"Who Has Found Speech Having Entered into the Seers?" On ṚV 10.71.3 and the Origin of Speech

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On ṚV 10.71.3 and the Origin of Speech

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Abstract

Ṛgveda 10.71 is usually considered as easy to understand, but as is the case with any other Ṛgvedic hymn, closer inspection reveals a number of difficulties. Among them is the problem of the unknown identity of the subjects of the first three stanzas: Although the activities described there are of fundamental importance within the ṛgvedic world view, no person is explicitly singled out as being responsible for them. It will be argued that one term in 10.71.3, *padavíya*, suggests the *kaví*s as the most likely subjects for activities related to it. After adducing Ṛgvedic attestations of the combination of *kaví* and *padá* as supportive evidence, it will furthermore be argued that the *kaví*s are the subjects of the first stanza as well, for the activity of distributing names is related to them in other stanzas as well. After considering in more detail some peculiar features of the first three stanzas it will be suggested to consider them as a metalinguistic reflection on the transition from myth via enigma to ritual.

Keywords: Ṛgveda 10.71; *kaví*; *vā́c*; language; speech; poetry.

Introduction: Hidden subjects in a Ṛgvedic stanza

The Ṛgvedic sūkta 10.71 certainly belongs to the more well-known hymns of the *Ṛgveda* (= ṚV), and it surely deserves it. The majority of Ṛgvedic hymns glorifies a deity by means of a long enumeration of epithets and prominent deeds. In them a sophisticated interplay of its constituents on all linguistic levels is displayed to such an extent, that it seems fair to assume that only the gods and perhaps a small group of priests were able to enjoy it. ṚV 10.71, instead, focuses on the very

possibility to create this interplay, i.e. on sacrificial speech, *vā́c*.[1] Furthermore, in contrast to the enigmatic and difficult language we so often face in many of the Ṛgvedic stanzas, many of the similes and formulations of this hymn are straightforwardly comprehensible. But as will be argued in this essay, this impression may at places turn out to be deceptive, and beyond the charming – because comprehensible – surface level at least in parts things may be more troublesome. In what follows an attempt will be made to highlight an example of such a challenging stanza, and I will furthermore try to demonstrate that the difficulties occuring in the first three stanzas are not due to the lack of sufficient background information, but are inherent in it.

The sūkta as a whole is known as the "Jñāna sūkta," the hymn of or to cognition, and according to tradition, Bṛhaspati is the author and jñāna, its deity. And as was to be expected with an speculative hymn, its ritual application is unknown.[2] Before the first three stanzas of this hymn will be discussed in more detail, a general outlook on the different ways they have been interpreted seems appropriate. According to Jamison and Brereton, its first stanza remembers the primordial seers with a reference to the Vala myth, where they have been able to release the cows by finding their secret names. The subject of stanza 2 and 3 is the contemporary priests, and they are the ones, who not only have found it in the words of the ṛ́ṣis, but who have also distributed it.[3] Their predecessors have approached these stanzas differently: Renou has assumed the same subjects throughout; in his opinion the first "poet seers" (*poètes-voyants*) have found speech and made her suitable for ritual purposes.[4] Another proposal for understanding these stanzas comes from Harry Falk, who suggests a succession of gods (stanza 1), primordial seers (stanza 2) and the ritualists of Ṛgvedic times, who have, via contemplation, approached the first seers.[5]

Given the lucidity of these stanzas in terms of syntax and morphology, the divergence of these approaches comes somewhat surprisingly, the more so since

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[1] For this reason Staal has considered this stanza as an early Indian instance of metalanguage. See Staal 1975, especially 321-323.

[2] *Sūktaviniyogo gataḥ* – Sāyaṇa, *ad loc*.

[3] Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1496, following Schmidt 1968: 124 in their interpretation of the first stanza.

[4] Renou 1956: 240-41; similar already Geldner 1957: 248-49.

[5] Falk 1987: 187.

the topic dealt with in these stanzas is well-known from other R̥gvedic hymns. The reason for this is quickly found: the absence of specified subjects in all three stanzas in combination with a lack of conjunctive elements and several changes of tense. The interplay of these three factors creates a contextual indeterminateness that does not allow at first glance for an unambiguous attribution of subjects to activities, tense and succession. However, one group of persons is mentioned in the third stanza, the *r̥ṣi*s, which sometimes appears in the context of sacrificial and poetic speech, *vā́c*,[6] whereas similar designations are missing in the first two ones. With the third stanza as a starting point and by taking recourse to some peculiarities of the r̥gvedic lexicon for the domain of poet and seer, it seems possible to discern a more satisfying structure for these stanzas.

