



## Research Article

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# Focusing on When and How “the Brahmins Won”: The Case of *dakṣiṇā* in Reformed and Non-Reformed Vedic Sources

To Johannes Bronkhorst, with gratitude

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**Abstract:** For some years now some eminent Scholars such as Parpola (2015), Amano (2016), Witzel (2020) have been arguing that the officiant-patron distinction and the “orthodox” sacrificial arena might have been brought into being for the first time by the bearers of the Yajurveda culture. At the same time, since 2007 onwards, Bronkhorst has proved in many ways that not all ancient Indian institutions necessarily descended from the “Brahmanical” mainstream. In this paper, we show that even what has always been considered as an original and evergreen institution, i.e. the *dakṣiṇā* as priestly gift had actually been developed especially by the Yajurvedic texts in line with the Brahmins’ action of “re-inventing themselves”. In Candotti et al. (2020; 2021), we believe we demonstrated that the earliest occurrences of the term testify to a completely different ritual and social context. In the present article we will try to grasp the evolution of the concept in the Yajurveda through the analysis of every detail of the different versions of the same rite or prayer where the term is

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found, which will allow us to highlight the intriguing progressive editing process of the handed-down texts.

**Keywords:** Vedic Canon; Yajurveda; *dakṣiṇā*; Brahmanical Reform; cultural matrices

## 1 Introduction: Fossils and Innovations in Vedic Sources

This article focuses on one of the best-known and most debated cases of self-representation in ancient Indian culture, namely the construction, in the context of the ‘Brahmanical reform’, of the Vedic canon. This was when texts were profoundly (re)elaborated by the late Vedic schools with the intention of constructing what was ‘Vedic’ in the emerging Śrauta context and expunging anything that was not considered as such. Our main aim is to launch a reflection on the challenge that this mode of transmission poses to modern interpreters who, within the same text, need to distinguish the so-called ‘innovations’ brought about by the Brahmanical reform and some interesting ‘fossils’ of pre-reform culture that, intentionally or unintentionally, have escaped emendation.

The present joint paper aims at reflecting on the coexistence in the same Vedic sources of those so-called “innovations” brought about by the Brahmanical reform, alongside some interesting “fossils” of the pre-reform culture. We use the label “Brahmanical reform” to precisely denote the shift from a time when a sacrificer, “to whatever *varṇa* he belongs, is ritually reborn a brahmin”,<sup>1</sup> to one in which the social class depends on one’s ancestry, in other words, when “the legitimation of being a *brāhmaṇa* switched from poetical prowess to the lineage of birth”.<sup>2</sup> It was then that the “distinction between ascribed and prescribed status”<sup>3</sup> generally disappeared in the orthodox Sanskrit sources<sup>4</sup> even though it was still being extolled by heterodox doctrines.<sup>5</sup>

1 Heesterman 1964: 7.

2 Falk 2001: 133.

3 Bailey 2011: 4.

4 Some exceptions can be found in the most ancient Upaniṣads: see e.g. BĀU 4.4.5-6; 23: *tad yad etad idaṃmayo’domaya iti | yathākārī yathācārī tathā bhavati | sādḥukārī sādḥur bhavati | pāpakārī papo bhavati | puṇyaḥ puṇyena karmaṇā pāpaḥ pāpena [...] vipāpo virajo’ vicikitsa brāhmaṇo bhavati*, “Hence it is said: ‘He’s made of this. He’s made of that.’ What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action. [...] If he is free from evil, free from stain, free from doubts, he actually becomes a *brāhmaṇa*.” (tr. Olivelle 1998: 121; 127 modified).

5 See e.g. (Vasalasutta) Sn 23 v. 136 (=24 v. 142): *na jaccā vasalo hoti na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo, kammanā vasalo hoti kammanā hoti brāhmaṇo* “One is not a low caste man by birth, one is not a *brāhmaṇa* by birth; one becomes a low caste man by deeds, one becomes a *brāhmaṇa* by deeds”.

In this paper, we will focus in particular on the evolution of the concept conveyed by the lexeme *dakṣinā*, a concept which is at the core of the ritual system. We already have devoted two papers to the oldest occurrences of this term<sup>6</sup> and obviously cannot repeat all the already-presented arguments. However, we will try to present a brief summary of them in § 2 in order to clarify the basis upon which we are constructing our argument. On the other hand, here we will focus on the Yajurveda texts as possibly the first witnesses and actors in the canonisation of texts and rituals that has been labelled as the “Brahmanical Reform”. In particular, we will analyse some selected occurrences of this term in the Yajurveda which, in our opinion, may be an example of clear discontinuity between reformed and non-reformed sources. We will use the strategy of synoptic reading of the several Yajurveda Saṃhitā versions of the same ritual context, a method we have often tried to propose in our most recent research projects. Indeed, we consider this tool as a promising way of singling out the pattern of slow but effective changes made in the handed-down texts in order to refine the Yajurveda Saṃhitā version of a specific Vedic branch and adapt it to a new ritual context in progress. What we are trying to reconstruct might be the elegant and technically impressive transition from a more variegated and perhaps floating ritual system to the so-called classical sacrificial arena system described by the Śrauta Sūtras.

The context of the investigation of Vedic sources has unquestionably changed over the past decades. Scholars have started to work on Vedic texts by postulating more than one cultural matrix for all sources.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is becoming ever more plausible that some ancient Indo-Aryan doctrines that were marginalised by the Brahmanical mainstream have nevertheless been preserved directly or indirectly in texts both prior to and subsequent to this assumed Reform.

Much work has recently been carried out, for example, on the *sattra* institution since when Falk (1983) and Heesterman (1987) devoted two important contributions to the subject from a historical-reconstructive perspective. Falk dismantled all the classical assumptions of the previous scholarship on the subject, such as exclusivity for Brahmins alone and absolute equality in sharing the fruits of their raids. Heesterman interpreted the sacrificial soma pressing *sattra* as another “offshoot of the *vrātya* phenomenon”. Indeed the reconstruction of the origin and status of the consecrated warriors called *vrātyas* has often been discussed in the past fifty years, even after Falk’s milestone work,<sup>8</sup> in which he hypothesised that the *vrātyas* must have lived in a destitute and rather desperate state, operating as sworn bands under

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6 Candotti et al. 2020; 2021.

7 See e.g. Parpola 1983; 2015; Witzel 1987; 1989; 1997; Lubotsky 2001; Samuel 2008; Bronkhorst 2007; 2016.

8 Falk 1986.

a *sthapati*. Within this historical-reconstructive framework, the protagonists of the *sattra* themselves are considered to have acted under similar conditions, forced to offer themselves in place of other goods suitable for sacrifice, as explained in TS 7.4.9 and KB 15.1.23–26 (*ātmadakṣiṇam vai sattrām* “The *sattra* has the self as its *dakṣiṇā*”).<sup>9</sup> In this case, however, what is most interesting for the present inquiry is that the tradition documents the fact that a great deal of work was carried out on the mentioned Vedic sources and that at some point there might have been an important debate on certain ritual and doctrinal details. More specifically, the number of *dakṣiṇās* involved in a *sattra* and above all, the number of officiants became the focus of technical and exegetical-philosophical reflections, crucially in the Mīmāṃsā tradition, where a quite technical section of the *Jaimini-Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra* is devoted to governing the so-called “plural agency of the *sattra*” (Adhikaraṇa 14 of Adhyāya 10: *sattrasya bahukartṛkatvādhikaraṇam*).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, this technical section seems to disguise the real issue, which in our opinion is rather social and institutional in nature and relies on the distinction between patrons and officiants and, ultimately, between the different social classes and the tasks possibly assigned to them by birth. Furthermore some traditionally handed down Vedic passages which no longer sounded acceptable were often re-interpreted in accordance with Brahmanical thought by resorting to grammatically forced readings of the texts themselves.<sup>11</sup> Such historical traces of ritual and doctrinal debate prompt a type of investigation like the one we are proposing here, in search of the historical ways in which we assume the Brahmins acted as skilled philologists on their sources to support the important social and institutional reform they would successfully achieve.<sup>12</sup>

A key point in research of this kind is to identify the before and after, i.e. what is original and what has been modified and, more generally, the antiquity of each step in the reconstructed historical development. As far as the *sattra* is concerned, for example, we need to understand whether it is an ancient or a recent institution. For instance, within the conclusions on the inquiry on the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* conducted in 2016 by Kyoko Amano, where both the unorthodox background of the *sattra* and the Śrauta garb of the text are confirmed, we read that the “myths and explanations” used in this work that deals with the *sattra* “are always connected with non-orthodox ways of thinking and acts whose background could be culture(s) outside the central

9 See e.g. Heesterman (1987: 98): “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.”

10 See Pontillo 2023: 204-8.

11 See for example the causative sense “action of causing someone to accept” arbitrarily ascribed to *pratigraha* “action of accepting” in *Śābara-Bhāṣya* ad JMS 3.4.31 (Candotti / Pontillo 2020: 44–45) and Patañjali’s unfounded explanation of the derivative stem *kṣemya-* in *Mahābhāṣya* 3.434.1. 13 (Pontillo 2018).

