the relevant *Śabarabhāṣya*, constituted a well-established hallmark of the *sattra* version of the twelve-day sacrifice, opposed to its *āhīna* pattern:

ĀpŚS 21, 1.3–4

sattram ahīnaś ca. dīkṣitam adīkṣitā yājayeyur ahīne. ete evārtvijo yajamānaś ca sattre. tasmād dvādaśāhena na yājyaṃ pāpmano vyāvṛtyā iti vijñāyate.

It (i.e. the twelve-day sacrifice) can be a *sattra* and an *āhīna*. In the *ahīna* type, non-consecrated men should make a consecrated one perform the sacrifice. In the *sattra* type the same priests are also the sacrificers. Therefore, it is known that one should not officiate at a twelve-day sacrifice, in order to avert evil.

Since the expression *iti vijñāyate* in the earliest Śrautasūtras introduces a *paribhāṣā*, as something which is “known” on the basis of the *śākhā* to which the Vedāṅga text belongs – as explained by Chakrabarti (1980: 54–55), we can assume that *dvādaśāhena na yājyaṃ pāpmano* is a *paribhāṣā* that must be traced far back in time in the Vedic sources. In fact, this recommendation already occurs in an identical form in the *Taittirīyasamhitā*:

TS 7,2.10

tasmād dvādaśāhēna nā yājyaṃ pāpmano vyāvṛtyai.

One should not officiate a twelve-day sacrifice, in order to avert evil.

Moreover, the opposition between *ahīna* and *sattra* sacrifices with reference to the relationship between consecrated and non-consecrated men involved in the sacrificial arena, already occurs in an even earlier Black Yajurveda sentence, which is perhaps the Vedic inspirational source for JMS 10,6.58, and clearly hinted at by Śabara’s commentary on JMS 10,6.58:

Śabara ad JMS 10,6.58

dīkṣitam adīkṣitā yājayeyur ahīne. ete evārtvijo yajamānaś ca sattre.

In the *ahīna* type of the twelve-day sacrifice, the non-consecrated men should make a consecrated one sacrifice. In the *sattra* type the same priests are also the sacrificers.

Let us read the early Black Yajurveda passage containing the sentence *dīkṣitam adīkṣitā yājayanti*:

KS 34,9

prajāpatir akāmayata syām iti. sa dvādaśāhenāyajata. tenābhavat. tasmād āhur bubhūṣato yajna iti. taṃ māsā dīkṣitam adīkṣitā ayājayan. tasmād dīkṣitam adīkṣitā yājayanti.

Prajāpati wished: may I exist (i.e. may I become perceptible)! He worshipped by means of a twelve-day sacrifice. He started existing (i.e. he manifested himself) by means of this. Therefore, they say that it is the sacrifice of the one who wishes to be manifested. The non-consecrated months made the consecrated [Prajāpati] sacrifice. Therefore, [currently] non-consecrated men make the consecrated one sacrifice.

Here, Prajāpati, the patron of sacrifice, is explicitly classified as a consecrated man and the months which officiate for him are the non-consecrated beings. A similar story to this one that comes from the *Kāthakasamhitā* is also found in the *Taittirīyasamhitā*. The six seasons take the place of the twelve months, but the pattern is the same. The collective way of performing sacrifices with the Vaiśvānara fire – which represents the union of the clan confederations, as studied by Proferes (2007: 47–48) – seems to be depicted as a failure.

TS 7,2.10.1–3

nā vā eṣo 'nyāto vaiśvānaraḥ suvargāya lokāya prābhavat. ūrdhvō ha vā eṣā ātata āsīt. tē devā etāṃ vaiśvānarām pāry auhant suvargāya lokāya prābhūtyai. ṛtāvo vā etēna prajāpatim ayājayan. tēsv ārdhnod ādhi tāt. ṛdhnōti ha vā ṛtvikṣu yā evāṃ vidvān dvādaśāhēna yājate. tē 'sminn aichanta. sā rāsam āha vasantāya prāyachāt. yāvam grīṣmāyāsuḍadhīr varṣābhyo vrīhīñ charāde māṣatilāu hemantaśiśīrābhyām. tēnēndram prajāpatir ayājayat. tāto vā indra indro 'bhavat. tasmād āhus. ānujāvarāsyā yajñā iti. sā hy etēnāgrē 'yajata. eṣā ha vai kuṇāpam atti yāḥ sattre pratigrhñāti puruṣakuṇāpām aśvakunāpām. gāur vā ānnam. yēna pātrenānnam bibhrati yāt tāt nā nirñenijati tāto 'dhi || mālam jāyate. ēka evā yajeta. ēko hi prajāpatir ārdhnot. [...]

