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RV 1.120.11: A note on the Vedic reflexive¹

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1. The difficult Ṛgvedic stanza 1.120.11 runs:

*ayám samaha mā tanūh.yāte jánāñ ánu
somapéyam sukhó ráthaḥ*

The hymn is composed by an offended poet, who was given a chariot with no horses (*rátham anaśvám*) for his work. The hieratic part of the hymn properly speaking, addressed to the Ásvins (verses 1 through 9), is followed by a kind of appendix (verses 10-12), where the author expresses his indignation at the stingy sacrificer. In verse 11 he sarcastically conveys the hope that his chariot will drive him to the place of soma-drinking by itself, without horses. Although the general sense of the stanza raises no questions, two words in pādas ab are unclear and pose serious difficulties: *ūhyāte* and *tanu*.

2. *ūhyāte*: Most interpretators take this subjunctive form as a passive derived from the root *vah* ‘drive’, notwithstanding the root vowel length in the Padapāṭha (Pp.); thus already Sāyaṇa (*aśvibhyāṃ niyate* ‘is transported by the Ásvins’); cf. also ROSEN 1838:259 (‘vehitur’); BÖHTLINGK – ROTH [PW] VI, 860; GRASSMANN 1873: 1244 [Wb. zum RV]; MACDONELL 1910:334, §446; ELIZARENKOVA 1989:617 (“passive with intransitive meaning”); LUBOTSKY 1995:259. Such an analysis raises the following syntactic question: by which verb is the accusative pronoun *mā* ‘me’ governed? Apart from the supposedly intransitive *ūhyāte* ‘is driven’ (?), the only word in the verse that might be – at least, theoretically – a verbal form is *tanu*, which I will discuss below.

GELDNER [RV übers., ad loc.] suggested that the passive *ūhyāte* is constructed with the accusative *mā*, considering this abnormal usage as a result of contamination of the transitive (*mā vahati* ‘it drives me’) and passive (*ūhyate* ‘it is driven’) constructions. One needs not argue that this syntactic analysis is absolutely improbable and cannot be supported by any parallel.

Beside syntactic problems, the passive interpretation of *ūhyāte* poses a number of morphological difficulties. First, the long root vowel, albeit based on the Pp. only, raises some doubts on whether this form belongs with the passive *ūhyā^{te}*. Second, subjunctives of *-yā*-passives are exceptional in early Vedic: the only reliable RVic form is *bhriyāte* at RV 5.31.12; cf. RENO 1937:7.

Abandoning the passive analysis, PISCHEL 1889:3 [VSt I] considered *ūhyāte²* a denominative derived from the unattested noun **ūhí-* or **ūhi-*, meaning ‘fördern’ or the like. This interpretation is untenable; cf. OLDENBERG, Noten ad 1.120.11, for criticism.

¹ I am much indebted to A. Lubotsky, N. Nicholas and Ya. Testelet for critical remarks and comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² Together with *ūhyāte* RV 4.56.6 ‘you two (sc. heaven and earth) respect [the truth]’.

A different explanation was suggested by OLDENBERG, *Noten ad loc.*, who has adopted the Pp. reading and treated the form in question as a *-yá*-intensive. This analysis has been revived by HOFFMANN 1982:69f. [= Aufs. 3, 775f.] and adopted by SCHAEFER 1994:178f., INSLER 1996:182, fn. 19, and WERBA 1997:398. OLDENBERG – HOFFMANN’s account of *ūhyá-* as going back to the reduplicated intensive **uā-uj^h-já-*, rebuilt in analogy with the weak perfect stem **uu-uj^h-*, seems quite plausible. Unlike *-yá*-passives, *-yá*-intensives can be employed transitively, which solves the problem of the syntactic links of *mā*.

3. *tanu*: Sāyaṇa, ROSEN 1838:259, GRASSMANN 1873:515 [Wb. zum RV], BENFEY 1883:288, RENOUE (EVP XVI, 23), ELIZARENKOVA 1989:150 and 617 and LUBOTSKY 1995:259, 1997:581 [RVWC] considered this form a 2sg.act. imperative (with the zero ending)³; cf. e.g. LUBOTSKY’s and ELIZARENKOVA’s translations:

‘This one, verily, *pull* me! May this easy-going chariot be drawn to Soma-drinking, along the people!’

‘*Тану* меня как-нибудь! Пусть двинется вслед за людьми эта легкоходная колесница на питье сомы!’