12 As Bronkhorst (2016) has brilliantly shown us.

Yajurvedic communities.” Nonetheless, she also points out that “the examination of the language revealed that some *sattra* passages could have been built into the text later than the main chapters”.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a diachronic assessment of the details of the *sattra* is anything but easy to carry out.

In the same year, Bronkhorst maintained that “presumably all *sattras* were ways of extracting donations from sponsors, whatever the texts say about it”.<sup>14</sup> This statement was in fact based on the analysis of some later inscriptions by Willis, who considered the term *sattra* as designating an institution for the feeding of ascetics and needy people, i.e. a sort of charitable almshouse.<sup>15</sup> However, in Bronkhorst’s historical perspective, the orthodox way of celebrating the sacrifice is the starting pattern (“The distinction between officiant and sacrificer was as clear as daylight”), and the *sattra* mode is an innovation, that has its origin in the aftermath of Alexander’s expedition through Northwestern India.<sup>16</sup> In Bronkhorst’s opinion, only after this capital event did both *sattras* and *grhya*- or domestic rites come to be performed as private rites carried out by the sacrificer himself. Of course, he is well aware that according to Heesterman the pattern of the classical sacrifice represents the end of a long process that moves towards an increasingly lower level of social complexity, but towards a higher degree of ritual technicalisation.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, as is well-known, Bronkhorst does not give any credit to the reconstruction of the “pre-classical sacrifice”.<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, other scholars have expressed some doubts about the date of the stage when the distinction between officiant and sacrificer might have been established. For instance, Kyoko Amano explains how “Forming and developing these concepts”, i.e. the officiant-patron distinction and the orthodox sacrificial arena, might have come about later, introduced for the first time by the bearers of the Yajurveda culture.<sup>19</sup> As is well known, Parpola (2015: 146) and Witzel (1997: 271) also attribute the formation of the Vedic Śrauta ritual to the bearers of the Yajurveda culture, instead of taking it for granted that the sacrificial arena had always been the classical one. In particular, in the monumental *Veda in Kashmir*, Witzel singles out an important piece of evidence in the first Brāhmaṇa section of the *Kaṭhaka Saṃhitā* which tells us that “The priests apparently were in need of a justification for the

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<sup>13</sup> Amano 2016: 63.

<sup>14</sup> Bronkhorst 2016: 161.

<sup>15</sup> Willis 2009: 104.

<sup>16</sup> Bronkhorst 2016: 157.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Heesterman 1962; 1985; 1993; 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Bronkhorst 2016: 158.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. 2016: 35, 40, 63.

Kṣatriyas' new role as sponsors of Śrauta rituals, after the Mantra period 'Kuru Reforms'.<sup>20</sup>

## 2 An Example of Clear Discontinuity Between Reformed and Non-Reformed Sources

In line with these historical reconstructions of the Brahmanical Ritual, we have recently reanalysed the most ancient Vedic and Pāli occurrences of the term *dakṣiṇā/dakkhina* coming to the conclusion that it could by no means signify "priestly gift" in these occurrences.<sup>21</sup> We defined the classical (reformed) *dakṣiṇā* as an institution meant to finalise the sacrifice<sup>22</sup> and characterised by the presence of two actants with distinct/complementary functions and involving a transference of material goods. On the other hand, we tried to prove that the meaning in the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* (35 occurrences) and in the Śaunaka Atharvaveda (29 occurrences) traditions is better rendered by "magnificence" both in an abstract sense "as an auspicious condition prototypically proper to a successful leader", and in a more material one, as magnificence made into an offering.<sup>23</sup> In fact, as we pointed out in Candotti et al. 2021 "[i]n the *Ṛgveda* the *dakṣiṇā* seems to be chiefly a matter of the gods" and in particular of Indra.<sup>24</sup> We refer to that article for a discussion of all the passages from both Saṃhitās and will limit ourselves to commenting on a few passages that we hope will be persuasive. For instance, in ṚV 2.11.21 (=2.15.10 = 2.16.9 = 2.17.9 = 2.18.9 = 2.19.9 = 2.20.9), in a heroic context devoted to races and to the distribution of the booty, we read:

<sup>20</sup> Witzel 2020: 736–7.

<sup>21</sup> Candotti et al. 2020; Candotti et al. 2021. It should be noted that from the outset, the Vedic language, for example the language of the *Ṛgveda*, included a constellation of terms that depicted the spiritual and material wealth of the patron of the sacrifice. See, for example, the semantic field of the word *maghā-* in Pinault 1999-2000 [2001]: 85–87.

<sup>22</sup> In the terms masterfully explained in seminal works such as Malamoud 1976. For further bibliography see Candotti et al. 2021: 22–24.

<sup>23</sup> The most abstract meaning and the most concrete meaning are not mutually exclusive; rather, they illuminate each other, as can also be seen in the ancient representation of *dakṣiṇā* as a (skillful) cow, which is at once a divine giver of gifts and the ritual gift par excellence that makes the sacrifice itself possible. For the choice of the term magnificence see Candotti et al. (2021: 27): "[The term] seems to match some important features of *dakṣiṇā*, namely a) its being the result of one's personal attitude and one's past deeds; b) its being perceptible – and thus easily represented by material goods and opulence; c) its being a crucial feature of the leader, which reverberates on its subjects. This is the main translation we use, apart from in those rare passages where the concrete aspect predominates, and 'offering' in the sense of 'the best we have to offer/our best' seemed more appropriate."

<sup>24</sup> 7 out of the 35 Ṛgvedic occurrences involve Indra's *dakṣiṇā*.

*nūnāṃ sá te práti váraṃ jaritré duhīyád indra dakṣiṇā maghónī |  
śiṣṣā stotṛbhyo máti dhag bhágo no bṛhád vadema vidáthe suvīrāḥ ||*

Now, Indra, may this bountiful magnificence of yours yield a reward to the one who invokes you; be ready to help those who praise [you]: may good fortune not pass us by, may we, having good heroes, speak loftily during the distribution of the booty.<sup>25</sup>

Indra’s *dakṣiṇā* is one of his instruments,<sup>26</sup> a power that the god typically owns and uses to favour mortals. By means of the *dakṣiṇā* the god ensures success for his devotees. Another interesting image is that of the “chariot of *dakṣiṇā*”. However, in the second hemistich of RV 1.123.1, it seems clear that the driving agent of the chariot of the *dakṣiṇā*- is indeed the dawn goddess (Uṣas), who leads the gods from heaven to the world of men and in particular, as the following verses seem to suggest, to a place where a ritual event is happening. This means that the “chariot of *dakṣiṇā*” is not loaded with goods and wealth (or ritual gifts) but with the magnificence of the gods. And it is this same magnificence which will take the very concrete form of goods and wealth, cattle above all, which are the outward sign (and result) of a successful leadership and the prerequisite of a successful sacrifice:

RV 1.123.1

*prthú rátho dakṣiṇāyā ayojy aínaṃ deváso amṛtāso asthuh |  
kṛṣṇád úd asthād aryā víhāyās cikitsantī mánuṣāya kṣáyāya ||*

The broad chariot of magnificence has been yoked,<sup>27</sup> the gods, immortals, have mounted it. From darkness the noble one (i.e. dawn) has arisen, she of ample power, caring for the human dwelling.