This (rite) with a Vaiśvānara on one side was not able to win the world of heaven. It was stretched upwards and the gods piled round this Vaiśvānarā, in order to win the world of heaven. The seasons indeed made Prajāpati sacrifice with it. Among them he was successful upon it. Indeed, the one who – aware of this – worships by means of a twelve-day sacrifice is successful among the officiating priests. They strived to obtain (something) from him; he namely offered sap to the spring, [he offered] barley to the hot season, plants to the rainy season, rice to the autumn, beans to the winter, and sesame to the dewy season. Prajāpati made Indra sacrifice by means of this [sacrifice]. Therefore, Indra became Indra. Therefore, they say: “It is the younger’s sacrifice” because, for the first time, he (i.e. Indra) worshipped by means of this sacrifice. He who accepts in a *sattra* is indeed eating a corpse, a human corpse or the corpse of a horse, a

cow as food. Inasmuch as they do not purify the vessel in which they carry food, filth is produced. One should only sacrifice alone, because Prajāpati was successful alone.

The successful and effective solution for the assumed failure consists in a sacrifice where officiating priests and sacrificer are not the same. In fact, the story proceeds with a new sacrificial scenario where Prajāpati in turn plays the role of an officiating priest and Indra that of a sacrificer. This is called “the sacrifice of the younger (*ānujāvāra-*)” because this is how Indra became the god Indra. It seems to hint at Indra’s heroic birth at the core of the enigmatic hymn RS 4,18, where Indra, after killing his father (Tvaṣṭr or Vṛtra, whoever he may be), ultimately seems to have attained glory when he receives the Soma brought to him by the falcon who stole it (RS 4,18.13: *ādḥā me śyenó mádhv ā jabhāra* “now the falcon brought the Soma up to me”).³³

It is difficult to underestimate the coincidence of the starting contexts described in the two Black Yajurveda passages here compared: there seems to be a god (Prajāpati and Indra respectively) who aspires to a pre-eminent position both in KS 34,9 and in TS 7,2.10.1. In the latter text, it is easy to recognize the use of the causative verbal stem *yājaya-* as perfectly corresponding to one of the specific stages in Amano’s (2014) reconstruction of the history of the relationship between the officiating priest and the sacrificer, precisely based on the usages of the causative form of the verbal base *yaj-* in the Black Yajurvedasamhitās. This is the stage when the role usually played by Bṛhaspati, as the priest who had the authority to decide whether the sacrificer can hold a sacrifice, is instead assigned to Prajāpati (Amano 2014: 1069). Prajāpati in fact is clearly an authoritative officiating priest for Indra’s sacrifice. The analysis of the two plural causative forms included in KS 34,9 (*taṃ māsā dīkṣitam adīkṣitā ayājayan*) and in TS 7,2.10.1 (*ṛtāvo vā etēna prajāpatim ayājayan*) respectively, which are also recalled by the plural verbal forms in Śabara ad JMS 10,6.58 and in ĀpŚS 21,1.3–4: (*dīkṣitam adīkṣitā yājayeyur*), is far more complex. Amano (2014: 1068) interestingly emphasizes the use of the plural causative verbal form of *yaj-* in MS 2,4.8 (*yāt kārīryā yājayānti* “That they let perform [the oblation] with the Kārīra-[fruit].”,³⁴ where “the subject is surely the people who suffer from the lack of rain”. Therefore – she comments on the same passage – “no longer ‘a priest (who has the authority) makes a sacrifice hold a sacrifice’”, but “the more general meaning ‘someone makes someone hold/perform a sacrifice’” emerges. Instead in our two passages the plurality (of the months and of the seasons respectively) patently/ apparently denotes a group of *adīkṣitāḥ*, i.e. non-sacrificers.

³³ The famous incipit of this hymn is devoted to a dialogue between Indra’s mother and the still unborn Indra. Apart from the clear hint at the hero’s unnatural birth from his mother’s side, it might also imply the heroic birth of gods, envisioned as their well-deserved access to heaven (RS 4,18.1): *ayām pānthā anuvittaḥ purāṇo yāto devā udājāyanta viśve | ātaś cid ā janiṣṭa prāvṛddho [...]* “This is the ancient known path from which all the gods were born. From this one should be born full-grown [...].”

