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TEXT-CRITICAL AND LINGUISTIC REMARKS ON
THE INTERPRETATION OF AN ATHARVANIC HYMN
TO NIGHT: ŚAUNAKĪYA 19.47 = PAIPPALĀDA 6.20*

The Atharvavedic hymn Śaunakīya 19.47 (attested also in Paippalāda 6.20) opens the group of the four Śaunakīya hymns (Atharvaveda-Śaunakīya 19.47-50) dedicated to the goddess of Night, Rātrī. According to AV-Parīśiṣṭa 4.3-5, hymns 47-48 and 49-50 are thematically grouped into two ‘sense hymns’ (*arthasūkta*; see Griffiths 2003: 5f.), applied in the ritual of worshipping Night. The first three stanzas are also attested (with variants) in the ‘apocryphal’ R̥gvedic hymns, in RV-Khilāni 4.2. Metre is irregular, mostly anuṣṭubh with incorporation of 12-syllabic pādas.

Alongside with the standard English translation by Whitney/Lanman (1905: II, 974-977), there are also translations by Kuhn (1864: 131f.); Ludwig (1878: 467); Zimmer (1879: 179-180); Geldner (1928: 28-29; except for stanzas 3-5); Renou (1942: 37; 1947: 27-28); Elizarenkova (1976: 328f. and 395f.); Sani (Orlandi & Sani 1992: 190-191). Griffiths (2009: 213-223) offers a detailed analysis of this and the following hymns in the Paippalāda recension). A number of stanzas are translated by Insler (1970: 143-147).

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In spite of the thorough and laudable Griffiths' analysis and discussion of the hymn in question, there are still several forms and passages in this text that require further clarification. The present paper offers several minor addenda to Griffiths' and earlier translations and commentaries. My linguistic and text-critical remarks are based on textual evidence available from both recensions.

I will use the standard edition of the Atharvaveda (AV) by Roth and Whitney, edition by Viśva Bandhu (for Śaunakīya) and ed. by Bhattacharya (for Paippalāda), only noticing the most important difficulties and discrepancies between the two recensions; the full critical apparatus for the Śaunakīya recension can be found in ed. Pandit and ed. Viśva Bandhu; for the Paippalāda, both the fundamental study of Griffiths (2009) and ed. Bhattacharya provide full evidence available from Orissa and Kashmirian manuscripts.

AVŚ 19.47.1 = AVP 6.20.1

*ā rātri pārthivaṃ rājah
pitúr aprāyi dhāmabhiḥ
divāḥ sādāṃsi bṛhatī vi tiṣṭhasa
ā tveṣāṃ vartate tāmaḥ*

O night, the earthly space has been filled with the establishments of the father (= Heaven). You, the high one, extend to the seats of the Heaven. Dense (tight?) darkness is rolling on (*ā-vṛt*).

The translation of pāda b *pitúr aprāyi dhāmabhiḥ* poses some linguistic and philological problems. While the genitive *pitúr* 'of the father' undoubtedly refers to the Heaven, the meaning of its syntactic head, the instrumental *dhāmabhiḥ*, is not quite clear and was translated differently by different scholars: 'war [...] gefüllet mit des vaters schaar' (Kuhn), 'ward erfüllt von den mächten [schöpfungen] des vaters' (Ludwig), 'hath been filled with the father's orderings' (Whitney), 'наполнен формами

отца' [is filled with the forms of the father] (Elizarenkova). Renou (1947: 27) interpreted this passage differently and saw here the ellipsis of the agentive (instrumental) noun: 'l'espace terrestre a été empli par toi, suivant les ordonnances du Père'; cf. also Sani's translation: 'lo spazio terrestre è stato riempito secondo le regole del padre Cielo'. Gonda (1967: 41) noticed the unclear character of the term *dhāman-* in this context and translated *pitūr dhāmabhiḥ* as "with the 'projections' of the Father's (an otherwise anonymous mighty god) divine essence". However, Griffiths (2009: 213f.) convincingly argues that the passage is likely to refer to the Heaven-Father and translates *dhāmabhiḥ* as 'positions' ('has been filled [by you] with the positions of [your] father'), explaining that it may refer to the star in the night sky.