Sometimes the *dakṣiṇā* itself is used as a prosopopoeia, for instance in RV 6.64.1:

25 Cf. Jamison / Brereton’s translation (2014: 415): “Now should the generous priestly gift yield your boon for the singer as its milk, Indra.”; Geldner’s (1951) translation: “Nun soll diese deine reichliche Lohngabe, o Indra, dem Sänger nach Wunsch ergiebig sein.”

26 Some occurrences of the term in the instrumental case are particularly interesting, see Candotti et al. 2021: 32 fn. 33.

27 Cf. Jamison / Brereton’s translation (2014: 286): “A broad chariot has been yoked for the priestly gift”, where the form *dakṣiṇāyā* is taken as a dative form (*dakṣiṇāyai*). In her on-line commentary on RV 1.123.1, Jamison explains the reason for such an interpretation: “If it’s a gen., it has to be construed with *ráthaḥ* ‘the chariot of the priestly gift’.” The identification of the chariot and the *dakṣiṇā* in 5d in her opinion does not support the use of the genitive. In fact, while commenting on stanza 5, she rejects the emendation of the instrumental *dákṣiṇayā* with a genitive form as proposed by other scholars and maintains that the text with this identification is easily comprehensible. We are perfectly in line with her interpretation of stanza 5, and, with regard to stanza 1, we consider that the form at stake might also be interpreted as a dative form in the sense of the purpose of the action of yoking, since if it refers to the beneficiary it makes no sense.

*kṛṇóti vísvā supáthā sugāny ábhūd u vásvī dakṣiṇā maghónī*

She makes all pathways, all passages easy to travel. She has appeared, the excellent bountiful Dakṣiṇā.

Here the metaphorical image at stake is that of the divine cow who facilitates the journey along the ritual paths that lead to heaven, just as earthly cattle create new paths by treading them.

Even in the late and much discussed hymn to the *dakṣiṇā* (RV 10.107), the term is better understood without putting it into the frame of a laud to priestly gift, as some uneasiness on the part of the translators themselves shows. For instance Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1571) speak of ‘extravagant praises of the *dákṣiṇā* [...] clearly in the poet’s interest’.<sup>28</sup> We prefer to interpret it as praise of the successful and liberal patron (qualified both as *bhoja-* and as *dakṣiṇavat-*), who is again represented as a godlike figure mounting the chariot of *dakṣiṇā* ready to lead the raid that will give to the community the necessary wealth to celebrate the sacrifices.

RV 10.107.11

*bhojám ásvāḥ suṣṭhuváho vahanti suvṛd rátho vartate dáksināyāḥ |*  
*bhojám devāso ‘vatā bhāreṣu bhojáḥ sátrūn samanikéṣu jētā ||*

The steadily conveying horses convey the glorious one. Rolling easily, the chariot of magnificence rolls on. O gods, help the glorious one in the raids. The glorious one will win against his rivals at the encounters.<sup>29</sup>

Some Atharvavedic occurrences are very close to those singled out in the *Rgveda Samhitā*,<sup>30</sup> for instance in ŚS 10.6.33–34, the *śatadakṣiṇa- maṇi-* is envisioned as a jewel that confers a hundred auspicious conditions which is perfectly consistent with the context. On the contrary, the phrase used in Whitney’s translation, i.e. “amulet of a hundred sacrificial gifts”,<sup>31</sup> is substantially incomprehensible.

*yáthā bíjam urvárāyām kṛṣṭé phálena róhati |*  
*evá máyi prajā páśávó ‘nam annam ví rohatu ||*  
*yásmai tvā yajñavardhana máne pratyámucam śívám |*  
*tám tvám śatadakṣiṇa máne śraīṣṭhyāya jinvatāt ||*

As a seed in fertile soil, in cultivated ground, thrives with fruit, so, may offspring, cattle, food and food grow out in me; o jewel that strengthens worship, may you, jewel of a hundred forms of magnificence, impel to pre-eminence him to whom I auspiciously fastened you!

<sup>28</sup> The whole hymn is analysed in § 2.4 in Candotti et al. (2021: 37–42).

<sup>29</sup> tr. Candotti et al. (2021: 41).

<sup>30</sup> Some good examples of the assumed meaning of *dákṣiṇā* are shared by the RV and ŚS Samhitās. See e.g. RV 8.24.21 = ŚS 20.65.3: *yásyámitáni víryā ná rádhaḥ páryetave | jyótir ná vísvam abhy ásti dakṣiṇā ||* “The favour of the one whose heroic deeds are immeasurable, cannot be circumscribed, [his] magnificence, like light, surmounts everything.”

<sup>31</sup> Whitney / Lanman 1905: 588–9.

One of the most marked occurrences is perhaps ŚS 9.5.22 (to be compared with PS 16.99.10, where the compound *dakṣiṇājyotiṣ-* is replaced by *akṣiti-*).

*āparimitam evā yajñām āpnóty āparimitaṃ lokám áva runddhe |*  
*yò₃ jám páñcaudanaṃ dakṣiṇājyotiṣaṃ dádati ||*

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

Here, *dakṣiṇā* is used in a more material sense as the outcome of such “magnificence”, which may become the crucial ingredient of a simple devotional act of offering. It represents the best a sacrificer can offer, so that, in terms of human after-death destiny, the individual himself becomes the very last offering which ensures his very own access to the world of merit. The billy-goat arising from the sacrificial fire might have been a fitting image for “the sacrificer’s new body” acquired in the highest heaven, within the framework of the idea of the recovery of one’s body after death, as reconstructed by Fujii<sup>32</sup> with the help of RV 10.14.8 and some other Rigvedic passages (RV 10.15.14, 10.16.5). Thus, the amount of light associated with the goat presumably matches the merit that results from the sacrificer’s daily sacrifices and this light is stored day after day in heaven until his death.<sup>33</sup>

Another illustrative example is ŚS 18.4.50–51 which is strictly connected with the after-death destiny of human beings. These verses again concentrate on an ultra-mundane context of *dakṣiṇā*, since they are contained in a funeral hymn.

ŚS 18.4.50–51

*éyám agan dakṣiṇā bhadrató no anéna dattá sudúghā vayodhâḥ |*  
*yaúvane jíván upapṛcátí jará piṭṛbhya upasaṃpárānayaḍ imán ||*  
*idám piṭṛbhaḥ prá bharámi barhír jívám devébhya úttaraṃ strṇámi |*  
*tád á roha puruṣa médhyo bhávan práti tvā jánantu piṭáraḥ páretam ||*

His magnificence made into an offering, well-milking, vigour-bestowing, has auspiciously come to us, given by him (i.e., by the deceased man); may old age lead them away together to the forefathers, when it reaches them who are [now] living in youth! First of all, I am placing this layer of grass for the forefathers: for the gods I am spreading a fresh one on top; ascend this, o man, becoming fit for the oblation; may the forefathers recognise you who are deceased!

Since, as expected, the hymn concerns a solemn public funeral in which all the prayers are uttered for a successful man who deserved the gratitude of the participants in the event (whose auspicious condition descends from that man, whom they hope may easily reach heaven after his death), here we can see the insightful tangible image of the deceased man as an offering placed on the sacrificial grass, ready to be grasped by the gods. The magnificence which the deceased man has borne for the

32 Fujii 2011: 108-9; 2012, 108–13.

33 See Pontillo 2025: 166–75.

whole community during his life seems to transcend the boundaries of existence on earth and expand the destiny shared in heaven by members of the same clan to the other world of the forefathers, a world where in due time they will join him.

In all these examples, it is certainly difficult to adopt “priestly gift” as a translation.

### 3 What Does *dakṣiṇā* Mean in the Yajurvedic Sources?

As we have already pointed out, Indologists have only recently acknowledged that the Yajurveda texts represent a crucial moment of transition between a rite in which priestly functions were more freely attributed and a reformed ritual that clearly separates the functions of the officiant from that of the patron. Moreover, the studies on the internal layering of the texts themselves are just as recent. We must therefore assume that also when analysing the concept of *dakṣiṇā* we must take this stratification into account and be prepared to identify different levels of codification of the concept itself even within each individual text. We thus expect old and reformed meanings of the term to coexist in these texts, and we also believe that such texts are excellent examples for identifying the exegetical and philological tools used to carry out the transition from one meaning to another. In fact, rather than drawing an overall picture of what *dakṣiṇā* is in the text of the Yajurveda, this paper will focus on a series of passages that, in our opinion, highlight the tensions between the two worlds and the tools used to overcome them.