³⁴ “Dass sie die Iṣṭi mit der Kārīra-[Frucht] veranstalten lassen” (trans. Amano 2014: 1068).

Nevertheless, in the first case the sacrifice is explicitly performed in order to obtain something that is desired by the *dīkṣita* and not by the *adīkṣitas* (*prajāpatir akāmayata syām iti*). In the second passage, the seasons explicitly aspire to achieve something (*tē śminn aichanta*), but I am not convinced that they should be considered as common individuals, since they rather seem to be members of a specific group who ask the best candidate among them to be the patron of sacrifice. Indeed, I interpreted the two sentences with the Parasmaipada causative form *ayājayan* as “they (i.e. the twelve months / the six seasons) made the *dīkṣita*-/Prajāpati sacrifice”, but they can only partly be said to play a role similar to that of the officiants in the classical sacrifice. In particular, in TS 7,2.10.1, Prajāpati gives each of the six seasons something which appears to be very similar to a priestly gift given by the sacrificer, almost as if the seasons were orthodox officiants, but this might have also been a distribution among members of a brotherhood. The action performed by Prajāpati is also signified by the Ātmanepada form of *yaj-* in KS 34,9, just like the action performed by Indra in the final part of the above-quoted TS 7,2.10.1, and the one mentioned in the so-to-say ritual actualization of the myth in form of maxim contained in this latter text.³⁵

Instead another element that could suggest us a collective performance such as that of the reconstructed original *sattra* in which the officiants simultaneously play the role of officiants is the locative plural *tēṣu*, then recalled by *rtvikṣu* in the so-called “actualization” in TS 7,2.10.1.³⁶ The untraced sentence quoted by Śabara ad JMS 10,6.50 = 57 and ultimately JMS 50 and 57 are quite close to this *Taittirīyasamhitā* passage, since they discuss on the plurality of *rtvij* and *yajamāna* and on the fact that they cannot all be considered equal (*tulya*). In fact, if we concentrate on the concluding words, which recommend that one should sacrifice alone – an action signified by an optative *ātmanepada* form of *yaj-* (*yajeta*) – because Prajāpati was successful alone,³⁷ one is inclined to rather interpret these two Black Yajurveda passages and especially the second one as a sort of foundational myth of what we will henceforth be normally used and considered as the original and evergreen sacrificial schema. However, in the two Black Yajurveda occurrences of *ātmādakṣiṇam sattrām* seen in section 2 a plural agency is involved both in the action of leading the *dākṣiṇās* and in that of reaching the heaven. In the second Black Yajurveda passage analyzed in section 3, the officiant/patron relationship like that of Prajāpati/Indra is presented as secondary and exemplary with respect to that of the plurality of priests/sacrificers of the type of Prajāpati/months or seasons.

In particular, let us note what at first glance seems to be a puzzling sentence, i.e. *eṣā ha vai kuṇāpam atti yāḥ sattré pratigrhṇāti puruṣakuṇāpām aśvakuṇāpām gaur*

³⁵ *rdhnóti ha vā rtvikṣu yā evaṃ vidvān dvādaśāhēna yājate* “Indeed, the one who – aware of this – worships by means of a twelve-day sacrifice is successful among the officiating priests”

³⁶ *tēṣv ārdhnod ādhi tát* “Among them (i.e. among the seasons), he (i.e. Prajāpati) was successful upon it.”

³⁷ *ēka evā yajeta. ēko hí prajāpatir ārdhnot.*

vā annam “He who accepts in a *sattra* is indeed eating a corpse, a human corpse or the corpse of a horse, a cow as food”, which in Falk’s (1986: 37)³⁸ opinion recalls how people died in *sattras* and even a form of early cannibalism. A quite similar sentence also occurs in the *Kāthakasamhitā*, as follows:

KS 34,8; 11

[...] *yas sattriyam pratigrhñāti. puruṣam vai so ’tti* [...] *puruṣam khalu vā ete ’danti yad dvādaśāhena yājayanti*

The one who accepts something coming from the *sattra* is indeed eating a man. Indeed, when they make (somebody) perform a twelve-day sacrifice they are eating a human being.