The third stanza runs as follows:[7]

R̥V 10.71.3.   *yajñéna vācáḥ padavī́yam āyan tā́m ánv avindann r̥ṣiṣu práviṣṭām |*
              tā́m ābhŕ̥tyā vy àdadhuḥ purutrā́ tā́ṃ saptá rebhā́ḥ abhí sáṃ navante ||

              "Through the sacrifice they followed the track of Speech. They found her having entered into the seers.
              Having brought her here, they dispersed her in many places. The seven *rebhá*s together cry towards her."[8]

The agents/subjects of the activities denoted by the first three inflected verbs (*āyan*, *ánu avindan* and *adadhuḥ*) are not singled out, not even with the help of pronouns. Two groups of people are explicitly mentioned here, the rebhás and the r̥ṣis, but it is doubtful that they can be behind the mentioned activities, although the way both of these terms are used in the R̥V would at least not rule out their denotation of the respective agents. But the word *rebhá* with only 20 R̥gvedic attestations has a rather restricted domain of application: it usually refers to a ritual singer (e.g. R̥V 1.127.10, 7.63.3, and 8.97.11), and some stanzas

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[6] See e.g., R̥V 10.81.1; 10.125.5; 10.130.5-6.

[7] Translation from Jamison and Brereton 2014 (= J-B), unless indicated otherwise.

[8] Translation of pāda d by me, whereas J-B have translated it as follows: "The seven husky-voiced singers together cry her out." But the preverb *abhí* almost always indicates a direction towards an object which is put in the accusative, (cf. Krisch 2006, *s.v. abhí*, and Casaretto 2010 [2011]). In the case of of *abhí sám nu-* the accusative indicates the recipient of praise and the respective stanzas where this combined verb occurs together with an accusative object (R̥V 6.7.2 and 4; 8.95.1) have been translated by J-B accordingly.

suggest a special relation to a morning ritual (ṚV 1.113.17; 1.127.10; 6.3.6). A fixed group like the seven rebhás, *saptá rebháḥ*, does not occur elsewhere, and they are not credited with the ability to give structure to the ways sacrificial speech is put into use.

The other group mentioned here, the ṛṣis, would fit much better into the actions emphasized in this text, as the performance of their activities is indeed related to speech. But due to syntactical reasons it seems unlikely that they are the hidden subjects of this stanza; if this were the case, the word *ṛṣi-* should appear in the nominative, not in the locative. The previous two stanzas do not offer any further clues:

ṚV 10.71.1.   *bṛ́haspate prathamáṃ vācó ágraṃ yát praírata nāmadhéyaṃ dádhānāḥ |*
               yád eṣāṃ śréṣṭhaṃ yád ariprám ā́sīt preṇā́ tád eṣāṃ níhitaṃ gúhāvíḥ ||

               "O Bṛhaspati, (this was) the first beginning of Speech: when they [= the seers] came forth, giving names.
               What was their best, what was flawless—that (name), set down in secret, was revealed to them because of your affection (for them)."

The first stanza rather suspiciously omits every mention of a subject as well, except a very general (and for this reason rather disappointing) "they" and even this pronoun has to be supplied anyway. It seems plausible to add "the seers," as J-B have done (as well as Geldner before them), but a word of caution may at this place nevertheless be in order. As is well-known, Vedic Sanskrit contains a whole spectrum of terms roughly corresponding to "seer", e. g. *ṛṣi*, *kaví*, *vedhás*, etc. but all these terms possess distinctive semantic features which may get lost once one word is chosen the semantic equivalent of which in the source language is not mentioned. And as "seer" is their translation for *ṛṣi* in stanza 3, it should be kept in mind that they cannot be the subjects there, and it seems therefore unlikely that the activites mentioned in the first stanza can be ascribed to them.

