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FRANK KÖHLER

RV 3.26: POETRY
AND THE MULTIFARIOUS NATURE OF AGNI

1. Introduction

Vedic Studies are an old branch of the rather young discipline of Indology, and they owe very much to the pioneer scholars of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, among whom Hermann Oldenberg (1854 – 1920) is to be counted as one of the most brilliant. One of his impressive achievements is his insight into the ordering principles of the rigvedic hymns and his painstakingly elaborated explanations for apparent or real transgressions of them.¹ While he has been able to deliver convincing explanations for a large number of such cases, there are some hymns left which allow for further discussion. In this article one of these hymns, Rigveda (= RV) 3.26, traditionally ascribed to the poet Viśvāmitra, will be analyzed with regard to an underlying formal and thematic unity. This will be undertaken by following an approach which has been outlined by Stephanie Jamison: she emphasizes the necessity to see a hymn in its totality.² Following her example the hymn RV 3.26 shall likewise be analyzed as a structured whole.

It will be argued that in spite of its supposed division into three triads (*trcas*) the order of this hymn as a whole with its many correlations on all linguistic levels allows for its interpretation as a carefully and consciously arranged structure. Secondly, it will be shown that the function of the particle *ānu*

¹ To be found especially in OLDENBERG 1888.

² Cf. JAMISON 2007, especially p. 58ff., but also JAMISON 2004.

in verse 8 deserves special attention because it enables an understanding of the hymn in line with rigvedic thought as it is attested in other hymns. But before substantiating this thesis a word of caution is in order: The interpretation elaborated here claims to open up a new possibility to see RV 3.26 (and perhaps other hymns of the RV as well) in a different way than before. However, this does not necessarily entail the exclusion of other perspectives. As will be shown, the proposed analysis depends on semantic ambiguities and on different options on several levels, e. g. the connection of several words within a hymn, or the syntactic relations between nouns within a verse. But these are only options and rarely more than that; it seems safe to assume that there is no way to exclude e. g. semantic ambivalences from the rigvedic vocabulary. And if this is impossible, it follows that there is no single way to understand the meaning of a hymn as a whole.

2. The many faces of Agni

RV 3.26 consists of nine verses ordered in three *trca*-s and is addressed to Agni Vaiśvānara (verses 1 to 3), the Maruts (verses 4 to 6) and Agni Jātavedas (verses 7 to 9), a scheme of invocation which is unique within the RV. The *trca*-s of this hymn were used separately in Vedic ritual, as Mādhava informs the reader in his commentary: the first *trca* is used in the Āgnimārutaśāstra, a recitation of verses which forms an essential part of the Soma ritual of the Śrautasūtras, the first two figure also as part of the Āgnimārutaśāstra in the Bṛhaspatīsava, a one-day Soma ritual, the last *trca* forms part of the Agnicayana.³ Bergaigne has understood the whole hymn as an archaic form of the Āgnimārutaśāstra, since the deities of the three *trca*-s – Vaiśvānara, Maruts and Jātavedas – are invoked there as well; furthermore, in some cases *trcas* can be compared

³ Mādhava, introduction to his commentary of RV 3.26, with reference to Āśvalāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra 7.7, 9.5 and 4.8, respectively.

to hymns.⁴ Geldner has perceived this hymn as a unity; according to him RV 3.26 deals with different aspects of ignition. The first *trca* contains the grinding of Agni, the second the fanning of the flames with the help of the Maruts, and the third a praise of the poet and his teacher.⁵ Oldenberg raised objections about these ideas, since these *trca*-s display neither a formal (different metres, i. e. Jagatī in stanzas 1 to 6 and Triṣṭubh in verses 7 to 9) nor a thematic unity. Instead, he argues for a purely arbitrary combination of them.⁶

However, in spite of Oldenberg's objections RV 3.26 may nevertheless be considered as forming a single hymn. The unity of a composition may sometimes be hidden under a disconnected surface, and it should come as no surprise if it turns out that this may be the case with some rigvedic hymns. In order to show that an underlying unity does indeed exist - which however does not affect the ritualistic level - the verses of RV 3.26 will be analyzed below.

The hymn opens with a *trca* invoking *Vaiśvānarā*, an aspect of Agni which according to Findly represents his identification with the sun; his ritual worship is responsible for the sunrise.⁷ Whereas it is open to doubt whether the identification with the sun is the most prominent feature of *Vaiśvānarā*,⁸ his importance in the sacrifice is certainly stressed here. The first verse starts with a declaration of purpose, a pattern well-known from other rigvedic hymns. The clan of the Kuśikas, to which the poet Viśvāmitra belongs, figures as the subject of this verse:

3.26.1 *vaiśvānarām mānasāgnīm nicāyyā haviṣmanto*
anuṣatyām svarvīdam |
sudānum devām rathirām vasūyāvo gīrbhī raṇvām
kuśikāso havāmahe ||

⁴ BERGAIGNE 1889, p. 131.