ELIZARENKOVA’s and LUBOTSKY’s interpretations (*tanu*: transitive, *ūhyāte*: passive) seem semantically plausible. However, alongside the aforementioned morphological difficulties of the passive analysis of *ūhyāte*, there is one major semantic objection against translating *tanu* as ‘pull’. The verb *tan* denotes making an object longer and/or bigger by stretching it or by change in its posture within its inner limits (Eng. *stretch, extend*, Germ. *strecken*), not dragging or hauling an object in order to move it (Eng. *pull*, Germ. *ziehen*) – in contrast, for instance, to its Russian cognate, which exhibits both meanings (cf. *протянуть руку* (lit.) ‘extend one’s hand’ ~ *тянуть повозку* ‘pull a cart’). Thus, the phrase *mā tanu*, supposedly addressed to a chariot, can only denote quite a masochistic wish to be stretched by means of this chariot.

This fact has already been noticed by LUDWIG⁴. In spite of his doubts, LUDWIG was apparently unable to offer another interpretation and translated *mā tanu* as ‘der möge ... mich ziehen’ (1876:I, 43 [RV übers.]). An attempt to interpret *tanu* in accordance with the general meaning of *tan* (much in the vein of LUDWIG’s remark) has actually been made already by Sāyaṇa (*mām tanu | vistāraya | putrapautradhanādibhiḥ samṛddham kuru* ‘stretch me, [i.e.] extend me, make abundantly endowed with sons, grandsons, riches, etc.’). Sāyaṇa’s interpretation has been adopted in some early European translations of the hymn, for instance, by ROSEN 1838:259 (‘Tu ... currus! me *auge*’) and BENFEY 1883:288 (‘Du da! ... *mach*’ mich *gross*’), but their interpretations seem forced and obviously make little sense.

Thus, since the imperative *tanu* ‘stretch’ is impossible in the context, we are forced to look for another interpretation. An unaccented word-form, unless a finite verb, can only be a vocative, and such an analysis has indeed been suggested by some scholars.

³ LUDWIG’s (1881 [RV übers., Comm. I]: 42) analysis (as an irregular 3sg.impv. with the zero ending) is impossible.

⁴ “Die anwendung im sinne von ‘ziehen’ ist sonst unerhört, und daher ser auffallend: *tanoti* bezeichnet sonst das ziehen, wobei das eine ende des gezogenen gegenstandes als fest zu denken (strecken)” (LUDWIG 1881:42 [RV übers., Comm. I]); cf. also PISCHEL 1889:2 [VSt I].

According to PISCHEL 1889:2f. [VSt I] and GELDNER [RV übers.], *tanu* belongs with the adjective *tanú-* ‘little, small’ and refers to the poet’s little wife; cf. GELDNER’s translation:

‘Dieser leichte Wagen soll mich jedenfalls unter die Leute zum Somatrunk fahren, *du Kleine*.’

This interpretation is untenable for a number of reasons, without mentioning the forced translation (why the poet suddenly addresses to his wife?): adj. *tanú-* first appears in the Brāhmaṇas; furthermore, the regular feminine stem is *tanvī-*, not *tanú-*, and its vocative form must be *tanvī*.

By contrast, HOFFMANN, op.cit., assumed that the form in question belongs with another word, *tanū-* ‘body’, and translated:

‘Dieser leichtlaufende Wagen wird mich irgendwie, *o (du mein) Leib*, über die Volksstämme hin (immer wieder) zum Soma-Trinken fahren.’

The main objection which can be raised against HOFFMANN’s interpretation is of course the awkward vocative ‘*o (du mein) Leib*’, which apparently makes little sense in the context.

In what follows I will argue that HOFFMANN’s analysis of the stanza is essentially correct, apart from the exact translation of *tanu*.

4. *tanū-* and the Vedic reflexive

As is well-known, *tanū-*, alongside its primary meaning ‘body’, commonly functions as the reflexive pronoun (‘oneself’)⁵. Could the form in question represent the vocative case of this reflexive pronoun?

At first glance, the answer can only be: no. A vocative reflexive may appear still odder than the (almost) meaningless vocative ‘*o (du mein) Leib*’. Let us have a closer look at the uses of the Vedic reflexive pronoun *tanū-*, however.

The prototypical reflexive function of *tanū-*, i.e. the expression of the coreference with the subject⁶, can be illustrated by the following RVic examples:

vandārus te tan_vvām vande agne (RV 1.147.2d)
‘As your praiser, I praise myself, o Agni.’

utā svāyā tan_vvā sām vade tāt (RV 7.86.2a)
‘And I discuss it with myself.’