Of particular interest is the verbal form that appears in this sentence, *apṛāyi*. This medio-passive aorist of the root *prā* 'fill' is not found elsewhere in the Vedic corpus and, in theory, allows for two interpretations: it can be rendered either as a passive: 'has been filled' (thus Ludwig: 'ward erfüllt'; Whitney: 'hath been filled'; Kümmel (1996: 72) '[a]ngefüllt (worden) ist'), or as a non-passive intransitive (decausative, or anticausative): 'has become full' (thus Griffiths 2009). The first, passive, analysis must also underlie the commentary on this verse found in Nirukta: *apūpuras tvaṃ rātri pāṛthivaṃ rājaḥ* 'you, O Night, has filled the earthly space'. The passive interpretation appears more appropriate for system-related linguistic reasons: unlike the verb *pr̥-* 'fill, become full', which is well-attested both in transitive-causative ('fill, make full'), and intransitive ('become full') usages, the historically related verb *prā* 'fill' should be characterized as fundamentally transitive in terms of syntactic classification. Accordingly, its intransitive counterpart must be a passive, rather than an anticausative (for further details on this syntactic division, see Kulikov 2011).

The exact meaning of the adjective *tveṣāṃ* in pāda d (*tveṣā ... tāmaḥ*) is not quite clear in this context. The indigenous commentary glosses it with mutually excluding terms:

dīpyamānaṃ nīlavarnaṃ ('shining, dark-blue'). The majority of existing translations rather rely on the former meaning, cf. 'liechtblitzendes dunkel' (Ludwig), 'das flimmernde Dunkel' (Zimmer), 'bright darkness' (Whitney), 'das (sterne)funkelnde Dunkel' (Geldner), 'les ténèbres scintillantes' (Renou), 'sparkling darkness' (Griffiths). Elizarenkova translates 'мерцающий мрак' [shimmering darkness], which probably suggests the image of the night sky full with stars. The only Rgvedic hymn dedicated to Night, 10.127, qualifies indeed the night as 'light', opposed to the darkness, cf. *jyótiṣā bādhate tāmaha* (RV 10.127.2) '[the night] expels the darkness with light'. All these translations leave out of consideration the 'dark' aspect of the night, however. It seems that *tveṣám* refers in this passage to a feature that is shared both by bright light and full (dense, tight) darkness: both deprive living beings from the ability to see, blinding them for a short time ('blinding darkness'). Note that, alongside with the meanings listed above ('shining, bright'), *tveṣá-* is also attested with the meaning 'vehement, powerful', cf. *tveṣó raváthaḥ* (RV 1.100.13) 'vehement roaring', *tveṣám ... samáraṇam* (RV 1.155.2) 'vehement battle'; *tveṣám ... rudráam* (RV 1.114.4) 'vehement/furious Rudra'; *kṣatrám ... tveṣám* (RV 5.34.9) 'vehement power'; cf. also *tveṣó arkáḥ* (AVŚ 4.15.5) 'bright/vehement is the flash of lightning', where both meanings, 'shining, bright' and 'vehement', are appropriate. Most likely, *tveṣá-* refers in this context to the high degree (density) of darkness – 'dense (tight?) darkness'; cf. Sani's translation 'la terrible tenebra' as well as Sarup's (1921: 148) rendering for Nirukta 9.29, where this stanza is quoted: 'the dreadful darkness'.

AVŚ 19.47.2 = AVP 6.20.2

ná yáśyāḥ pāráṃ dadṛśé ná yóyuvad
vísvam asyāṃ ní viśate yád éjati
áriṣṭāśas ta urvi tamasvati
rātri pāráṃ aśīmahi
bhádre pāráṃ aśīmahi

[The one] whose further [limit] is not seen, [as] [the day (light (?))] that is receding [is] not [seen] (anymore). Everything that moves comes to rest in her. May we, O wide darksome night, attain [your] further limit uninjured; may we, O fortunate one, attain [your] further limit.