#### 3.1 *dakṣiṇā* Occurrences Where Officiant Priests are Actually Involved in Ritual Action

After surveying about one hundred Yajurveda passages, that is 50 selected from the *Kaṭha Saṃhitā* (KS), 34 from the *Maitrayaṇī Saṃhitā* (MS), 5 from the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (TS) and 9 from the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* (VS), we have to admit that some of them are anything but clear-cut, indeed at least at first glance they seem to be full of ambiguities.

For instance, KS 8.8 makes explicit mention of a couple of officiant priests (namely the Hotṛ and the Adhvaryu) and the use of the verbal base *dā-* (in the gerundive form *deya-*) instead of other verbs often combined with the noun *dakṣiṇā*, such as *nir-vap-* “to distribute, to offer” and *nī-* “to lead, to carry”, used in comparable contexts, seems to be clearly linked to a priestly gift context.

KS 8.8

[...] *vardhamānā dakṣiṇā deyā. dakṣiṇāyā vai vṛddhīṃ yajamāno ’nuvardhate. upāharantī dakṣiṇā deyā dhenur vā upāharantī.*

*upa hy eṣā paya āharati nāsyāgnim ādadhānasya kanīyo bhavati.*

*dhenur hotre deyā. āśiṣām avaruddhyai.*

*anaḍvān adhvaryave vahny eva yajñasyāvarundhe.*

[...] A *dakṣiṇā* that grows must be given. Indeed the patron of the sacrifice on account of the *dakṣiṇā* grows.

A *dakṣiṇā* that brings abundance must be given, verily it is the milk cow that brings abundance. Indeed she brings milk, she does not become inferior to the status of the one who has set the fire. It is a milk cow that has to be given to the Hotṛ in order to obtain a blessing.

An ox [has to be given] to the Adhvaryu: he just obtains the bearer of the sacrifice (i.e. the draught animal).

Nonetheless, the *dakṣiṇā* mentioned three times at the beginning of the passage seems to be very close to the Rigvedic prosopopoeia of the patron’s success, i.e. to an image of abundance which makes it possible to perform the sacrifice and to distribute the fruits of the patron’s success. One could thus wonder whether this combination might be considered as valuable evidence of the final phase of the transition towards the meaning of “priestly gift”.

### 3.2 Giving the *dakṣiṇā*: A Set of *mantras* and its Changing Ritual Context

The situation becomes more complex in the large number of passages where it is not clear who the implied ritual actors are and who pronounces the different *mantras*. We will focus on a set of *mantras* that are traditionally dedicated to the moment of the ritual handling of the gifts. In a fully reformed context they are clearly used to accompany the moment of the distribution of the *dakṣiṇā* as the gift (typically cows but also other items) given to the priests; nevertheless whether or not the set of *mantras* had this specific ritual function from the very beginning must still be ascertained. The main agent of this part of the rite is supposed to be the *yajamāna* [Y] even though some specific *mantras* are attributed to the *adhvaryu* [A]. This group of *mantras* is quoted in MS 1.3.37, KS 28.4, VSM 7.45–7. In the albeit meagre indications that come to us from the commentary sections of the *saṃhitās*, the relevant *Śrautasūtras* show some differences both in the wording of the *mantras* and in their association with a specific ritual action. This makes it particularly difficult to reconstruct the ritual context, which, on the other hand, is an essential part of the text’s meaning.

The relevant *mantras* – here preliminarily interpreted according to the ritual indications as illustrated by Caland and Henry in their description of Agniṣṭoma<sup>34</sup> – are the following:

MS 1.3.37

[1] *ṛtāsya pathā prēta candrādakṣiṇās |*

[Y to gifts] O shining cows/*dakṣiṇās*, proceed along the way of the Rta!

[2] *brāhmaṇām adyā ṛdhyāsaṃ pitṛmāntaṃ pitṛmatyām iṣim arṣeyāṃ sudhātudakṣiṇam ||*

[Y to priest] Today may I make prosperous a *brāhmaṇa* having an illustrious father, one sprung from an illustrious family a Rṣi descending from a Rṣi, whose *dakṣiṇā* is well founded.

[3] *vī svāḥ paśya vyāntarikṣaṃ | yātasva sadasyair |*

[4] *asmādrātā mādhumatīr devatrā gachata pradātāram āviśatā.*

[A to Y and then to the gifts] May you see (2<sup>nd</sup> p.sg) the sun, the intermediate space, may you align (2<sup>nd</sup> p.sg) with the members of the *sadas*,<sup>35</sup> [addressing the gifts] may you, our beloved (pl. f.) and rich in honey, go (2<sup>nd</sup> p.pl) among the gods, approach (2<sup>nd</sup> p.pl) the giver!

Caland and Henry (1907) consider that [1] is recited by the patron while he is returning to the *sadas* hall together with the cows and the gifts.<sup>36</sup> *mantra* [2] expresses a blessing concerning one of the actors in the sacrificial arena mentioned in the singular: the ritual context implied is that of the *yajamāna* who questions and then blesses a Brahmin of the Atri *gotra*, who stands before the entrance to the *sadas*. He then offers the latter a gift, probably gold or a cow.<sup>37</sup> [3] and [4] are part of the closing rituals, and are to be uttered by the priest first addresses the patron (or prompts him to recite) and then the gifts themselves.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Caland / Henry 1907: 289-96. The two authors offer a kind of vulgate derived from the indications of the different *Śrautasūtras*; moreover, it is also common for both ancient and modern authors to contextualise individual *mantras* differently.

<sup>35</sup> *sadas*- is a special meeting place for the priests officiating at the Soma sacrifice. It is an oblong shed where the priests put up their *dhiṣṇyas*, i.e. a sort of side-altars which consist of a heap of earth on which a fire is placed. See Ranade 2006: 203; 308.

<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, Dharmadhikāri (2008: 96) points out that the *mantra* is recited “so to have them [i.e. the cows] go away between the *cātvāla* and the *āgnidhra* shed towards the north”; this suggests that the *mantra* is recited in an earlier moment in the ritual, namely when the cows cross the sacrificial arena to be led to the northern end of the area, outside the enclosure, where they will be distributed. In fact, as we will see later on, Dharmadhikāri simply follows the relevant portion of the Maitrayāṇi ritual manual, the MŚS.

<sup>37</sup> see, e.g., ĀpŚS 13.6.12 and MŚS 2.4.5.15. KS 28.4 uses a feminine singular pronoun which suggests that it is actually the gift of a cow that is at stake.

<sup>38</sup> It is significant how a fairly limited set of formulae is in fact spread over a large number of even very diverse and complex ritual actions.

### 3.3 (Re)constructing a Ritual Context: The Brāhmaṇa Portion of *Maitrayāṇi Saṃhitā*

What we have just illustrated can be considered as the liturgical usage and interpretation of mantras in a fully reformed context. Nevertheless, if we stay with the more ancient commentary on the *mantras*, that is the Brāhmaṇa portion of the *Maitrayāṇi Saṃhitā* (MS 4.8.2) we can spot some uneasiness in dealing with the exact ritual and textual meaning of the *mantras*. The Brāhmaṇa portion inserts this series of *mantras* into the context of the rites concerning the distribution of the *dakṣiṇās*, with an interesting premise regarding the intentions of the patron: *amuṣmin vai loke yajamāno bubhūṣati* “The patron wishes to be in that world over there”.<sup>39</sup> Some oblations are then made, particularly to the Sun who is said to be the god to which that world belongs. This section is ended up with the statement: *dakṣiṇānām vā eṣo ’nvārambhaḥ* “this is the following initiative concerning the *dakṣiṇās*”. What follows seems to hint at the distribution of the booty which is entrusted to a mysterious godlike figure called Tutha.<sup>40</sup> This is followed by our sub-set of *mantras*.