This type of pronominalisation, solidly embedded in most languages of the world (cf. e.g. *John praises himself*; Russ. *Иван хвалит (самого) себя*) is well-studied and does not require special discussion.

Next to the reflexive usage properly speaking, there is another class of closely related functions attested for reflexive pronouns, which can be illustrated by the following English sentences:

⁵ Cf. e.g. GRASSMANN 1873:519f. [Wb. zum RV]; BLOOMFIELD 1895:421; MACDONELL 1910:305, §400.3; OLDENBERG 1919:86, fn. 4; 100ff.; RENOU 1966:172f. [EVP XV].

⁶ For a definition of reflexive, see e.g. FALTZ 1985; TESTELEC – TOLDOVA 1998.

I myself agree with you.

Sokrates himself was unable to solve this problem.

Peter repaired his bike himself.

The meaning of *-self* in such usages (often labelled ‘emphatic (reflexive)’ or ‘intensifier’) can be determined as a signal of the fact that its referent “is to some degree unexpected in the discourse role or clausal role where it occurs” (KEMMER 1995:57). In other words, one might expect that Sokrates would solve the problem, Peter would not repair his bike without someone’s help, and so on. It is worth mentioning that common sources of intensifiers in the languages of the world are words denoting soul, body or body parts (head, bone, heart); cf. MORAVCSIK 1972:272⁷.

While in some languages such meanings are rendered by words other than reflexive pronouns properly speaking (cf. Russ. reflexive *себя* vs. emphatic *сам*⁸), English *-self* can be employed in either usage, i.e. as a reflexive marker properly speaking or in the emphatic sense (cf. KEMMER 1995).

It turns out that, like English *-self*, Vedic *tanū-* ‘body, self’ can be employed both in the reflexive and emphatic usages, i.e. either as a marker of the coreference with the subject (cf. examples above) or as an intensifier, cf.:

punāné tan_ivā mitháh | svéna dákṣeṇa rājathah (RV 4.56.6ab)
‘Purifying each other yourselves, you (sc. heaven and earth) rule with your own power.’

t_ivám no agne táva deva pāyúbhīr | maghóno rakṣa tan_ivás ca vand_iya (RV 1.31.12ab)
‘You, o Agni, protect with your protecting powers, o god, the bountiful ones and ourselves, o praiseworthy one!’

áva drugdhāni pītr_iyā sṛjā nó | _iva yā vayám cakṛmā tanūbhiḥ (RV 7.86.5ab)
‘Remit our fatherly sins, [remit] those which we have committed ourselves.’

Most likely, here also belongs the nominative *svā tanūr* attested in hymn 10.83, addressed to Manyu (fury). The passage runs:

abhāgāḥ sánn ápa párceto asmi | táva krátvā taviśásya pracetaḥ
tām tvā manyo akṛatūr jihīhām | s_ivā tanūr baladéyāya méhi (RV 10.83.5 ~ AV 4.32.5)
‘I have gone far away without my share, through the power of yours, the strong one, o wise one!
Unintentionally, I have made you angry, o Manyu. Come here ..., in order to give me force.’

The noun phrase *svā tanūr* caused difficulties for many scholars. HILLEBRANDT 1913:111 left it untranslated (“Konstruktion der Worte *svā tanūr* unklar”, *ibid.*, fn. 6). Some interpreters stuck to the original meaning of *tanū-* ‘body’ (LUDWIG 1876:II, 279 [RV übers.]: ‘ich bin [nur] mein eigener leib, kom [du noch] zu mir ...’; GRASSMANN 1877:365 [RV übers. II]: ‘leibhaftig komme ... zu mir’), which obviously leads to forced translations. GELDNER [RV übers.] hesitates between the meanings ‘person’ (‘in eigener Person komme zu mir ...’) and ‘body’ (‘(ich bin) dein Leib’). RENO 1966:172f. [EVP XV] follows GELDNER’s former interpretation (‘viens à moi en personne’), though pointing out that *tanū-* can also be employed in the reflexive usage in cases other than the nominative (“ailleurs qu’au Nomin., *t^o* tend vers le réfléchi”).

⁷ For the typology of intensifiers, see MORAVCSIK 1972 (one of the pioneer studies in the field); LJUTIKOVA 1997; 1998 (with bibl.).

⁸ For Russ. *сам*, see e.g. JANKO 1999.