The next stanza also does not offer any clues about the possible subjects:

ṚV 10.71.2.   *sáktum iva títaunā punánto yátra dhī́rā mánasā vā́cam ákrata |*
               átrā sákhāyaḥ sakhyā́ni jānate bhadraíṣāṃ lakṣmī́r níhitā́dhi vācí ||

               "When the wise have created Speech by their thought, purifying her like coarse grain by a sieve,
               In this they recognize their companionship as companions. Their auspicious mark has been set down upon Speech."

Here two designations are used for denoting the agents, *dhī́ra* and *sákhi*, but both of them do not single out specific groups. These nouns are applicable as attributes for groups in general without any specific restriction. Furthermore, there is a remarkable switch of tenses in these three successive stanzas; the first stanza displays only the use of the imperfect tense, which denotes an action in the historical past (*ágram*). The second stanza moves the scenery into the immediate past and the present, which are described by the corresponding tenses, present and aorist. Eventually, the third stanza has both, actions in the past as well as in the present. Consequently, it is not obvious at first glance that stanza 2 has a direct connection with 1 or 3, unless one assumes that a change of perspective for the lyrical narrator has taken place due which the events are described here as happening at the presence of the speaker.

The following stanzas 4 to 11 continue the description of the present with present or perfect tense forms, but without reference to the first three stanzas. Their meaning, and the meaning of stanza three in particular, has therefore to be elucidated by different means.

Hidden tracks, enigmatic words and the kavís

In order to do so, it may be promising to have a closer look at *padavī́yam* in stanza 3a. It is an abstract noun with a transparent morphology, build up by the words *padávī-* and the suffix *-ya*. This word does not appear to offer any derivational or morphological difficulties: the first element of the underlying compound *padá*, "track, trace" is attested two times with finite verb forms of *vī-*, ṚV 1.48.6 and 6.1.4. Especially the last stanza might be interesting:

ṚV 6.1.4.   *padáṃ devásya námasā vyántaḥ śravasyávaḥ śráva āpann ámṛktam |*
nā́māni cid dadhire yajñíyāni bhadrā́yāṃ te raṇayanta sáṃdṛṣṭau ||

"Pursuing the track of the god with homage, seeking fame, they will attain fame indestructible; even the names they have assumed are worthy of worship. They take pleasure in your auspicious manifestation."

In this stanza the terms *nā́man* (which occurs in stanza 10.71.1 as well) and *padá* are attested in one stanza, and its content makes it likely that it is the ritual poets who are to be understood as the subject of tracking. As is well-known, besides denoting "track" and "place," *padá-* has acquired the meaning of "word" in Sanskrit, and thanks especially to the works of Renou and Thompson, its specific Ṛgvedic function to figure as an item of the esoteric lexicon has become intelli-

gible.[9] It may therefore tentatively be termed an "enigmatic semantic unit" and it is characteristically used when hidden connections between ritual, poetry and deities come into the focus of the Ṛgvedic poets.[10] As the genitive *vācáḥ* makes clear, the background for building up the compound *padavīyá* is formed by the enigmatic nature of speech. The abstract noun itself is derived from the root compound *padaví-*, which is attested seven times in the ṚV.[11] In three of them (ṚV 3.5.1; 9.96.6 and 18), it forms a syntagma with the term *kaví-*, one of the more prominent used designations for "poet."[12] The stanzas are as follows:

ṚV 3.5.1.   *práty agnír uṣásaś cékitāno 'bodhi vípraḥ padavīḥ kavīnā́m |*
             pṛthupā́jā devayádbhiḥ sámiddhó 'pa dvā́rā támaso váhnir āvaḥ ||

             "In response to the dawns, the ever more visible Agni has awak-
             ened, the inspired (priest), trail-blazer for the poets. He of broad
             visage, kindled by those seeking the gods, as the draft-horse (of the
             oblations), has opened the doors of darkness."

ṚV 9.96.6.   *brahmā́ devā́nām padavī́ḥ kavīnā́m ṛ́ṣir víprāṇām mahiṣó mṛgā́ṇām |*
             śyenó gṛ́dhrāṇāṃ svádhitir vánānāṃ sómaḥ pavítram áty eti rébhan ||

             "Formulator for the gods, trail-blazer for the sage poets, seer for the
             inspired poets, buffalo of the wild beasts, falcon of the birds of prey,
             axe of the trees—Soma goes rasping through the filter."