MS 4.8.2 [1 MS]

*ṛtāsya pathā prēti | eṣā vā ṛtāsya pānthā yād yajñās | candradakṣiṇā iti candrām hā diyāte*  
 “Go (pl.) along the path of the *ṛta*”: this path of the *ṛta* is indeed what is the sacrifice. [When it is said] “o *candradakṣiṇās*” it is because what is shimmering is indeed given.

The commentary is committed to creating a context that is exclusively ritualistic, in which the shining cows/*dakṣiṇās* move within the sacrificial arena, ready to be donated; the MŚS specifies that we are here simply dealing with an offering to the Agnīdh made in front of the Cātvalā pit.<sup>41</sup> The compound *candradakṣiṇāḥ* is interpreted by MS as a plural *karmadhāraya* compound in the sense of “you o silver cows” or “you o silver gifts”. MŚS 2.4.5.14-15<sup>42</sup> even integrates the following *mantra* in

<sup>39</sup> We are grateful to one of the reviewers of the present article, who drew our attention to this important premise.

<sup>40</sup> As for the identification of god *tuthā* with *brāhman* see Candotti et al. (2020: 148 fn. 27) and bibliography quoted there.

<sup>41</sup> See MŚS 2.4.5.13: *ity antarā cātvalāṃ āgnīdraṃ codicīr utsrjati* “Thus he releases the [cows] to the Agnīdh.”

<sup>42</sup> MŚS 2.4.5.14-15 *antarvedi tiṣṭhann ṛtvigbhyaḥ sahiranyā dakṣiṇā dadāty agnīdhe prathamam tato madhyataḥ kāribhyo ’nupūrvañ hotṛkebhyaś cāntataḥ pratihartre. prāsarpakam dakṣiṇāpathena nītvā sadasyaprathamebhyo dadyād ātreyaṃ tato hiranyam* “Thus staying in front of the Vedi he gives the gifts with gold/the cows together with gold to the officiants, first to the Agnīdh, after that, in the middle, in due order, to the praising *hotṛakas* and at the end to the *pratihartr*. Having led the *prāsarpaka* (an assistant of the officiant or a mere spectator) along the path of the *dakṣiṇās* toward the first *sadasyas* he should therefore give gold to the descendant of Atri.”

order to account for a gift made up of silver and cows (which would point to an analysis in terms of a dvandva-compound: “o you silver and cows”) and this happens in both passages despite the fact that the accent seems instead to indicate a bahuvrihi: “you whose *dakṣiṇā* is brilliant”.<sup>43</sup> Such a ritual interpretation is nevertheless reductive if we consider that similar invitations are generally addressed to the sacrificial victim which is sometimes envisioned as a substitute for the patron. Just think of the two famous *Rgveda* hymns (RV 1.162 and 163) dedicated to the sacrifice of the horse, which represents the king in a sort of *Aśvamedha ante litteram*, and which is explicitly invited to go to heaven among the gods. The bahuvrihi interpretation might have well suited the pre-reformed role of the *dakṣiṇās* as “magnificence made offering” – magnificence often made up of cows – a prerequisite for the success of the sacrifice. The commentary seems to resolve a perceived tension between the original text and the assumed ritual function by both enforcing a purely ritual horizon and also by resorting to the intrinsic ambiguity of the compound.

The paraphrase of *mantra* [2 MS] is given as follows:

MS 4.8.2 [2 MS]

*eśā vai brāhmaṇāḥ pitṛmān paitṛmatyó yá ārṣeyāḥ śuśrúvān sudhātudakṣiṇam íti sudhātú evāśya yajñāṃ dadhāt*<sup>44</sup>

This is a *brāhmaṇa* having an illustrious father, one sprung from an illustrious family: one who is descending from a *ṛṣi* and who is very well versed [in the Veda]. “*sudhātudakṣiṇa*”: in fact, he establishes the sacrifice of that one on good grounds.

There is no doubt that MS 4.8.2 considers the *mantra* as being addressed to an officiant of some kind, be it to the *Ātreya*<sup>45</sup> in front of the *sadas* or first to all the officiants beginning with the *Āgnidh* and only then to the *Ātreya*, as suggested by MŚS 2.4.5.14.<sup>46</sup> One cannot fail to notice however that the commentary finds it difficult to deal with the description of this same officiant by means of the five relevant traits: having an illustrious father, b) sprung from an illustrious family c) descending from a *ṛṣi*, d) very well versed [in the Veda] and e) being “*sudhātudakṣiṇa*”. It seems that not all of these traits are equally suited to the role of officiant.

<sup>43</sup> cf. compounds such as *candraratha*- e.g. in RV 3.3.5a: *candrām agniṃ candrārathaṃ hárivrataṃ* “Shimmering Agni, whose chariot is shimmering and whose commandments are golden” (tr. Jamison / Brereton 2014: 472).

<sup>44</sup> MŚS 2.4.5.14 integrates the *mantra* with *idaṃ candram imāś ca bhavate dakṣiṇā dadāmi* “I give this silver and these cows to his Lordship”.

<sup>45</sup> Even though, strictly speaking, the *Ātreya* is not part of the group of the appointed officiants. KS even gives us a hint of the fact that he might not be a *brāhmaṇa* at all; (28.4) *yām abrāhmaṇāya dadāti vanaspatayas tayā prathante* “that [cow?] (f. sing.) which he gives to a non-*brāhmaṇa* with that the lords of the forest become glorious”. For a discussion on the possibility that non-*brāhmaṇas* might be entitled to *dakṣiṇā*, see Heesterman 1959: 241-2.

<sup>46</sup> See above fn.42.

In fact, according to the commentary the only truly relevant characteristic are *c* and *d* – descending from a *r̥ṣi* and being highly skilled in the Vedas – almost as if they were the specifically targeted instantiations of the more general terms of the first two. More significant still is the interpretation of the compound *sudhātudakṣiṇa-* which substitutes *dakṣiṇā* with *yajña* suggesting that the *dakṣiṇā* offered to the officiant is justified by his ability to bring the sacrifice of the patron to a satisfactory conclusion.<sup>47</sup> The implied analysis is thus “the one to whom a well-grounded *dakṣiṇā* [is given]”. One may wonder why the simpler analytical string “one whose *dakṣiṇā* is well-founded” is not used; perhaps, under the latter analysis the compound might be taken as referring – as it might have originally – to the patron.<sup>48</sup> The commentary might then have resorted to a more convoluted analysis of the compound but one that undoubtedly indicated the officiant as the *denotatum*.

Even more complex is the meaning and ritual context of [3/4 M] which should be uttered in the context of closing rites once the *yajamāna* has already entered the *sadas*. The section of the relevant MS Brāhmaṇa states the following:

MS 4.8.2 [3/4 MS]

*vī svah paśya vy āntāriḥṣam ity adā evā prāpya vadati yātasva sadasyair ity arātīyānti vā etā etāsmāi dādāta īśvarā brāhmaṇāḥ somapās cākṣuṣāpahantos tān evā śamayaty asmādrātā mādhumatīr devatrā gachata pradātāram āviśatēti tāthā hainam amūtrāgachanti bahūrmayā yajñakunapīti ha smāha yajñāvaca rājastambāyanāḥ prā vā ito manuṣyā dakṣiṇās cyāvāyanti nāmūtra gachantīti yād āha, ānavahāyāsmān devayānena pathā sukṛtāṇi lokē sīdata tān naḥ saṃskṛtām itī tāthā hainam ihā cāmūtra cāgachanti.*

“Look at (2<sup>nd</sup> p.sg) the sun, [look] at the intermediate space” [3] he says, having reached exactly that;<sup>49</sup> “line up (2<sup>nd</sup> p.sg) with the members of the *sadas*” [4]. They [i.e. the priests in the *sadas*], the lords, the *brāhmaṇas*, the soma drinkers are hostile to this very type of donor. Because of their rejection with their eyes, these indeed he appeases: “May you (f. pl.) beloved by us and rich in honey go (2<sup>nd</sup> pl.) among the gods, approach/enter (2<sup>nd</sup> pl.) the giver.” In this way indeed they come to him (patron) in that world. “*bahūrmayā yajñakunapīti*” thus said Yajñavacas Rājastambāyana<sup>50</sup> when he said indeed [that] the human *dakṣiṇas* remove [the giver] from here [but] they do not go into that world over there. “Without having abandoned us (priests + giver), may you (the gifts) sit (pl.) in the world of pious men through the *devayāna*

47 Kyoko Amano (personal communication) suggests that the meaning of the compound here must be “having (i.e. accepting) a well-grounded sacrificial gift” in the sense that the officiant is not too greedy and expects a fair *dakṣiṇā*. While this may well be the meaning implied in the passage it seems to us that the commentary is in fact resorting to a different (and clumsier) analysis.

