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ed. par
Éric Pirart et Xavier Tremblay

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DR. LUDWIG REICHERT VERLAG

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Two Words for ‘sister-in-law’? Notes on Vedic *yātar-* and *giri-*

Arlo Griffiths & Alexander Lubotsky

In an important article, published more than thirty years ago (1976), Ingrid Eichner-Kühn has suggested that two words for ‘sister-in-law’, which have a good Indo-European pedigree but up till then were not identified as such in the oldest Indo-Aryan, are really attested in Vedic texts.¹

Her new interpretation was based on a passage from the Paippalāda recension of the Atharvavedasaṃhitā, or Paippalādasamhitā (PS), in its hymn 19.19. At the time, Eichner-Kühn could still only make use of the heavily corrupted Kashmir manuscript of this text. In the 1950s, however, Durgamohan Bhattacharyya discovered a more reliable manuscript tradition of the Paippalādasamhitā in eastern Indian Orissa.² Following in the footsteps of Michael Witzel, Arlo Griffiths has since 1999 been able to gather several mss. from Orissa (Griffiths 2003), so that we now have adequate access to both branches of Paippalādasamhitā transmission, the one from Kashmir and the one from Orissa.

We start with the word *yātar-*, which was identified by Eichner-Kühn in PS 19.19.11. The passage forms part of small hymn of three stanzas 9-11 (a so-called *trīca*), a preliminary edition of which is presented below. The Orissa readings are based on manuscripts JM, Pa and V/122.³

PS 19.19.9-11. To command the love of a woman: with an herb

19.19.9 ab: only PS; cd: PS 2.77.5cd; e: ŚS 6.8.1c

ahaṃ te manasā manasā cakṣur grhṇāmi cakṣuṣā |
evā pari śvajasva mā yathāsan mayi te manaḥ ||

I seize your mind with [my] mind, [your] sight with [my] sight. Embrace me in such a way that your mind shall be within me.

¹ See the lemmata *giri-* and *yātar-* in Mayrhofer’s *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindiarischen* (vol. I, p. 487f. and vol. II, p. 410), where Eichner-Kühn’s suggestions have been recorded and accepted.

² For the most recent chapter in the writing of the history of this discovery, see now the Introduction to Bhattacharyya 2008, and especially the acrimonious second postscript.

³ See Griffiths 2003 on these mss. We roughly apply the same editorial principles that were followed in our previous (joint) publications of excerpts from the Paippalādasamhitā: cf. Griffiths 2004, 2007; Griffiths & Lubotsky 1999, 2003; Lubotsky 2007. But we disregard here merely orthographical variants, if there is no other variant to be recorded.

evā pari śvajasva] **Or**, yavā pari śajasva **K** yathāsan] **JM V/122**, yathāsaṃ **Pa**, śrathāsa **K**

ab. Cf. Atharvaveda, Śaunakasamhitā (ŚS) 3.8.6ab, 6.94.2ab (~ PS 19.10.14ab) *ahām gr̥bhñāmi* (PS *gr̥hñāmi*) *mānasā mánāṃsi máma cittám ánu* (PS *upa*) *cittébhir éta* ‘I seize [your] minds with [my] mind; come ye after my intent with [your] intents’ (Whitney) — words which are presumably to be pronounced by a king.

cd. These pādas are syntactically slightly awkward because of *evā* without antecedent, the usual construction being *yathā ... , evā ...*. Although rare examples of the reverse order do exist (cf. Minkowski 1995: 392), we assume these pādas to have been adapted from PS 2.77.5, where the particles are used in the expected order, and the last *yathā* is clearly not coreferential with *evā*: *yathā nemī rathacakraṃ samantam pariśasvajē | evā pari śvajasva mā yathāsan mayi te manaḥ* ‘As the fellow completely embraces the wheel of a chariot, so embrace me, so that your mind shall be within me’. Cf. also ŚS 6.8.1 *yáthā vr̥kṣām libujā samantam pariśasvajē | evā pári śvajasva mām yáthā mām kāmīny áso yáthā mán nápagā ásaḥ* ‘As the creeper completely embraces the tree, so embrace me, so that you shall be in love with me, so that you shall not go away from me’.⁴

These parallels make it clear that we are dealing with a charm to command the love of a *woman*, and not that of a man, as was assumed by Eichner-Kühn;⁵ see further below. The hymn ŚS 6.8 together with 6.102 (see the next stanza) and 2.30 is used by the Kauśikasūtra (35.21) in the rites for bringing a woman under one’s control. Further, this is suggested by the feminine gender of *nemi-* and *libujā-*, as indicated by Zehnder 1999: 173.