The interpretation of the two coordinated attributes in *pāda* a, *pārām* and *yóyuvat*, poses some problems. While the former, *pārā-* ‘further [limit]’, obviously refers to the morning that replaces the night, the interpretation of the intensive participle *yóyuvat* is far from obvious. Whitney understood this form transitively (?) (‘She of whom the further limit is not seen, nor what separates’), but transitive-causative usages are only attested for the reduplicated present of the verb *yu* (*yuyóti* ‘makes keep away’; see e.g. Joachim 1978: 53ff.; 139f.). Under the intransitive analysis (‘retreating, receding’), adopted in some other translations, it remains unclear what kind of substantive might be qualified by this epithet. Thus, Schaefer (1994: 172) hesitantly connected this participle with darkness (‘das (Stück für Stück/immer wieder) zurückweichende (Dunkel?)’). Griffiths (2009: 214f.) suggested that the syntactic head of *yóyuvat* may be *rājas-*, rather than *tāmas-* ‘darkness’ (‘[whose] receding [space (?)] is not visible’), assuming that it may refer to the dark earthly space. In my view, the most natural understanding of this passage should connect the two coordinated members (*pārām* and *yóyuvat*) with the two limits of the night – that is, with its end and beginning, which are listed here in the context of a stylistic repetition (‘anaphora’ in terms of Klein 2010: 16-19): *ná dadrṣé ... ná [dadrṣé] ...* ‘is not seen ... [is] not [seen] ...’. One of these is ‘yonder, further, future’ limit – that is, the boundary that marks the end of the night, separating it from the coming day. The other is ‘this’, past limit, separating night from the day just ended. Accordingly, the participle *yóyuvat* may refer to the receding day light of the past day, and its syntactic head could be, for instance, the neuter substantive *svār-* ‘(day/sun) light’: ‘[the day light] that is

receding [is] not [seen]’; cf. in particular, the formula *svàr drśé* ‘for seeing (day/sun) light’, common in the Rgveda.

AVŚ 19.47.3 = AVP 6.20.3

*yé te rātri nṛcákṣaso
draṣṭāro navatīr náva
aśītīḥ sánty aṣṭā
utó te saptá saptatīḥ*

O night, the men-watching lookers that are yours [are] ninety [and] nine, they are eighty [and] eight, also seven [and] seventy are yours,

AVŚ 19.47.4 = AVP 6.20.4

*ṣaṣṭís ca ṣát ca revati
pañcāśát páñca sumnaya
catvāraś catvāriṣśác ca
tráyas triṣśác ca vājini*

and sixty and six, O wealthy one; fifty [and] five, O benevolent one; four and forty, three and thirty, O victorious¹ one;

AVŚ 19.47.5 = AVP 6.20.5

*dváu ca te viṣśatís ca te
rātrīy ékādaśāvamāḥ
tébhir no adyá pāyúbhir
+nī² pāhi duhitar divaḥ*

¹ For the meaning of the term *vājini-*, see Griffiths 2009: 128f., 216f. Griffiths translates it as ‘prize-winner’.

² Whitney’s emendation; mss. read *ná* (Śaunakīya) or *nu* (Paippalāda); for a discussion of variant readings, see Griffiths 2009: 217f.

and two are yours (i.e. your watchers), and twenty are yours; [and], O night, eleven are the last. With those protectors today protect us, O daughter of the sky.

The expression *nṛcákṣaso draṣṭārah* ‘men-watching lookers’ in 3ab is likely to refer to the stars. The quantity of watchers is described here in terms of numbers divisible by 11: 99, 88, 77 etc. The symbolism of this numerical series is not quite clear; see Keith 1917: 408; Oldenberg 1894: 516. A part of this series, 55–77–99, also appears in AV 6.25, but in a different context, in a spell against pain. However, at least one of its member, the number 33, may be relevant in the context of our hymn: 33 is the sum of 27 nakṣatras (see, for instance, Weber 1862; Hillebrandt 1927-1929: Bd. I, 386), five planets (see Hillebrandt 1927-1929: Bd. II, 411f.) and the moon – which provides an association quite appropriate in the context of a hymn to Night. Another important symbolic meaning associated with the number 33 is the number of gods (often mentioned in the R̥gveda). The decreasing sequence of numbers, according to the plausible assumption of S. Jamison (quoted in Griffiths 2009: 215), may refer to the stars going out at the arrival of dawn.

AVŚ 19.47.6ab = AVP 6.20.6ab

rákṣā mākir no aghásamsa īsata
mā no duḥśamsa īsata

May no evil-cursing demon take possession of us; may no bad-cursing one take possession of us ...