⁵ GELDNER 1901.

⁶ OLDENBERG 1909, p. 235: "Der unbefangene Leser von III, 26 wird kaum eine durch da Ganze durchgehende Intention empfinden ..."

⁷ Cf. FINDLY 1982.

⁸ Cf. e. g. RV 3.2, where *Vaiśvānarā* is clearly considered to be present on the sacrificial ground and three times termed *hōtr* (in stanzas 1, 6 and 15).

“After perceiving Agni Vaiśvānara with our mind we Kuśikas, desiring wealth, with offerings and songs of praise call according to truth, the finder of the sunlight, the very liberal god, the chariot-driver, the pleasing one.”

nicāyyā “after perceiving”; the formation of the absolutive of *ci-* “to perceive” is influenced by the present stem *cāy-*;⁹ although there is no noticeable difference between uncompounded forms of this root and those with prefix *ní*, only the latter ones are used in connection with the mental perception of poets (in RV 1.164.38; 10.114.2/9) and 10.124.9).¹⁰

anuṣatyám “according to truth”: following Lüders this compound is translated here as an adverb, but it may have been used as an attribute for Agni as well.¹¹

svarvíd- “finder of the sunlight”¹²; an additional interpretation may be contemplated for at least some attestations of this compound, including this one: The epithet *svarvíd-* is used because the beings who are characterized by it enable other beings (especially the devotees) to see the light of the sun.¹³

With regard to the structure of the hymn as a whole a few points should be emphasized: first, the process of composing a hymn is hinted at by the expression *mānasā nicāyyā*, and second, the use of *anuṣatyám* indicates that the description is or becomes true. The next verse continues with the praise of Agni by means of a sequence of epithets:

3.26.2 *tám śubhrám agním ávase havāmahe
vaiśvānarám mātariśvānam ukthyám |
br̥haspátim mánuṣo devátātaye vípraṃ śrótāram
átithim raghuṣyádam ||*

⁹ Cf. HOFFMANN 1992, p. 788.

¹⁰ For meaning and function of *ní* cf. SCHNEIDER 2009 [2010].

¹¹ LÜDERS 1959, pp. 639f.

¹² SCARLATA 1999, pp. 491f.

¹³ Similarly RAM GOPAL 2011, p. 29: “light-bestowing”.

“We call for support him, the splendid Agni Vaiśvānara, the praiseworthy Mātariśvan, Bṛhaspati, the inspired one, the listener, the guest, the hurrying one to the human feast for the gods.”

Here Agni is again called *Vaiśvānarā*, but this time the chain of accusatives which is formed to express different features of him includes the names of two other divine beings as well: Bṛhaspati and Mātariśvan, who are usually considered to be different from him. Since they do not figure further on in this hymn it seems appropriate to follow Schmidt who assumed that *mātariśvan-* and *bṛhaspāti-* are used in this verse as attributes of Agni besides *vaiśvānarā-*, and that the adjectives *śrótr-*, *vīpra-* and *ātithi-* are in turn attributes of these aspects which serve to underline the specific roles of Agni in the sacrifice.¹⁴ In accordance with Schmidt’s idea it is presumed here that this list aims at a description of the totality of ritual activity which includes the directing of the attention of a god (*mātariśvan-* and *śrótr-*), the recitation of sacrificial poetry (*bṛhaspāti* and *vīpra*) and the maintenance of the sacrificial fire (*vaiśvānarā-* and *ātithi-*).

The next verse deals with the twofold nature of Agni, who is on the one hand kindled by his devotees and on the other hand always present among the gods:

3.26.3 *ásvo ná krāndañ jānibhiḥ sám idhyate vaiśvānarāḥ*
kuśikébhīr yugé-yuge |
sá no agniḥ suvīryaṃ svásvyaṃ dádhātu rátnam
amṛteṣu jāgrvih ||

“Like a roaring horse by women Vaiśvānara is completely kindled by the Kuśikas in every generation; let him, Agni, who is awake among the immortals, bestow on us a treasure consisting in good men and horses.”

ásvo ná krāndañ jānibhiḥ sám idhyate: “[Vaiśvānara] is completely kindled like a roaring horse by women”: Geldner correctly assumes a sexual connotation here.¹⁵

¹⁴ SCHMIDT 1968, pp. 68 - 71.