19.19.10 **ab:** only PS; **cd:** ~ ŚS 6.102.2cd = PS 19.14.2cd

ā rathasye,va cakre abhi mā vartatām asau |
reṣmachinnaṃ yathā tṛṇaṃ veṣṭāsau manasā mayi ||

Let N.N. roll towards me like two wheels of a chariot. Like grass torn up by a storm, N.N. will twine around me with [her] mind.

ā rathasyeva] **Pa V/122**, ārathatasyava **JM**, arathasyeva **K** cakre abhi] **Or**, cakra bhi **K** vartatām asau] **Or**, varcasā girau **K** tṛṇaṃ] **Or**, triṇaṃ **K** veṣṭāsau manasā] **Or**, veṣṭamāyi anaso **K**

⁴ For the meaning of the perfect *pariśasvajē*, see Kümmel 2000: 591f. (‘umarmt halten’).

⁵ “Man geht wohl nicht fehl, wenn man annimmt, daß diese Strophe von einer Frau gesprochen wurde, die zauberische Praktiken (Umstreuen?, Umlaufen?) an ihrem Mann vollzog, um ihn so aus Banden seiner Familie, besonders seiner weiblichen Verwandten zu lösen und ihn fester an sich selbst zu ketten” (1976: 27).

d. We take *veṣṭā* (actually, **veṣṭtā*) as a *-tar*-future of the root *veṣṭ*, cf. Lubotsky 2002: 68, 140 (*ubi alia*) for other new examples from the Paippalādasamhitā of this verbal category. These two pādas are a variant of ŚS 6.102.2cd (= PS 19.14.2cd) *reṣmachinnaṃ yáthā tṛṇaṃ máyi te veṣṭatām mánah* ‘like grass cut by a whirlwind, let thy mind twine itself to me’ (Whitney).

19.19.11 Only PS

pari tvā yātur asaram pari mātuḥ pari svasuḥ |
pari tvānyābhya strībh,yo aṇayauśadh,yāsaram ||

I have circumambulated you [in order to separate you] from [your] husband’s brother’s wife, from [your] mother, from [your] sister. [In order to separate you] from the other women have I circumambulated you with this herb.

pari tvā] **JM V/122 K**, pari vā **Pa** yātur] **K**, pāntar **JM**, pātur **Pa V/122** asaram] **Or**, asuraṃ **K** mātuḥ] **Or**, pātuḥ **K** tvānyābhya strībh,yo] **JM V/122**, tvānyābhyarstabhyo **Pa**, tvānyābhyasatrībh,yo **K** aṇayauśadh,yāsaram] **Or**, nayau+sa2+dhyāsaram **JM**, nayauśadh,yāsaram **Pa V/122**, noyopyadh,yasuram **K**

a. Our readings *yātur ... mātuḥ* combine the transmitted readings *pātur ... mātuḥ* (**Or**)⁶ and *yātur ... pātuḥ* (**K**). Although *pātus* (ostensibly gen. sg. of *pātar-* ‘protector’) is attested at one place in both of the transmissions, we feel relatively confident in keeping it out of our text. The reading *yātur* of **K** is a *lectio difficilior*, whereas *pātus* would make less sense in the context — pāda **c** guarantees that all members of the list must be female. The origin of the reading *pātur* in the **Or.** transmission may be sought in the perseverative influence of PS 16.5.6a (= ŚS 8.2.26a) *pari tvā pātu samānebhyo*; cf. also PS 2.2.3b *pari tvā pāmi viśvataḥ*.

c. The **Or.** mss. confirm the emendation *tvānyābhya strībh,yo*, which was already proposed in Vishva Bandhu’s Vedic Word Concordance (see the reference given by Eichner-Kühn, 1976: 26, note 19) on the sole basis of the Kashmir reading.

d. Cf. PS 5.24.6ab *anayāham oṣadh,yā sarvāḥ kṛtyā *adūṣayam* ‘I ruined with this plant all witchcrafts’ (Lubotsky 2002: 111) and ŚS 1.34.5ab (= PS 2.9.3ab) *pāri tvā paritatnūneḥṣūṇāgām āvidviṣe* ‘I have gone around you with an encompassing sugar-cane so that [there would be] no mutual hatred’.