ṚV 9.96.18. *ṛ́ṣimanā yá ṛṣikṛ́t svarṣā́ḥ sahásraṇīthaḥ padavī́ḥ kavīnā́m |*
             tṛtī́yaṃ dhā́ma mahiṣáḥ síṣāsan sómo virā́jam ánu rājati ṣṭúp ||

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[9] Cf. Renou 1941-42: 134-38, Renou 1958: 21-22, and Thompson 1995.

[10] The expression "enigmatic semantic unit" has been used here instead of "word," since there is no unambiguous example for an entity denoted by *padá* in the ṚV. When this term is used linguistically, its denoted object is only referred to with this term, ergo left unexpressed (as is to be expected in the domain of esoteric speech). Possible coun-terexamples like *padáṃ véḥ* or *padáṃ góḥ* have been adduced as possessing the meaning of just *ví* or *gó*, but given the esoteric context, an attribution of a single (and simple!) meaning to this syntagma seems unlikely. For this reason it can not be ruled out that *padá* is applicable not only for words, but for syntagmas as well.

[11] See Scarlata 1999: 499.

[12] Of course a kaví (and to a certain extent also some of the designators from this do-main) is much more than a poet, since he is also concerned with the adequate forms of ritual and the discernment of cosmic and ritual structures; see Köhler 2011.

"Having the mind of a seer, a maker of seers, gaining the sun, having a thousand devices, trail-blazer for poets, a buffalo, seeking to gain the third domain, Soma, as rhythm [the anuṣṭubh meter], regulates the virāj (meter) according to rule."

As a cursory glance shows, *padavī́* occurs in combination with *kaví*, but not with any other term from this semantic domain.[13] The gods who are described this way are Agni and Soma, and the ratio behind this syntagma and its use for exactly these two gods is probably to be found in the the way poetic inspiration is conceived of. Agni and Soma are the inspirators par excellence for the Ṛgvedic poets and are therefore the suitable objects of reference for the term *padavī́*. And apart from inspiration, the occurence of this syntagma, rare as it is in terms of absolute numbers, fits to those Ṛgvedic stanzas where *padá* and *kaví* occur side by side, as in, e.g., ṚV 10.53.10.

ṚV 10.53.10. *sató nūnáṃ kavayaḥ sáṃ śiśīta vā́śībhir yā́bhir amṛ́tāya tákṣatha |*
vidvā́ṃsaḥ padā́ gúhyāni kartana yéna devā́so amṛtatvám ānaśúḥ ||

"Now, poets, sharpen up (the hatchets) that are (here), the axes with which you carve for the immortal. As knowing ones, create hidden tracks, (like the track) by which the gods achieved immortality."

In this stanza, any mythological background is missing, the kavís are the ones who know how to deal with hidden tracks/word, and moreover they are even concerned with immortality. Within the Ṛgvedic world view, this obviously means, that they are involved in poetry of a special kind. Further combinations of *kaví* with *padá* occur in ṚV 1.146.4; 8.8.23; 9.12.8; 9.97.57 and 10.177.2. The evidence collected so far therefore suggests the assumption that the anonymous subjects of ṚV 10.71.3 could be referred to as kavís. But there is another reason why this term can serve to single out the subjects in question. Among the terms which can be used in the ṚV to denote a poet, *kaví* is the one with the broadest range of activities.[14] Not only does a kaví compose and recite poetry, he is also responsible for the structure of the ritual, as the following stanzas make clear:

ṚV 10.114.5. *suparṇáṃ víprāḥ kaváyo vácobhir ékaṃ sántam bahudhā́ kalpayanti |*
chándāṃsi ca dádhato adhvaréṣu gráhān sómasya mimate dvā́daśa ||

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[13] In ṚV 3.5.1, *padavī́* is qualified by the attribute *vípra*, which also serves to denote ritual poets. But the determining relation holds between *padavī́* and the kavis.

[14] Apart from *vedhás*, but this term does not appear in the vicinity of *padavī́*; the etymology and meaning of *vedhás* is dealt with in Pinault 2013.

"The inspired ones, the sage poets configure the eagle, though it is just one, in many ways with their words.
And arranging their meters at the ceremonies, they measure twelve cupfuls of soma."