¹⁵ GELDNER 1951, p. 359.

Thus the first *ṛca* is closed, which mainly deals with Agni's activities on the sacrificial ground. In all three verses he is addressed as *Vaiśvānara*, so that the image of the sacrificial fire is invoked. The first verse announces that Agni is going to be praised. In the second verse a long chain of accusatives serves to bring several aspects of Agni's activities to the fore and equates him with two other divine beings connected to the ritual, *Br̥haspati* and *Mātariśvan*. In the final verse of this *ṛca* the twofold nature of Agni is featured. On the one hand it is claimed that his ignition has been carried on for generations in the family of the poet. On the other hand Agni is requested while he sojourns vigilantly in heaven to bestow support consisting of good men and good horses. The last point seems to be in favour of Oldenberg's argument, that these three *ṛca*-s form independent units, since requests for reward usually appear at the end of the *ṛgvedic* hymns. However, the syntagma *dād̥hātu rātnam* points to verse 8a-b and will be discussed below.

Along with Agni, the second *ṛca* refers the Maruts, the gods of thunderstorms who reside in the atmosphere. They are introduced in verse 4, when the fire is kindled:

3.26.4 *prá yantu vājās táviṣṭbhir agnáyaḥ śubhé sám̥miślāḥ*
pr̥ṣatīr ayukṣata |
br̥hadúkṣo marúto viśvāvedasaḥ prá vepayanti
párvatām̃ ádābhyāḥ ||

“Let the prizes come up, the fires with their powers! Flocked together they have just yoked their spotted [deer] for splendor. The high-growing/high-sprinkling Maruts who own everything, the inviolable ones start making the mountains tremble.”

br̥hadúkṣ-: “high-growing/high-sprinkling” according to Kiehnle;¹⁶ presumably the high-towering clouds of thunderstorms.¹⁷

¹⁶ KIEHNLE 1979, p. 171.

¹⁷ SCARLATA 1999, p. 62.

It may appear that the image of the Maruts has been evoked by the outburst of the kindled flames, as was supposed by Geldner.¹⁸ But *prima facie* it seems more likely that the poet now starts the evocation of the Maruts in the second triad for another purpose which will become clear later. At least the way the Maruts are praised decidedly speaks against Geldner's assumption: in this verse as in the following one they are characterized in their fierce aspect as gods of thunderstorms, and one may therefore guess that this is exactly the reason why they are praised here at all. The discussion of this point shall be postponed for the moment.

3.26.5 *agniśrīyo marúto viśvákr̥ṣṇaya ā tveśám ugrám áva
īmahe vayám |
té svānīno rudrīyā varṣānirñijaḥ simhā ná
heśákratavaḥ sudāñavaḥ ||*

“The Maruts are adorned by Agni and possess all countries; we ask for vehement strong support; they are the resounding Rudras, dressed in rain, very liberal/of good liquid, like lions who are determined to do harm.”

heśákratu-: “determined to do harm”; so according to Lüders, who has adduced rigvedic passages which highlight the fierce character of the Maruts. This is the reason why they are compared lions here; similar Renou (“au pouvoir -spirituel nocif”).¹⁹

sudāñu-: “very liberal/of good liquid”; both meanings are possible and in connection with the rain-making Maruts an ambivalence is presumably intended.²⁰

In this verse the praise of the Maruts as forceful gods is continued. They are connected to lightning (this should be the meaning of *agniśrī-*) as well as to abundant rain-falls (*varṣānirñij-*). The following verse features the praise of Agni next to that of the Maruts:

¹⁸ GELDNER 1951, p. 359.

¹⁹ LÜDERS 1940, p. 774; RENOUE 1964, p. 67.

²⁰ Cf. MAYRHOFER 1992, s. v. *dānu-*.

3.26.6 *vrātaṃ-vrātaṃ gaṇāṃ-gaṇaṃ suśastībhīr agnér
bhāmam marūtām ója īmahe |
pr̥ṣadaśvāso anavabhrārādhaso gántāro yajñām
vidátheṣu dhīrāḥ ||*

“With good songs of praise we ask flock after flock, host after host for the light of Agni, for the vigour of the Maruts. With speckled horses and gifts that cannot be taken away, they go the sacrifice, wise with regard to the distributions.”

vidátheṣu dhīrāḥ: “wise with regard to the distributions” according to Thieme, who assumes that there is no fixed object of reference for *vidátha-*.²¹