48 The compound should be read together with the commentary on an almost immediately preceding *mantra* (*vāya tuthó vo viśvāvedā vibhajatu*, for which see note 55) where a distinction is made between those who are fit for *dakṣiṇā* (*dakṣiṇeya-*) and those who are not (for this term see Candotti et al. 2020). *sudhātudakṣiṇa-* might have originally been a synonym of *dakṣiṇeya-*.

49 Either the *sadas* or sun/heaven as a result of the sacrifice itself.

50 This sentence is barely intelligible. This is the best we could make of it.

path: this has been perfected for us”;<sup>51</sup> thus indeed they (gifts) come to him both here and in that world over there.

The first question concerns the utterer of the formulas and the recipient. If we stay with MŚS, the Śrautasūtra of the Maitrayāna school, we must consider that [3] and [4] are said by the patron addressing presumably the gifts.<sup>52</sup> However such a reading implies a certain number of difficulties for example a) accepting that the gifts are addressed in the singular, b) accepting that the exhortation to look at the sun/heaven is attributed to them and not to the patron<sup>53</sup> c) accepting the usage of the medial form *yatasva* “array yourself/place yourself”, so often used for human beings, for inanimate beings.<sup>54</sup> It is evident that a different ritual contextualisation of these *mantras* could easily lead to very different interpretations of the ritual act. Let us consider the possibility that the *mantra* [2 MS] did not originally refer to the Ātreya priest but rather to the patron of the sacrifice who benefits from the latter and who could rightly be called *sudhātudakṣiṇa* since the very possibility of celebrating the sacrifice derives from his magnificence made into wealth.<sup>55</sup> And, consequently, that the blessing to reach heaven in [3 MS] is addressed to him together with the exhortation to take his place among the officiants and the *prasarpakas* in the *sadas*.

The exegetical activity we tried to highlight above (for example: exploiting the ambiguity of certain terms, particularly compounds; contextualising mantras differently within the ritual; changing the speaker or the recipient; materially/ritually anchoring a broader religious imagery) can be interpreted as indicating that some elements of the *mantras* are fossils of a different ritual practice slowly (and sometimes painstakingly) changed into a fully reformed one.

But there is more. The final part of the paragraph mentions a series of mantras that are not found in the matching mantra section of the MS. The context seems to be

51 cf. TS 1.4.43.

52 MŚS 2.4.5.16-17: *vi svaḥ paśya. iti sadah praviśya yajamānaṃ vācayati. asmadrātās. iti dakṣiṇā anumantrayate.*

53 This is of course possible when cows and other sacrificial animals are being exhorted to go to heaven but far less acceptable for inanimate objects.

54 The semantics of the verbal base *yat-* is complex and particularly its Rigvedic attestations have been studied time and again. See especially Thieme 1975, Gotō 1987: 254-5; Narten 1964: 203-4; Jamison 1983:131-2; Mayrhofer 1992-1996: 394–395.

55 That the group of *mantras* might originally have been used in the context of the distribution of the booty could be suggested by the preceding *mantra* (*tutho vo viśvavedā vibhajatu*) where Tutha is summoned in order to preside over the division of goods. The Brāhmaṇa portion of MS stresses a number of elements that do not fit well with the reformed context of the distribution of priestly gifts: *eṣa vai tutho viśvavedā yad agnir eṣa vai taṃ veda yo dakṣiṇiyo yo 'dakṣiṇiḥ* “This Tutha who possesses everything since it is fire, he knows well who is fit for the *dakṣiṇā* and who is not.” Both the identification of Tutha with Agni and the need to discriminate between those officiants who deserved the *dakṣiṇā* and those who did not are hard to fit into a strictly reformed context.

that in which a gift can be refused: in particular, the text seems to recall that the participants in the *sattra* can refuse the gift of the donor who makes sacrifices in order to attain heaven. The first mantra, “May you (f. pl.) beloved by us and rich in honey go (2<sup>nd</sup> pl.) among the gods, approach/enter (2<sup>nd</sup> pl.) the giver,” envisions the *dakṣiṇā* as a patron’s treasure in a perspective according to which the *dakṣiṇā* is not a priestly gift but an offering that ascends to heaven together with the patron. Perhaps a second mantra follows, possibly attributed to Yajñavacas Rājastambāyana, which states that “human” *dakṣiṇā* ensure the patron’s ascent to heaven but do not follow him. Finally, a third mantra – “Without having abandoned us (priests + giver), may you (the gifts) sit (pl.) in the world of pious men through the *devayāna* path: this has been perfected for us” – seems to resort to a sort of *excusatio non petita* to ensure the presence of *dakṣiṇā* in heaven with the patron and also in the sacrificial arena as gifts to the officiants. And this third mantra seems to give voice to the way the classical (reformed) relationship between officiant and patron should be conceived.

### 3.4 Looking for Traces of Editorial Activity: A Synoptical Approach

Of course, inconsistencies and exegetical tricks may testify to a transitional phase, to a change that was underway, but if we content ourselves with the analysis of a single text it is not easy to understand the direction of this change. Nevertheless, by working synoptically on all occurrences in the YV it is often possible to retrieve further clues. We will concentrate on the shifts concerning the finite verbal form of *mantra* [2] which in the MS is the precative *ṛdhyāsam* “may I make prosperous”.

Let us then focus on *Kaṭha-Saṃhitā*. The first part of *mantra* [2] is not quoted in full, but in a kind of *pratīka* form followed by *iti*, even though it seems plausible that the author would have known the full version, since he takes up some of the terms (such as *ārṣeya-*) in the commentary part:

[2 KS] *brāhmaṇam adyardhyāsam pitṛmantam paitṛmatyam iti yo vai śrotriya ārṣeyas sa pitṛmān paitṛmatyas tam videyam ity evaitad āha sa hi sudhātudakṣiṇaḥ*

“Today may I make prosperous a *brāhmaṇa* having an illustrious father one sprung from an illustrious family.” One who is indeed versed in the Veda, descending from a *ṛṣi*, he is a *brāhmaṇa* having an illustrious father one sprung from an illustrious family. “I must find such [a *brāhmaṇa*]” this is what [the text] says. Indeed he is one whose *dakṣiṇā* is well-founded.<sup>56</sup>

56 The text continues (KS 28.4) by identifying the ritual power of the gift according to the beneficiary’s social status: a non-*brāhmaṇa*, a *Kaṇva* or *Kaśyapa*, a *brāhmaṇa* non-*śrotriya* or a *brāhmaṇa* descending from a *ṛṣi*.

The second particle *iti* marks a direct discourse intended to summarise the meaning of the *mantra* as a whole where the finite verb is radically changed: what is at stake is not how to ensure good fortune for the officiant or indeed for the patron, as might well have been the case in a more archaic version of the rite, rather it is how to identify the right officiant capable of ensuring the success of the ritual. The condition of being *sudhātudakṣiṇa-* is no longer one of the many characteristics (together with lineage, scholarship etc.) required to officiate in a sacrifice, rather it is an expression that sums them all up: a *brāhmaṇa* of good lineage and good scholarship is one who deserves the *dakṣiṇā*, i.e. the *dakṣiṇā* given to him is indeed well-grounded since he guarantees the success of the ritual.<sup>57</sup>

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the gloss *videyam* in KS pertains directly to the *mantra*-level in VS(M):

*brāhmaṇām adyā videyaṃ piṭṛmāntaṃ paiṭṛmatyām*

This later text may thus actually be the point of arrival of a “domestication” process through which a blessing for the patron’s fortune and glory presumably linked with the crucial moment of the distribution of booty is transformed into the distribution of gifts to the officiant priests. The figure of the Ātreya (who is not an officiant *stricto sensu* and who may be replaced by a non-*brāhmaṇa*) is crucial in this passage; similarly significant is the presence of the *prasarpakas*, mere spectators, in the hall of recitation.<sup>58</sup>

## 4 Building the Set of Formulas to Accept Priestly Gifts

Under this perspective, it becomes significant that, after the *mantra* [4] addressing the cows who are invited to approach the giver, this White YV is the only tradition that contains a series of *mantras* where a giver and a receiver together with a kind of

57 If our interpretation is correct, the constituents of the *bahuvrīhi* compound *sudhātudakṣiṇa-* are analysed differently at each stage of interpretation. At the *mantra* level we analysed the compound as “one whose *dakṣiṇā* is well founded” meaning a patron who has enough wealth and glory to celebrate a sacrifice. The *Brāhmaṇa* portion of MS already departs from this interpretation, albeit in terms that are difficult to define, and, by replacing *dakṣiṇā-* with *yajña-*, clarifies that the compound refers to the officiant. At the level of the KS, on the other hand, *sudhātudakṣiṇa-* should probably be interpreted as [the officiant] “to whom a well-grounded *dakṣiṇā* [is given]”.