Thus, the Vedic passages devoted to this subject seem to contribute to reinforcing the image of the assumed self-immolation, commonly evoked at least as the prototypical sacrifice (e.g. Lévi 1898: 133; Tull 1990: 55; Malamoud 2002: 21)³⁹ and especially postulated in order to explain the king Soma-slaying semantic field.⁴⁰ However, they can often be of help in understanding how important its substitutive realization was. Indeed, in the earliest sources we also find illustrative sentences about this redemption, where the sense of replacing the self to be immolated with an animal victim is clearly explained. In another *Kāthakasamhitā* passage already pointed out by Heesterman (1987: 95), it is explained that the consecrated man (the *dīksita*) redeems himself by means of the fact that he takes hold of an animal victim: *de facto* he kills an animal as the sacrificial victim. As a consequence, the one who eats something of this victim is indeed eating a man.

KS 24,7

[...] *yat paśum ālabhate. ātmānam tena niṣkrñāti*. [...] *tasya yo ’śnāti puruṣam atti*.

He (the *dīksita*) redeems himself by taking hold of an animal victim. [...] the one who eats something of this [victim] is indeed eating a man.

We cannot definitely exclude that the sacrificer’s self-immolation and especially the chance to avoid such a fate by paying a ransom for his life was the common background for all the reinterpretations of the notion of redeeming themselves (*niṣkrñ-*

³⁸ “... eine Erinnerung daran gab, wie bei Sattras Menschen zu Tode kamen, und aus *atti* müßte man eigentlich auf einen ursprünglichen Kannibalismus schließen!” (... there was a remembrance of how people died in Sattras, and from *atti* one should actually infer an original cannibalism).

³⁹ By contrast, Filliozat (1963: 39) stated that “l’autocrémation du moine bouddhiste ne doit pas être rapprochée du sacrifice brahmanique, en dépit de son origine indienne”.

⁴⁰ As clearly explained by Pinault (2019: 273), when the Soma-plant is bought, it is welcomed as “a king, who comes voluntarily as guest to the sacrifice”, and: “It is clear that the plant is personified, and that its pressing is comparable to the sacrifice of an animal. This equivalence has long been recognized; it is supported by the repeated sentence that considers the pressing to be tantamount to a killing: *ghnānti vā etāt sōmam yad abhisuṅvānti* ‘One kills the *soma* when one presses it’ (TS 6.6.9.2 and other formulations in many other texts).”

literally denoting the act of buying, paying off themselves), as was mentioned above when we focused on the new details added by the second passage containing our questioned phrase *ātmadakṣiṇam sattrām*, i.e. KB 15,1.17–26, with respect to TS 7,4.9. The general pattern actually seems that of a hero who gains a divine state for himself by means of the sacrifice, provided that he offers the whole booty, that is the whole outcome of his magnificence, to all the other members of his brotherhood and to his community in general. Thus, the sacrificer can be replaced by a victim, provided that he offers this victim and all the goods offered in sacrifice, i.e. the whole *dakṣiṇā*, to the community.

Such a notion of the sacrificer's redemption was variously re-elaborated in the Brāhmaṇas. For instance, the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* emphasizes a purchase, but what is bought is Soma, which could be considered the substitute *par excellence* for the sacrificer envisioned as the expected victim, to be ritually killed (when its stalks are pressed):

AiB 1,13

[...] *sarve nandanti yaśasāgatenety anvāha. yaśo vai somo rājā, sarvo ha vā etena kṛiyamāṇena nandati yaś ca yajñe lapsyamāno bhavati yaś ca na. sabhāsāhena sakhyā sakhāya ity eṣa vai brāhmaṇānām sabhāsāhaḥ sakhā yat somo rājā. kilbiṣaspr̥d ity eṣa u eva kilbiṣaspr̥d yo vai bhavati, yaḥ śreṣṭhatām aśnute sa kilbiṣam bhavati tasmād āhur mānūvoco mā pracārīḥ, kilbiṣam nu mā yātayann iti pituṣaṇir ity annam vai pitu, dakṣiṇā vai pitu. tām enena sanoty annasanim evainam tat karoti [...]*

[...] [It is said:] “All rejoice with the one who reached glory.” (RS 10,71.10) Indeed king Soma is glory. Everyone rejoices with the one which is bought, both he who is going to obtain something in sacrifice and he who is not. [It is said:] “The comrades with the comrade pre-eminent in the assembly” (RS 10,71.10). Indeed, he is the comrade who is pre-eminent in the assembly among the creators of sacred formulations, i.e. king Soma. [It is said:] He is “rescuing [them] from the sin” (RS 10,71.10). Indeed, he is a savior from sin. The one who becomes [the comrade pre-eminent in the assembly] indeed, who attains the pre-eminence, becomes sin. Therefore, they say: “Do not recite, do not proceed! Let him not be returning the sin!” He is a winner of nourishment. Nourishment is food; nourishment is the *dakṣiṇā*. Therefore, he wins with it; indeed, this makes him a winner of food. [...]