ṚV 10.114.6. *ṣaṭtriṃśā́ṃś ca catúraḥ kalpáyantaś chándāṃsi ca dádhata ādvādaśám /*
yajñáṃ vimā́ya kaváyo manīṣā́ ṛksāmā́bhyām prá ráthaṃ vartayanti //

"Configuring the four as thirty-six and arranging the meters up to twelve (syllables?),
having measured out the sacrifice with their inspired thought, the poets make the chariot [= sacrifice] roll forth with ṛc and sāman [verse and tune]."

Consequently, the kavís are occupied with sacrificial speech and its place in the ritual setting, and this would fit to the way the activities are described in stanza 3. Furthermore, both meanings of *padá* – "trace" and "enigmatic expression" – would fit as well. The kavís are looking for the traces of speech, and this means that they look for those enigmatic units which form a part of her. And by situating the setting in the past, these activities obtain an aetiological character, thereby explaining how and why ritual poetry works in the present of the composer of this poem.

One may object that the information collected so far is not sufficient enough to single out the kavís as the agents; for example, in ṚV 10.130 it is not the kavís but the ŕṣis who have structured the ritual. But as will be shown below, the ŕṣis do not participate to the same degree in those acts that help to constitute ritual as the kavís: Whereas the activies of the later ones are described with forms of the causative of *kalp-* with the resulting meaning "configure, order" in ṚV 10.114.5 and 6, does the perfect of this root with the meaning "to go along (with)" appear in ṚV 10.130.5 and 6;[15] the translation of the respective pādas (d and a) has been modified accordingly:

ṚV 10.130.5. *virā́ṇ mitrā́váruṇayor abhiśrī́r índrasya triṣṭúb ihá bhāgó áhnaḥ |*
víśvān devā́ñ jágaty ā́ viveśa téna cākl̥pra ŕṣayo manuṣyā̀ḥ ||

"The virāj meter is the full glory of Mitra and Varuṇa, and the triṣṭubh meter is here Indra's portion of the (sacrificial) day.
The jagatī meter entered the All Gods. The seers, the sons of Manu, have gone along with it (the ritual)."

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[15] See Kümmel 2000: 140-41.

ṚV 10.130.6. *cākḷpré téna ṛ́ṣayo manuṣyā̀ yajñé jāté pitáro naḥ purāṇé |*
páśyan manye mánasā cákṣasā tā́n yá imáṃ yajñám áyajanta pū́rve ||

> "The seers, the sons of Manu, our fathers, have gone along with it (the ritual), when the sacrifice was born in ancient times.
> Seeing with my mind as my eye, I think of the ancient ones who offered this sacrifice."

The ṛ́ṣis apparently do not have a role as important and significant as the kavís, and this impression is confirmed by the last stanza of this poem:

ṚV 10.130.7. *sahástomāḥ saháchandasa āvṛ́taḥ sahápramā ṛ́ṣayaḥ saptá daívyāḥ |*
pū́rveṣām pánthām anudṛ́śya dhī́rā anvā́lebhire rathyò ná raśmī́n ||

> "The courses (of the ritual were) joined with the praise songs, joined with the meters. The heavenly Seven Seers were joined with the model (of the rite).

> Looking along the path of the ancients, the insightful ones [=the present priests] have taken hold of the reins (of the sacrifice) like charioteers."

To sum up, the compound *padaví*, from which *padavíya* is derived, forms a syntagma only with *kaví*, and not with any other related term. Furthermore, the kavís deal prominently with enigmatic speech, the elements of which are denoted, inter alia, by *padá*. And finally, they take an active role in establishing ritual precedures, something that could be related to the content of ṚV 10.71.3. It seems therefore likely that the kavís are the anonymous subjects of ṚV 10.71.3 a-c.

But there are some open questions: What is the explanation for pāda d? Who are the subjects of the first two stanzas? How does this explanation fit to the remaining stanzas of this hymn? And why have the kavís not been mentioned in the first place?

The first question is perhaps the least difficult to answer: *tā́ṃ saptá rebhā́ḥ abhí sáṃ navante* means that speech itself has become the object of the praise of the rebhás, as this is the usual construction of the verb *nu-* in combination with *abhí* and *sám* (cf. e.g. ṚV 6.7.2 and 4). And paradoxically, since this is done by means of speech, she herself becomes simultaneously not only the means of praise, but the addressee as well.