58 Caland / Henry Vol 2, p. 294: “A chacun des *prasarpakas* on donne en proportion de son mérite personnel (15); c’est assis au sud dans le *sadas* que ceux-ci touchent leurs honoraires il leur est interdit de les exiger avec menaces, et même de les quêmander.”

figure who acts as a go-between are clearly identified in the ritual context. In fact it is Varuṇa who acts as an intermediary in a transaction in which the final recipient of the oblation seems to be simultaneously both god and the officiant himself:

VS(M)

*agnáye tvā máhyaṃ váruṇo dadātu sò 'mṛtatvám aśtyáyur dātrá edhi máyo máhyaṃ prati-grahitré*

May Varuṇa give you (acc. 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing.)<sup>59</sup> to me, I who am Agni! I might obtain non-death!<sup>60</sup> May life come to the giver, refreshment to me, I who am the recipient.

This prayer is repeated another three times: the final recipients are in turn Rudra, Bṛhaspati and Yama, the giver is always Varuṇa: the human giver, through the help of Varuṇa gains life, the other gods and the recipients gain refreshment. What seems to be at stake here is the well-known parallelism between the Brahmins and the gods, and the consequent implicit equation between the act of offering oblations to the gods and that of offering gifts to the Brahmins. Even more significantly, this section of the VS(M) closes with the well-known formula:

*kò 'dāt kásmā adāt kámo 'dāt kāmāyādāt | kámo dātá kámaḥ pratigrahitá kāmaitát te*

Who has given and to whom? Desire has given to desire. Desire is the giver. Desire is the one who receives. Desire, this is for you.

As is well known, every time an officiant accepts a gift, this formula is repeated to atone for guilt or to avoid the guilt that might result from accepting sacrificial gifts.<sup>61</sup>

This formula occurs in the earliest Yajurveda Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas and Śrautasūtras<sup>62</sup> and in ŚS 3.29.7, even though the context here is radically different, since it concerns the offering one must make to save oneself from the payment due to Yama and his ministers to gain access to the afterlife.<sup>63</sup> This different ritual use nevertheless also reveals a possible path for the integration of the reformed *dakṣiṇā* into the heart of the ritual process, precisely through the concept of the ransom offering highlighted by the Atharvavedic passage.

<sup>59</sup> As it can be seen from the variant of this *mantra* in MS below, this second person singular refers to the animal offered to the god.

<sup>60</sup> For this translation see below the discussion on the similar MS occurrence.

<sup>61</sup> Together with Kyoko Amano we worked on the lexical occurrences deriving from the verbal base *pratigrah-* “to accept” with special reference to the term *pratigrahitré*, precisely in order to understand the origin of this negativity in accepting something in the ritual context, a negativity of which there is no trace in the most ancient texts. Our results are forthcoming.

<sup>62</sup> Yajurveda: MS 1.9.4.8; KS 9.9.7; VS(M) 7.48. Brāhmaṇas: TB 2.2.5.4 PB 1.8.17 ŚB(M) 4.3.4.12. Śrautasūtras: ĀŚS 5.13.14; ŚŚS 4.7.15; ĀpŚS 14.11.6; BŚS 21.10; LŚS 2.7. 18 (hint at the formula to be murmured).

<sup>63</sup> See also Candotti et al. 2020: 145.

But there is more to this than meets the eye. In some of the other Vedic occurrences, these two formulas are associated with another one. Let us read this accompanying formula in what we assume to be the most ancient version, namely MS 1.9.4.8. The first prayer reads as follows:

*devāsya tvā savitūḥ prasavè 'śvīnor bāhūbhyāṃ pūṣṇó hástābhyāṃ prátigrhṇāmi.*

At the impulse of the god Savitr, with the arms of the Aśvins, with the hands of Pūṣan I receive you.

It is followed by an abbreviated (and slightly different) version of the VS(M) formula (and, of course by the *kāma*-formula as the closing verse):

*yamāya tvā máhyaṃ vāruṇo dadāti. sò 'mṛtatvám aśiya. máyo dātré bhūyāt. máyo máhyaṃ prátigrahitré*

Varuṇa gives you to me, I who am Yama. I might obtain the non-death. May refreshment come to the giver, refreshment to me who is the one who receives.

We may notice two interesting differences with respect to the matching VSM formula: a) the use of the present indicative *dadāti* instead of the imperative *dadātu*; b) the subject of the precative verbal form *bhūyāt* (in the place of the VS(M) imperative *edhi*) is the same, namely *mayas* “refreshment” for both recipients (giver and receiver).

The last prayer is the above mentioned *kāma*-formula.<sup>64</sup>

In order to better understand what is at stake here it is necessary to take into account the broader context of this passage. The whole of chapter 1.9, also called *caturhotṛ* chapter, is considered by Kyoko Amano as an attempt “to embed a non-orthodox ritual into the context of the orthodox *śrauta* ritual” (2017: 1044); in fact, the author specifically identifies this non-orthodox ritual with the *mahāvratā* ritual.<sup>65</sup> The whole chapter is crucial for the understanding of the evolution of the ritual act of distributing gifts in the text of the Yajurveda and certainly calls for closer scrutiny. For the moment let us concentrate on some very specific points concerning the relationship between the giver and the recipient.

The ritual is one might say mythically constructed through several successive sacrificial sessions. The first one involves a *daśahotṛ*-formula and the protagonist is Prajāpati who, being alone, desires to create the world: he first divides himself into the ten sacrificial implements. Then he creates the Devas and the Asuras from his

<sup>64</sup> The commentary on this is as follows: *samudró vai kāmō dakṣiṇā kāmō dākṣiṇayaivā dakṣiṇāṃ prátigrhṇāti. yó vai devátāṃ véda yāgre dakṣiṇāṃ ānyad dakṣiṇīyo ha bhavati, náyati dakṣiṇāṃ.* “Desire is in truth the Samudra (the great vessel of Soma). Desire is in truth the *dakṣiṇā*. For the *dakṣiṇā* [the horse] receives the *dakṣiṇā*. He who has known the deity who brought the *dakṣiṇā* in the beginning, in truth he becomes worthy of *dakṣiṇā*, leads the *dakṣiṇā*.”

<sup>65</sup> See also Amano 2019: 5–7.

breaths. Yet Prajāpati’s ritual setting seems incomplete since he still is in need of a support (*āyatana*). Having seen Indra inside his body he thus performs the first act of libation ever, by libating his in-breath into Indra. This is an interesting variation on the myth of Prajāpati as the first sacrificer, in which he seems to draw all the central elements of sacrifice from himself: instruments, sacrificial material (breaths),<sup>66</sup> and support of the offering (Indra, who is said to embody *vīrya* “power”).

The second session is a *caturhotṛ* session held by the gods who desire to generate Indra through a sacrifice with Soma as a *grhapati*. The *caturhotṛ* formula seems to establish a set of four priests (whose names only partially match the fully reformed ones) as indicated in the commentary: *prthivī hótāsīd dyaúr adhvaryús tvāṣṭāgnīn mitrá upavaktā* “The earth was the Hotṛ, the sky was the Adhvaryu, Tvaṣṭṛ was the Agnīdh, Mitra was the Upavakṭṛ.” The result of this sacrifice is described as follows: *tá índram janayitvābruvan. svār ayāméti* “Having generated Indra, they said, ‘May we go towards the sun!’”