In any case, at the time when the above-cited sources were completed, it is clear that real self-immolation had become obsolete and that the relevant competitive and pressing context so well described by Falk (1985; 1986: 30–36) had been replaced by new purely ritualistic competitions in some specific sacrificial patterns such as the *vājapeya* or the *rājasūya*, where the outcome of horse-races and dice games was absolutely predictable.

Furthermore, while noticing how the collective sacrifice is put in a bad light compared to that based on a distinction between the roles of patron and officiant especially in TS 7,2.10.1, where the notion of purification also seems to be fake compared to the original context, one wonders if this assumed piece of evidence for ancient “cannibalism” might rather be “considered an exercise in anti-*vrātya* propa-

ganda”, like some gloomy portrayals of *Vrātyas* singled out in the *Brāhmaṇas* and explained in such a manner by H. H. Hock (2016: 111–112).

4. Conclusions

On the basis of the present survey of Vedic and technical sources regarding the *sattra*, we could conclude that the *sattra* way of performing a sacrifice with a plural agency but without a genuine priest was a well-known sacrificial modality before the age of the Black *Yajurvedasamhitā*, after which it was perhaps kept alive in the *Śrautasūtras* by putting it on the same level as the *ahīna* way. In other words, the *sattra* as the exclusion of the professional priests does not seem to be a late invention of Brahmins, dating back to the age of the latest *Brāhmaṇas*, such as the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (see the above-mentioned ŚB 9,5.2.12–13) and above all it was not a fallback for the lost centrality of the Brahmins. On the contrary, it might date back to the pre-*Yajurvedasamhitā* time, at least, and it seems reasonable to expect that we can only find some historical reflection on the difference between *sattras* and the other sacrifices after the *Yajurveda* age, i.e. when the new orthodox system distinguishing between patron and officiant priest(s) had really become the rule. One might wonder in fact why a Brahmin, whose nature or changed socio-political conditions made him decide to perform a sacrifice far away from the rest of the world, should feel the need to provide the world itself with a technical-philosophical explanation for the legitimacy of his choice (be it free or forced), as the one given in the selected *Mīmamsā* sources. And was this solely because this sacrificial pattern was felt to be distant from a classical pattern which the Brahmin had himself autonomously established? By contrast, an important step in the Brahmins’ plan to “inventing themselves” might have been to explain how the roles of priest and patron started to separate. Such an explanation discusses the sources where a plural agency and the commingling of fires are clearly imbued with the early spirit of the union of the clans (with the imagery of the central fire placed in the middle of allied peoples). It is actually tempting to consider the Black *Yajurveda* passages about such a comparison, which are especially focused on the contrast between *dīksita* and *a-dīksita* in the sacrificial arena, as a kind of aetiological myth about what will henceforth be the orthodox sacrificial schema.

We have seen how the passages which deal with the *sattra* do indeed concentrate on the agency involved in the *ahīna* and in the *sattra* ways of performing the twelve-day sacrifice, which are compared with each other. Within the boundaries of such a comparison, the offering – which is the best one can offer – is clearly envisioned as self-immolation. This is exactly what Heesterman and Falk have maintained – but it is important to interpret *dākṣiṇā-* in our bahuvrīhi *ātmādakṣiṇa-* as an offering and not as a priestly gift. Indeed, the Black *Yajurveda* sources seem to be well aware