In my opinion, the most natural interpretation of *svā tanūr* in RV 10.83.5 is the emphatic reflexive – which seems to have actually underlain WHITNEY’s translation of the parallel Atharvavedic verse 4.32.5 (‘come to us, thine ownself’): ‘Come here yourself, in order to give me force.’

As it seems, to the same usage belongs the vocative *tanu* in RV 1.120.11. The meaning of ‘unexpected role’ perfectly suits the context, being much in the vein of the sarcastic intonations of the poet: ‘the chariot will drive me [many times]’ (note the intensive verb), while everybody certainly knows that it will never happen without horses.

The last point to clarify is the syntactic position of *tanu* in the clause.

5. Vocative of a reflexive pronoun?

At first glance, vocative and reflexive appear incompatible grammatical characteristics. Yet, I do not see good reasons to reject this combination of functions as impossible. The *a priori* prejudices against such an analysis may be based, I suppose, on the narrow sense of reflexive, as a marker of the coreference with the subject. Since the subject case (= nominative) is impossible for reflexives *sensu stricto* by definition (note the lack of the nominative case in the paradigm of reflexive pronouns like Russ. *себя*, and cf. RENOÜ’s remark on the reflexive usage of *tanū-* quoted above), and the vocative is syntactically fairly close to the nominative, both of them can be said to be equally impossible for reflexives.

This is not the case with reflexives in the wider sense of the concept, i.e. including intensifiers. Emphatic reflexives can surface as adjuncts to noun phrases regardless of their grammatical relations, or syntactic positions (subject, object, etc.) – in particular, as an adjunct to the subject; cf. Vedic examples above and see FALTZ 1985:38ff. with evidence from Modern Hebrew, Turkish and Irish. Thus, there are no syntactic constraints on an emphatic reflexive in the nominative case; cf., in particular, the nominative *svā tanūr* in RV 10.83.5, discussed above.

On the other hand, the vocative can replace the nominative in some (rare) cases; cf. the textbook example of a predicative vocative (see e.g. DELBRÜCK 1888:106 [AiS]):

ābhūr ēko rayipate rayiṇām (RV 6.31.1a)
 ‘You alone have become the Lord of wealth.’ (lit. ‘you ... have become – o Lord of wealth!’)

The similar construction *tvām h_iy āsi rayipātī rayiṇām* ‘because you are the Lord of wealth’ at RV 2.9.4, with the nominative *rayipātī*, shows that the vocative in RV 6.31.1 must be secondary.

Another class of non-prototypical uses of the vocative comprises vocatives in comparisons (cf. DELBRÜCK, *ibid.*; RENOÜ 1952:342), as in:

vayām hī te āmanmah_iy ...
āśvc nā citre aruṣi (RV 1.30.21)
 ‘Because we have thought of you (respectfully), [o Uṣas], o bright one, o reddish one, like a mare.’ (lit.: ‘[o you, which are] like a mare’)

The vocatives in the above passage undoubtedly replace the original nominatives (cf. PINAULT 1995-96:316f.), as the non-vocative variant of the same construction clearly shows:

ásveva citráruṣī ... sákhābhūd aśvīnor uṣāḥ (RV 4.52.2ac)
 'Bright, reddish, like a mare, <...> Uṣas has become the friend of the Aśvins.'

As it seems, in such uses the vocative noun, apart from the common vocative function (i.e. call, appeal), serves to emphasize some features or aspects of the referent ('you ... have become – the Lord of wealth! ...'; 'you ... – like a mare! ...'; etc.).

I believe *tanu* in RV 1.120.11 exemplifies the emphatic reflexive usage of *tanū-*, specifically the type illustrated above by English *Peter repaired his bike himself* (= without someone's help, cf. Russ. *сам*), on the one hand, and the emphatic function of the vocative case (as e.g. in RV 1.30.21 quoted above), on the other. The emphatic use of the vocative and the intensifier reflexive *tanū-* perfectly match each other and make good sense in verse 1.120.11. Thus, the stanza can be translated as follows:

'This chariot, indeed, will carry me – itself! (i.e. o you, which will do it itself, without horses!)⁹ – to Soma-drinking, along the people.'

By means of such a double emphasis the poet might have sarcastically stressed upon the inability of a horseless chariot to move by itself. The use of the 'emphatic vocative' may have been a feature of the colloquial style, quite appropriate in the non-sacral appendix to the hieratic part of the hymn.

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⁹ Germ. 'Dieser ... Wagen wird mich wirklich – selbst! – ... (immer wieder) zum Soma-Trinken fahren'; Russ. '... будет возить меня ... сама! – на питье сомы ...'.

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