Pāda a is taken from RV 6.71.3d (= RV 6.75.10d). The main problem is posed by the first word, *rákṣā*. The accent on the first syllable points to the 2sg. imperative form of the verb *rakṣ* ‘protect’, with the secondary lengthening of the final vowel. Accordingly, this form is unanimously translated for this R̥gvedic passage as a verbal form (‘protect (us)!’), which is

syntactically connected in RV 6.71.3 with the preceding pāda (c): *suvitāya nāvyaśe* ‘*rākṣā* ‘protect (us) for a new fortune!’; it was pointed out, however (in particular, by Renou) that the same form in the repetition RV 6.75.10d (undoubtedly based on RV 6.71.3) is syntactically ‘hanging’.

By contrast, the translators of the Atharvaveda unanimously interpret *rākṣā* as the nom.sg. form of *rakṣás-* ‘demon’ (which, however, requires emending the accentuation, ⁺*rakṣā*, suggested already by Whitney). Two exceptions are made by Geldner’s and Griffiths’ translations, which adopt the meaning attested in the Rgveda: ‘Schütze uns...’ (Geldner 1928: 218); ‘Give protection!’ (Griffiths 2009: 218). Whitney in his Atharvavedic concordance (1881: 244) quotes this form twice, both as a form of the verb *rakṣ* ‘protect’ and as a form of the substantive *rakṣás-* ‘demon’. I follow the latter interpretation, adopted by most translators of the AV. Alongside general considerations (the meaning ‘demon’ is of course appropriate in the context of an Atharvanic hymn), there are also linguistic reasons in favour of this interpretation: the secondary lengthening of the final vowel in imperative forms, almost obligatory in the language of the RV, is a very rare phenomenon in the AV. Accordingly, when borrowing this pāda from RV 6.71.3, the author/redactor(s) of the hymn Śaunakīya 19.47 = Paippalāda 6.20 could have interpreted the form *rākṣā* (that was not quite clear to him/them as a verbal form) as a form of the substantive *rakṣás-* ‘demon’.

AVŚ 19.47.8cd = AVP 6.20.8cd

⁺*andhām rātri trṣṭádhūmam* (or ⁺*tiṣṭhaddhūmam* ?)
aśṭrśāṅnam áhiṃ kṛṇu

O Night, make the trṣṭadhūma-snake (?) blind, headless [or:
make the snake blind, breathless (?), headless]!

The unclear word *trṣṭádhūmam* (Śaunakīya) / *tiṣṭhaddhūmam* (Paippalāda) is also attested in AVŚ 19.50.1 = AVP 14.9.1.

Śaunakīya reads *tr̥ṣṭád̥hūmam*, while Paipp. has *tiṣṭhadhūmam* (*tiṣṭha dhūmam?*). All interpreters understand this word as an epithet or name of a snake (thus rendered by Ludwig and Whitney; cf. also Griffiths (2009: 221): ‘the *tiṣṭhadhūma* snake’). The variant of this bahuvrīhi-compound preserved in the Śaunakīya recension is translated as ‘mit dem gift[i]gen hauch’ (Kuhn 1864: 132), ‘von beissendem Hauch’ (Zimmer 1879: 180), ‘von widerlichem geruche’ (Ludwig), ‘harsh-smoked (?)’ (Whitney), ‘of pungent / poisonous smoke’ (Griffiths). Semantically more attractive appears the reading attested in Paipp. mss. (*tiṣṭhadhūmam*), which might be based on the original reading ⁺*tiṣṭhad-dhūmam*.³ Assuming the meaning ‘breath’ for the word *dhūmá-* ‘smoke, vapor’ (cf. one of the glosses of the indigenous commentary *ni[s̥]śvāsa-dhūma* (*viśvāsa-dhūma?*) ‘vapor of exhalation’, which connects this epithet with the stinky breath of a snake), one might tentatively translate the compound in question as ‘(the one whose) breath stopped’. Accordingly, ⁺*tiṣṭhaddhūmam ... áhiṃ kr̥ṇu* could be understood as ‘make the snake breathless’.

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³ This emendation is mentioned by Griffiths, who points out that ⁺*tiṣṭhad-dhūmam* might be rendered as ‘of enduring smoke’, noticing, however, that this interpretation is hardly possible in this context.

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