that the material *dakṣiṇā*, i.e. the offering itself, which is the best a *dīksita* can offer, allows the *dīksita* to be free, and not really immolated. However, they emphasize an assumedly dark side of the *sattra* in order to prevent anyone from assuming the role of a priest in such ceremonies and *vice versa* to promote an anti-*sattra* / anti-*vrātya* propaganda, which reinforces the newly inaugurated orthodox sacrificial arena. It seems that these sources intentionally take the compound *ātmādakṣiṇa*- literally and plausibly pretend to ignore that there is a soteriological interpretation of sacrificing themselves (see above, section 2), i.e. the notion of offering all the best one can, due to one's past successes, with the aim of reaching heaven as pure light. The sacrificer(s) moves/move on a heroic horizon balanced between death and immortality. The hero of a brotherhood has the role of food-provider for the community, but he had to gain loyal support for his expeditions. As sacrificer he might have obtained public allegiance according to the prototypical relationship illustrated by Prajāpati's myth.⁴¹ It is noteworthy that the self-immolation of the sacrificer, assumed to be a part of the *sattra*, at least in its prototypical version, also appears in *vrātya* dynamics, where the *sthapati* as *primus inter pares* indeed plays the role of an ascetic who sacrifices himself by carrying out the observances (*vrata*-) of the whole group (see above BŚS 18,24): as a *dīksita* he is often depicted as if he were dead.⁴² The aim of *sattrins'* and *vrātyas'* sacrifices officially consists in gaining access to immortality.

To sum up, I believe that it is time to try to capitalize on the fundamental awareness that not all ancient Indian institutions necessarily descended from the Brahmanical mainstream – as Bronkhorst has been teaching us from 2007 onward. *sattras* must have been part of a non-Brahmanical section of the Indo-Aryan people, dating back to an age when Brahmins – because of their clash with perhaps distant Indo-Aryan relatives – were forced to deal with their institutions, trying to incorporate them within their so-called inclusivist programme. With the advent of inheritance rights, due to the Yajurvedic development of sacrifice and society, the sacrificer historically split into two figures, respectively the chieftain who absorbed the ruling, military and economic power, and the priest as a recipient of a portion of the goods earned by the leader who guaranteed the technical relationship with the gods and above all with the collective tradition.⁴³

⁴¹ In other words, a hero is “besought for increase of wealth” – and perhaps the idea of cooking the *grhapati* might have derived from this basic notion, because through him “one receives the possibility of eating food” (Gonda 1986: 55). Nonetheless, all those who entrust themselves to their hero become obliged (*vrātyāḥ*) to him and come to constitute his troops (*vrāṭāḥ*), as explained by *Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā* 2,6.12 and *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa* 1,7.4.3 in the interpretation by Proferes (2007: 58–59) and Maggi (2019: 64–65).

⁴² See e.g. JUB 3,11.3: *athaitad dviṭīyam mriyate yad dīksate*, “When he is consecrated, he dies for the second time” and the relevant comment by Kaelber (1989: 128).

⁴³ All translations from Vedic and Sanskrit are the author's, unless explicitly stated. The present work is part of a Cagliari University Research Project REG RASSR15811 “Justifying changes and making the new acceptable from the Antiquity to the Early Modern age” (RAS 2019–2020).

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Sažetak

Jednom od karakterističnih značajki satre obično se smatra činjenica da svaki sudionik satre može obnašati funkciju svećenika. Dakle, ne postoji „svećenički dar”, već Falk tvrdi kako žrtvovatelji prinose sebe, tj. svoj *ātman*, kao *dakṣiṇu*, kako je objašnjeno u TS 7,4.9 i KB 15,1.23–26. S druge strane, način prinošenja žrtvovanja satra mogao je biti sekundarna, kasnija faza u povijesti žrtvenoga obreda. Doista, starodrevni vedski izvori uključuju doslovne preporuke za izvođenje *dvādaśāhe* za sebe, umjesto za nekoga drugoga. Štoviše, „višebrojnost djelatništva *satre*” čak je postala predmetom obrade u Jaiminievim *Mīmāṃsāsūtrama* 10,6.45–59 (*satrasya bahukarṭṛkatvādhikaraṇam*). Cilj je ovoga rada također preispitati izraz *ātmādakṣiṇam sattrām* na temelju rada Candotti, Neri i Pontillo 2020. i 2021., gdje se najstarije pojave pojma *dakṣiṇā* reinterpretiraju kao žrtvovateljeva „veličanstvenost” u apstraktnom smislu prototipskoga stanja svojstvenoga uspješnomu vođi, kao i u materijalnijeme smislu kao ishod takva stanja, koje postaje obredna srž koja zajednici omogućuje da izvede žrtveni obred.

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