The second question is of a more problematic nature. The first three stanzas with their encoded statements on origin and nature of ritual poetry certainly form a thematic unit that deals with the foundation for the activities depicted in the remaining stanzas. It seems plausible to consider them as the subjects of

stanza 1 as well, as the acitivities ascribed there to anonymous subjects would fit well into the descriptive frame for the kavís: Not only are they frequently mentioned in connection with padá, as has been demonstrated above, they also occur in combination with nā́man:

RV 10.5.2.   *samānáṃ nīḷáṃ vŕ̥ṣaṇo vásānāḥ sáṃ jagmire mahiṣā́ árvatībhiḥ |*
               r̥tásya padáṃ kaváyo ní pānti gúhā nā́māni dadhire párāṇi ||

> "Cloaking themselves [i.e., dwelling] in the same nest, the bullish buffaloes have united with the mares.
> The sage poets protect the track of truth: they have placed in hiding the highest names."

And also the following stanza from the 9th Maṇḍala can be adduced here to demonstrate the intimate connection between being a kavī and the establishment of names:

RV 9.92.2.   *áchā nr̥cákṣā asarat pavítre nā́ma dádhānaḥ kavír asya yónau |*
               sī́dan hóteva sádane camū̀ṣū̀pem agmann r̥ṣayaḥ saptá víprāḥ ||

> "With the gaze on men, the kavī has run here, acquiring a name in in the filter, in his womb,
> taking a seat in the cups, like a Hotar on his seat. The seven inspired ŕ̥ṣis have just gone to him."[16]

With this evidence, the connection between *kavī* and *nā́man* appears therefore sufficiently close to assume that the kavís are the anonymous subjects not only of RV 10.71.3, but of the first stanza as well. The phrase *prathamáṃ vācó ágraṃ yát praírata nāmadhéyaṃ dádhānāḥ* sounds, *prima facie*, like a further instance of stanzas dealing with the name-giving activities of the kavís mentioned above. But a closer look reveals that the kavís in stanza 1 are involved in a even more fundamental activity. Here, they do not establish names; rather, they establish the very possibility for doing so: By making *nāmadhéya* instead of *nā́man*

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[16] My translation. J-B have translated pādas a and b as "his gaze on men, he has run here, acquiring the name 'poet' in the filter, in his womb" (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1331). But the decision to take the nominative of *kavī* as the direct object of the participle *dádhāna* is hardly justifiable because of the missing case agreement, and furthermore, there is no reason not to accept the more plausible alternative to consider it as an epithet for Soma. With all in all 45 instances, including this stanza, where *kavī* is used for Soma (cf. Köhler 2011: 30), there is no need of further explanation of its appearance in this stanza.

the object of *dhā-* "to place," at least if *dhéya*, the second member of the compound *nāmadhéya*, is taken here as an abstract noun derived from *dhā-* with the meaning "establishing."[17] Seen this way, the *kavís* would have enabled the very possibility for the performance of rituals, and interestingly, this circumstance affects the Ṛgvedic conception of speech, *vāc.* It is well-known that speech is the most important constituent of Vedic ritual (at least for the Ṛgvedic poets), and this has led to a gradual increase of its status, eventually leading to its deification in ṚV 10.125. But from this sūkta one could get the impression, that to reach its full divine form, speech is dependent, if not on ongoing recitation of ritual poetry (for it is this domain, where her power is at its peak), than at least on the activities of the *kavís* who allotted to her her specific role in ritual. And whereas the second stanza does not have an immediate connection to the scenery depicted in the first one, (as indicated by the use of the aorist and the present tense), the third stanza ties in with the content of the latter. As Thompson has shown, *padá* usually denotes "trace" or "trail" in the ṚV, and out of it developed the specific use for denoting linguistic units in the meaning of "trace of the gods."[18] But in with regard to *vācáḥ padavíyam āyan* in ṚV 10.71.3, an additional level of meaning is presented. Once the double meaning of "trace" and "enigmatic linguistic unit" for *padá* is taken into account, two different descriptions of the same action are given in this stanza. On the one hand, the kavís searched for the traces of speech, and on the other hand they searched for the enigmatic words – i.e., a part of speech they needed in order to shape the ritual. And to find her (speech) in the ŕṣis just means they have the enigmatic words at their disposal, so that from the kavís' point of view all that was needed for establishing the ritual was present. And also pāda d of ṚV 10.71.3 gets an extended meaning: in this stanza vác, which would usually be the means for *abhí sáṃ nu-*, figures here as its object, as has been shown above. An obvious interpretation would be to see this as a