The interpretation of *yātur* as abl. sg. of the kinship term *yātar-*, proposed by Ingrid Eichner-Kühn, is very attractive. The existence of this word in Sanskrit is ensured by its attestations in grammatical, lexicographical as well as literary sources (see the references in the Petersburg dictionary). On the other hand, Eichner-Kühn is clearly mistaken when she

⁶ The reading *pāntar* (**JM**) is due to the similarity of the akṣaras *tu* and *nta* in some forms of Oriya script.

translates *yātar-* as 'Frau (deines) Bruders'. This follows of course from her assumption that the charm is addressed to a man, which, as we have seen above, is probably incorrect. Furthermore, it contradicts the evidence of other Indo-European languages, where cognates of *yātar-* always mean 'husband's brother's wife', or, in plural, 'brothers' wives'. This is the case with Gr. (Hom.) εἰνάρτεες pl., OLith. *jentė*, CS *jetry*, Lat. *ianitricēs* pl., as well as Persian *yārī* and Pash. *yor*. Likewise, the Sanskrit lexicographers gloss *yātar-* as 'husband's brother's wife' (e.g. Amarakośa 2.6.30ab *bhāryās tu bhrātr̥vargasya yātaraḥ syuḥ parasparam* 'the wives of a series of brothers would each be each other's *yātar*'). There can hardly be any doubt that *yātar-* has the same meaning in our passage.

At first glance, the combination of the kinship terms in stanza 11 seems somewhat strange. If the woman is unmarried and still lives in her paternal household, mentioning her mother and sister is comprehensible, but then her *yātar-* 'husband's brother's wife' is out of place. Conversely, if the woman is married, her mother and sister do not play an important role in her life any longer, since, according to the norm in Vedic marriages, the woman moves to her husband's home. The only feasible solution is that the triplet 19.19.9-11 was a charm to be pronounced by a husband to secure a new wife's love by weaning her away from the female relatives in her paternal household,⁷ while at the same time preventing her developing too close a bond with her new husband's brother's wife. Indeed the prominent position of *yātar-* in the list then becomes comprehensible — she is the only person in the bride's new household who is also an affine, an outsider, and a potential ally.

Let us now turn to the other ostensible word for 'sister-in-law', viz. *giri-*. The situation is essentially different here. First of all, there is no other indication in Sanskrit literature, of the type we have referred to for *yātar-*, that *giri-* ever had this meaning in Sanskrit, next to the usual 'mountain'.

It is also debatable whether this meaning can be deduced from the textual evidence that Eichner-Kühn adduced. Following the lead of Barret (1940: 30), she pointed to a Gṛhya ritual that seems structurally similar to the one, which the charm PS 19.19.9-11 was to accompany. The relevant passages are Āpastambaghṛhyasūtra 8.23.6; BhāradvājaGS 2.27; HiraṇyakeśiGS 1.14.2; PāraskaraGS 3.7.2. Let us quote the description of the ritual at ĀpastambaGS 8.23.6, and its continuation in 8.23.7:

yaṃ kāmaya nāyaṃ māchidyeteti jīvaṣāṇe svaṃ mūtram āniya suptam
uttarābhyāṃ triḥ prasavyaṃ pariśīcet || 6 ||

yena pathā dāsakarmakarāḥ palāyeramṣ tasminn iṇdvāny upasamādhāyottarā āhutiḥ
juhuyāt || 7 ||

If he wishes that somebody be not estranged from him, let him pour his own urine into the horn of a living animal, and sprinkle (it) with the next two (verses) [Āpastamba-

⁷ A somewhat similar situation may be reflected in ŚS 3.25.5: *ājāmi tvājanyā pāri mātūr ātho pitūḥ | yāthā māma krātāv āso māma cittām upāyasi* 'I goad thee hither with a goad, away from mother, likewise from father, that thou mayest be in my power, mayest come unto my intent' (Whitney).

mantrapāṭha] II, 22, 5. 6) three times from right to left around (the person) while he is sleeping.

In a path which servants or labourers use to run away, he should put plates (used for protecting the hands when holding a hot sacrificial pan) on (a fire), and should offer the oblations (indicated by the) next (Mantras, II, 22, 7-10).⁸

The pair of mantras whose use is enjoined here in the first sūtra shows some variants between the different texts that actually cite it, but not for the first three words of the first pāda of the first mantra, that concerns us here. The hymnal belonging to the Gṛhyasūtra of the Āpastamba school, the Āpastambamantrapāṭha (2.22.5), gives the following text:

pari tvā girer amihaṃ pari bhrātuḥ pari svasuḥ
pari sarvebhyo jātibhyaḥ

Eichner-Kühn initially translates: 'Umharnt habe ich dich weg vom Berge (?), um(harnt) weg vom Bruder, um(harnt) weg von der Schwester, um(harnt) weg von alle Verwandten...', but concludes that the translation of *girer* 'away from the mountain' does not make any sense ("völlig sinnlos"). "Auch eine Interpretation, daß etwa ein heimatliebender Aborigenensklave aus dem Bergland angesprochen wäre, macht nur aus der Not eine Tugend" (p. 28); by contrast, she believes that a meaning 'sister-in-law' would make good sense, and provides an etymological justification, referring to Lat. *glōs*, Russ. *zolovka*, etc. She admits that the ostensible cognates in fact mean 'husband's sister' and are naturally used only for women. Since the mantra in question is addressed to a man, she needs to assume a semantic shift from 'husband's sister' to 'brother's wife': "Keine Schwierigkeiten bereitet die hierbei fürs Vedische anzunehmende Bedeutungsverschiebung von 'Schwester des Mannes, Schwägerin' zu 'Frau des Bruders, Schwägerin', die auch in anderen Sprachen zu beobachten ist" (p. 29). Although this semantic shift did indeed occur in some languages, it had always been triggered by changes in the social structure directly affecting the institution of marriage. We have already mentioned above that, according to the Vedic custom, the woman moved to her husband's home after the nuptial celebrations, and this custom certainly was of Indo-European date, as we can infer from an almost total lack of Indo-European terminology for wife's relatives. If, however, due to social changes, the wife does not necessarily move to her husband's home, or if she and her husband entertain vivid contacts with her paternal family after they have been joined in marriage, this lack of terminology for wife's relatives becomes awkward. What is her brother or her sister vis-à-vis her husband? And what is her brother's wife vis-à-vis herself? In this situation it is only to be expected that 'husband's sister' would come to mean also 'wife's sister' or 'brother's wife'. In Vedic India, however, there is no evidence that the traditional institution of marriage had been subject to such a change. All terms keep their original

⁸ The quoted translation is that of Oldenberg (1892: 296).

semantic domain, and it is therefore highly unlikely that only one single term for 'husband's sister' would have acquired a different meaning.

It seems to us that Eichner-Kühn too lightly dismisses the possibility that this ritual is aimed at a 'homesick aboriginal slave from the mountains'. The text of ĀpastambaGS 8.23.7, quoted above, implies that the *dāsa*- 'slave' was among the categories of servants whose running away the preceding sūtra was meant to curtail.⁹ In the PS, we come across a few passages where (the feminine of) *dāsa*- is clearly associated with the mountains. In a charm against Fever (*takmān*-), we read (PS 12.1.9): *giriṃ gacha girijāsi girau te māhiṣo grhaḥ | dāsīm icha prapharvyam tām takman vīva dhūnuhi* 'Go to the mountain, you are mountain-born, on the mountain is your Māhiṣa¹⁰ house. Look for a young Dāsa girl; do shake up her, o fever!'. A combination of mountains and a *dāsī* is also found in PS 20.39.5 [Kashmir 20.38.5] (*giriṃ gacha girijāsi girau te māhiṣo grhaḥ | dāsī cakram āsthāya nāmlāte nikrandayisyati*).¹¹

The association of *dāsas* with the mountains can of course be due to the fact that the majority of *dāsas* descended from the mountain peoples, or at least that such was the stereotype among Aryans, but it may also reflect a mytho-poetical image, inherited from the Ṛgveda, where it is related on several occasions how Dāsa, an inhabitant of the mountains, was slain by Indra, cf. ṚV 6.26.5c *āva girér dāsam śambaram han* 'You (Indra) have slain down Dāsa Śambara from the mountain' or 4.30.14 *utā dāsam kaulitarām brhatāḥ pārvatād ādhi | āvāhann indra śambaram* 'And you (Indra) have slain down Dāsa Śambara, son of Kulitara, from the high mountain'.

On this basis, we believe that *giri*- of the Ṛghya mantra must simply be taken in the meaning 'mountain'. We can thus forego a detailed discussion of the problems of historical phonology that would compound the semantic problems to be overcome if one wanted to defend Eichner-Kühn's ingenious proposal concerning *giri*-.

⁹ It must be admitted that none of the parallel texts attest this word in the same context, but use others like *bhrīya*- or *utūla*- instead.

¹⁰ The meaning of the adjective *māhiṣa*- is not very clear. It could be derived from *māhiṣi*- 'chief queen', so that *māhiṣo grhaḥ* would mean 'a house with a chief queen'. Alternatively, it could refer to a name of a mountain people, cf. a parallel passage ŚS 5.22.7 *takman mūjavato gacha bālhikān vā parastarām | śūdrām icha prapharvyam tām takman vīva dhūnuhi* 'O fever, go to the Mūjavants or to the Balhikas, further off. Look for a young Śūdra girl; do shake up her, o fever!'.

¹¹ An indirect indication for an association of a *dāsā*- and the mountains is further found in ŚS 4.9.8 *trāyo dāsā āñjanasya takmā balāsa ād āhiḥ | vārṣiṣṭhaḥ pārvatānām trikakūn nāma te pitā* 'Three are the slaves of the ointment – fever, *balāsa*, then snake; the highest of mountains, three-peaked by name, [is] thy father' (Whitney).

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