The last verse of the second triad skillfully connects the ritualistic activity of Agni with the Maruts’ powerful manifestations in a thunderstorm. The first two *pādas* recall a typical ritualistic setting, where the devotees ask the divinities for certain boons. But by using two *āmreḍita* compounds for the Maruts in *pāda* a the poet provides the setting with a dynamic component which is suitable to express the force of a thunderstorm. So it comes as no surprise, that the Maruts are requested to grant their power to the devotees. The demand for Agni’s splendor in *pāda* b may safely be understood as a plea for inspiration since the physical aspect of Agni, the sacrificial fire and its light are already present. With the second line the imagery is shifted: *pāda* c contains two epithets for the Maruts, of which the first one refers to their capability of giving rain, and the second one points to their contribution in the ritual. This aspect is further underlined by *pāda* d, which taken in isolation could have referred to the priests in the ritual.

The last triad of this hymn has caused some in-depth interpretations of its mystical contents, especially by Rönnow and Jurewicz.²² Their conclusions will be dealt with later on, but before that a translation of this triplet will be proposed and defended. The verses 7 to 9 focus again on Agni, but this time

²¹ THIEME 1949, p. 35 – 49.

²² RÖNNOW 1927; JUREWICZ 2010.

with different connotations. It seems as if Agni himself is speaking in verse 7:

3.26.7 *agnīr asmi jānmanā jātavedā ghṛtām me cákṣur*
amṛtam ma āsán |
arkás tridhātū rájaso vimānó 'jasro gharmó havír asmi
nāma ||

“I am Agni, Jātavedas by birth; ghee is my eye, the immortal in my mouth. I am the threefold song/lightbeam, the one who measures the middle region, the undecaying heat; I am offering by name.”

arká-: The meaning “song of praise” is unanimously accepted in research, whereas the assumption of an additional meaning “ray” or “light beam” remains disputed. Especially Roesler has argued for a single meaning “song”, followed by Krisch and Kim;²³ however, her arguments for excluding the meaning “ray” are not fully convincing: as she herself admits, *arká-* has to be understood as “ray” in RV 6.4.6a-b: *á sūryo ná bhānumádbhir arkáir ágne tatántha ródasī ví bhāsá* “Like Sūrya with his rays full of light you, Agni, have pervaded the two worlds with splendor.”²⁴ But if the existence of an alternative meaning is granted for one stanza it is difficult to maintain its exclusion for all other rigvedic attestations, in particular so, if the assumption of the meaning “ray” either additionally or exclusively would render the translation of the respective verses much more coherent (what Neisser has already argued for in his dictionary)²⁵. This happens to be the case e.g. in RV 9.97.31c-d: *pávamāna pávase dhāma gónāṃ jajñānāḥ sūryam apinvo arkáih* “Pavamāna, you purify yourself as the foundation for the cows; after having been born you filled Sūrya with rays”, or the stanza discussed in this article, RV 3.26.7. Here, the juncture *rájaso vimāna-*, which appears in eight out of ten rigvedic attestations of *vimāna-* and which points to a connection of the so described entity to the sun, suggests the second meaning “ray” as well

²³ MAYRHOFER 1992, s. v. *arká-*; ROESLER 1997, pp. 191 – 195; KRISCH 2006, p. 492f. (but somewhat sceptical about “song” being the only meaning of it for all attestations); KIM 2010, pp. 174f.

²⁴ ROESLER, *o. c.*, p. 193.

²⁵ NEISSER 1924, pp. 104 – 108.

as the first one “song”. As a result it seems therefore appropriate to reckon with the meaning “ray” for other attestations of *arká*-likewise. *asmi nāma*: “I am by name”: this is a typical attestation of a nominal sentence with copula and *nāman-* as a predicative noun, as noticed by Elizarenkova.²⁶

Here Agni apparently figures as the speaker; here he calls himself not *Vaiśvānara* the term used for denoting him in the first triad, but *Jātavedas* “having the knowledge of originated beings”, an epithet which is used in order to emphasize his peculiar knowledge.²⁷ In addition to that he lists the main sacrificial offerings of the rigvedic ritual, clarified butter (*ghṛtá-*) and Soma (*amṛta-*) here and identifies himself with them. In the next stanza the perspective is shifted from the first person back to the third:

3.26.8 *tribhñ pavitrair āpupod dhy àrkām hrđā matim jyótir*
ānu prajānān |
vārṣiṣṭham rátnam akrta svadhābhir ād id
dyāvāpṛthiví páry apaśyat ||

“Since he purified the lightbeam/the song with three strainers by recognizing the thought with the heart according to the light,

²⁶ ELIZARENKOVA 2001, pp. 38f.