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[17] This interpretation is not undisputed, because according to Vārttika 2 (*bhāgarū-panāmabhyo dheyaḥ*) and 3 (*mitrācchandasi*) to A 5.4.36 *dheya-* can be added as a suffix to *bhāga, rūpa, nāma,* and (in Vedic language) to *mitra* without changing its meaning, therefore *nāmadhéya* = *nā́man*. Given the circumstance that Kātyāyana certainly lived after Pāṇini (who did not mention this rule), his authority for Vedic may be open to doubt. But even if his rule would be correct, it nevertheless would not exclude the interpretation given above, for in the domain of (especially Ṛgvedic) poetic language, phonetic elements can always suggest semantic relations. The possibility to attribute a more literal meaning for this term has been taken into consideration in Graßmann 1996, s. v. *nāma-dhéya*; as its first meaning occurs "Namengebung."

[18] See Thompson 1995.

confirmation, that she has become a deity in her full rights, but this is not to say that she has suddenly become the object of worship. Rather, the audience of this stanza is given to understand that in every act of worship performed or supported by the means of poetry, speech herself is worshipped.

But this establishment of sacrificial speech as an essential feature of ritual is itself situated in a larger context, the transition of myth to enigma. The poem starts with an address to Bṛhaspati, who does not only figure as the embodiement of sacrificial spech, but as one of the main protagonists of the Vala myth as well, where he is assisted by the Aṅgiras, the first mythical poets.[19] Part of the myth is the liberation of the cows from a cave by means of poetry, which consequently must have been at the disposal of the ṛṣis already. Seen this way, the *kavís* have transformed speech by changing it from an mythical instrument so to speak into an element of ritual performances.

With these premises the third question finds an answer as well. The prominent topics of the remaining stanzas, the necessity of visionary abilities for composing poetry as well as the urge to cooperate in the performance of a ritual are developments and elaborations of the first activities of the kavís that took place in the remote past. One element of this aetiology for ritual is the constant emphasis of friendly cooperation of the persons involved, from the mythical past via the enigmatic transformation to the concrete ritual performances. This feature is brought out to such an extent, that it figures as an important link between these different stages.

Finally, the question why the kavís have not been mentioned at all in the first place remains to be answered. It is of course rather difficult to discover the reasons a poet may have had for omitting certain things, but an attempt for a tentative answer may nevertheless be ventured. According to ṚV 10.71.1d, the mutual affection of the kavís caused that which was hidden to appear: *preṇā́ tád eṣāṃ níhitaṃ gúhāvíḥ*. But perhaps the opposite interpretation works as well: with their affection they have hidden what has been obvious before. This would explain why the kavís have not been mentioned, and it perhaps also offers an explanation for the problematic character of stanza 2, which has so far been tacitly ignored: the tenses used in this stanza (aorist and present tense) suggest a relation to the present, but its position between two stanzas with their clear reference to the past calls for a similar time reference. Maybe there is no contradiction here: the ongoing activities on the ritual ground are imitations of primordial events that have led to their very establishment in the past. And yet more

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[19] For Bṛhaspati and the Aṅgiras, see the seminal work Schmidt 1968.

than imitation is involved, for the kavís furnished the ritual structures with a kind of language, which is supposed to be used creatively. And since this invention of ritual structures has presumably not been conducted by poetry, it seems therefore plausible to assume that the kavís possessed a competence for speech per se, not only for poetry.[20]

The foregoing analysis has tried to show that the first three stanzas of ṚV 10.71 contain a sophisticated interplay between revelation and secrecy, culminating in an aetiology for ritual and sacrificial speech. That this aetiology itself is given in an enigmatic way that defies interpretation, may nicely illustrate one of the characteristics of vā́c mentioned in stanza 4a: *utá tvaḥ páśyan ná dadarśa vā́cam* – "And many a one who sees has not seen Speech."

Acknowledgments

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[20] This is a proposal brought forward by Prof. Pinault during discussion.

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