A third sacrificial session is needed to fulfil this desire, a sacrifice with the *pañcahotṛ* formula, in which we find the three formulas for accepting gifts. Once again, it is a sacrifice with a *grhapati*, this time Varuṇa,<sup>67</sup> while four other gods assume the function of the officiants.<sup>68</sup> With this sacrifice the gods move toward heaven. They thus create the animals, and Varuṇa as the *grhapati* distributes them (and other gifts) to several gods.<sup>69</sup> It is precisely in this context that the distribution of the indraic vigour (*indriya*)<sup>70</sup> – generated by the sacrifice (as shown in the *caturhotṛ* session) and embodied in the animals – is discussed and handled through the three formulas mentioned above:

66 As noticed e.g. by Amano (2017: 1041), breath offerings were typical of *sattras* – see KS 33.7 ~ TS 8.5. 6.2 and KS 34.8 ~ TS 7.2, 9 10) where “some relation between breath control and *sattra*” emerges.

67 Once again in the function of the giver.

68 *té vai pāñcahotāro nyāsīdan vāruṇagrhapatayas. agnīr hótāsīt. aśvīnādhvaryú. rudró agnīd. bṛhaspátir upavaktā.* “Those indeed were engaged in a sacrificial session attended by five priests and with Varuṇa as the *grhapati*. Agni was the Hotṛ, the Aśvin the two Adhvaryu, Rudra was the Agnīdh, Bṛhaspati the Upavakṭṛ.” The name of the *pañcahotṛ* formula is justified by the fact that both the Aśvins perform the duty of the Adhvaryu, so that the priests are five.

69 This is followed by a *saptahotṛ* session (MS 1.9.5) with Aryaman as the *grhapati* held on their (i.e., of gods) way to the sun, when they still had to provide the sacrificial pole: *te vai svaryanto ’bruvan, ato no yūpaṃ prayachata kenāyatānenātraiva vetsy athety abruvan, te vai saptahotāro nyāsīdann aryamagrhapatayah.*

70 Indra in 1.9.3 is said to be equivalent to *vīrya* “power”. Such power is supposed to be the *āyatana*, i.e. the support of the sacrifice. What seems at stake here is the same indraic “magnificence” which is already the prerequisite and the output of the sacrifice in the *Ṛgveda*, where it labelled as *dakṣiṇā*, even though here we find a different terminology which has suggestive echoes in non-orthodox traditions.

MS 1.9.4

*tēna paśún asrjanta. tān devātābhyo 'nayan yamāyāśvam anayan. tāsyārdhām indriyāsyā-pākrāmat. sā etām pratigrahām apaśyat. devāsya tvā savitūḥ prasavè 'śvīnor bāhūbhyām pūṣṇó hāstābhyām prátigrhāmi. yamāya tvā máhyañ vāruṇo dadāti. sò 'mṛtatvām aśīya. máyo dātré bhūyāt. máyo máhyaṃ pratigrahitré. iti. sò 'rdhām indriyāsyópādhatta. ardhām indriyāsyópādhatte yá evāñ vidvān áśvam pratigrhāti. átha yó 'vidvān pratigrhāty ardhām asyen-driyāsyāpākrāmati.*

*With this [the gods] begot the animals. They led them to the deities, to Yama they led the horse. Half of his/its<sup>71</sup> vigour (i.e. the indraic power generated by the sacrifice) fled. He (Yama) saw this (formula of) reception: "At the impulse of the god Savitṛ, with the arms of the Ásvins, with the hands of Pūṣan, I receive you. Varuṇa gives you (O horse) to Yama [that is] to me." "I could obtain amṛtatvam for myself! May refreshment come to the giver, refreshment [also] to me, I who am the recipient." He added half the vigour. He who has such knowledge and receives the horse adds half the vigour. But half the vigour of the one who receives without knowing goes away.*

After Yama is given a horse, the rite of receiving is repeated, with different gifts of decreasing importance and danger, for the four officiant gods, Rudra, Agni, Bṛhaspati and Uttāna Aṅgiras (who replaces the Ásvins), each in the function of a matching priest. The fear represented here seems to be that accepting the offering might actually result in a *diminutio* on the part of the recipient. As we have already seen, these passages play on the underlying ambiguity between the function of the gods and that of the *brāhmaṇas*, gods on earth. Here Yama seems to fear that he will have to sacrifice half of his magnificence in exchange for the horse, just as his human counterpart, the *brāhmaṇa*, fears that he will have to give up his share of magnificence in exchange for the horse given as a gift. This is how we interpret the otherwise puzzling *sò 'mṛtatvām aśīya*: in fact, it cannot be the expression of a desire, i.e. "may I obtain non-death", which would be particularly out of place in the case of Yama and, more generally, of an officiant. Of course, it could easily refer to the patron but we have no trace of his presence in the whole chapter. Instead, we believe that it is a short and lively sketch in which Yama complains that Varuṇa is offering him a mere horse as a gift when such a sacrifice could actually grant him non-death. In fact, he goes on to declare that both the giver and the recipient should obtain refreshment. Let us highlight the fact that the difference between the giver and the recipient is far less evident in the MS than in the matching VS(M) formula which attributes different boons to them. The latter could thus be evidence of a further step towards a fully reformed context.

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<sup>71</sup> *tasya* can refer to the horse or to Yama himself, yet it is more probable that it refers to Yama because of the anaphoric chain *tasya ... saḥ* in which the second pronoun clearly refers to Yama. Moreover, at the end of this passage, which describes the actualization of the myth, the relative clause (*yá evāñ vidvān áśvam pratigrhāti*), built on the parallel genitive pronoun *asya* clearly shows who the owner of the *indriya* is.

The fact that the passage begins with Yama, who is not an officiant, is further evidence that the origin of the formulas was still perceived and interpreted against the background of the Atharvavedic funerary context in which one’s body is redeemed from death. The handing over of the *dakṣiṇā* to gods, now seen primarily in the function of officiants, is similarly understood as an act of redeeming the benefits of the sacrifice from those who, be them gods or priest, engendered them.

This passage may well bear witness to the first, laborious steps towards the construction of a reformed rite with a clear division between officiant and patron, each of whom is entitled to completely different (and immeasurable) benefits from the performance of the sacrifice. But it gives us a somewhat inverted image, starting from an unorthodox ritual that, as Amano suggests, has been manipulated to conceal its very nature, in which all the tensions arising from this operation are highlighted.

Giving up the role of being an active beneficiary of the religious fruits of the sacrifice must not have been an easy step to take.

## 5 Concluding Remarks

The synoptic analysis we have proposed here has focused more on the linguistic micro-variations of the formulas and their interpretation than on the presence or absence of given ritual elements. We hope to have succeeded in showing that behind some of these variations there lies the work of “experts” who intentionally worked on the texts in order to drive them, without any conspicuous modifications, towards a reformed cultic dimension.<sup>72</sup>

The example of the *dakṣiṇā* briefly analysed here shows how the more ancient value of magnificence as a prerequisite for sacrifice is still sometimes maintained in the texts of the Yajurveda tradition. In these texts, however, we witness almost in real time, the increasing movement of this institution towards a displacement of the gods, with priests becoming the final recipients, which as we have seen was accompanied by a certain concomitant fear in accepting such gifts.

This is entirely in line with Amano’s previously mentioned observations on the absence of any fixed sacrificial roles in the texts appearing before the Yajurveda tradition which was the first to foster this kind of transition. This implies that the technical supremacy of the Brahmins as officiants cannot be taken for granted from the very origins of Vedic culture, but that it at least finds its origins in the texts we have analysed. Some deep social and cultural movements seem to have been working in the direction of creating a class of experts in these sacrificial rituals. These

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72 The *Rgveda* may have already hinted at these experts with the term *vedhás*. See Brereton 2004; Pinault 2012 (especially p. 328) and bibliography quoted there.

movements went through several historical phases and the composition of the Mantras and Brāhmaṇa portions of the Yajurveda might well have been amongst the earliest of these.

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