²⁷ And *pace* Findly’s interpretation of this name as denoting “possessing all beings” (FINDLY 1981) this may have been understood as the original meaning of this name. First, there is the compound *jātavidyā-* in RV 10.71.11, whose resemblance to *jātavedas-* is too close to allow for a chance resemblance. Secondly, as Findly herself admits (FINDLY 1981, p. 353), the name *jātavedas-* has a rigvedic explanation as follows: 6.15.13b: *viśvā veda jānimā jātavedāḥ* “as *Jātavedas* he [i. e. Agni] knows all beings”, which again points to the meaning assumed here. And finally, Agni’s outstanding knowledge is emphasized throughout the RV (cf. MACDONELL 1897, p. 97). It seems therefore plausible to assume, that even if Findly’s explanation of *jātavedas-* is historically correct, the contemporary audience was likely to have perceived an indication of Agni’s knowledge in it. It is true, though, that the uncompounded noun *vedas-* usually has the meaning “possession”, as has been shown by Nowicky (NOWICKY 1976, pp. 118 – 120), but he acknowledges at least one exception which like RV 3.26 can be found in the third *maṇḍala*; RV 3.60.1 a-b: *ihéha vo manasā bandhūtā nara usíjo jagmur abhi táni vedasā* “Here and there, you men, the *usíj-* have come to those [works?] of yours by means of thought, connection and knowledge”. The hymn deals with the wonderful deeds of the Rbhus which have been traced mentally by the ritual priests.

he made for himself the highest treasure by means of his own dispositions; right then he surveyed heaven and earth.”

ápupot: According to Kümmel a preterite perfect of *pū-* in the function of an aorist.²⁸

svadhā- “own disposition”: with Graßmann and Scarlata understood to denote the innate character of a being.²⁹

In this verse the identity of the speaker is as unclear that of the person who is spoken about. Two persons seem likely: Agni and the poet. The answers to both questions are interconnected: if Agni continues to speak it should be the poet he is talking about. But if the poet starts speaking again, it seems likely that he explains the nature of Agni. Do both proposals make sense? In the following I will argue that they in fact do. But before doing that, a short digression concerning the meaning of *pādas* a and b is in order. These two *pāda*-s seem to explain the composition of a poem; this can be paralleled with other passages in the RV, where the act of poetry is conceived of as purifying speech with sieves.³⁰ The appearance of the heart fits well into this interpretation, since it is considered to be the place or means of inspiration, as can be seen in other stanzas as well.³¹ About the meaning of this stanza all modern commentators agree more or less, but there are differences with regard to the syntactic relation between the two accusatives *matīm* and *vyótis*

²⁸ As Kümmel points out, *ápupot* cannot be interpreted as an reduplicated aorist, since the vowel of the reduplicated syllable is short (KÜMMEL 2000, pp. 306f.).

²⁹ GRASSMANN 1996, s. v. *svadhā*; SCARLATA 1999, pp. 264f.

³⁰ E.g. in RV 9.73.3 a-b *sahásradhāre vitate pavitra ā vācam punanti kavāyo manīṣiṇaḥ* “The inspired *kavi*-s purify the speech in the spread-out strainer of a thousand spouts” or RV 3.1.5 a-b *śukrēbhir āngai rāja ātatanvān krātum punānāḥ kavibhiḥ pavitraiḥ* “having filled out the intermediate space with his bright limbs, purifying his resolution with strainers, with *kavi*-s [=... with the strainers of the *kavi*-s] ...”

³¹ E.g. RV 6.9.6 *vī me kārnā patayaṭo vī cākṣur vīdām jyótir hṛdaya āhitam yāt vī me mānaś carati dūrādhīḥ kīm svīd vaksyāmi kīm u nū manīṣye* || “My ears fly away, my eye away, this light, having been placed in the heart, away. My mind walks away, musing in the distance: Pray, what am I going to say, and what am I going to think now?” or RV 10.5.1 *ékaḥ samudró dharúṇo rayīṇām asmád dhṛdó bhūrījanmā vī caṣṭe śiṣakty ūdhar nīnyór upāstha útsasya mádhye níhitam padām véḥ* “The one sea, the keeper of riches of many births looks out from us, from the heart. He follows the udder in the lap of the two concealed ones; the track of the bird is laid down in the well.” For a comprehensive study of inspiration in the RV cf. GONDA 1963.

as well as with the status of *ánu*. This particle, whose meaning is given as “after, along, according”, can generally serve as a preverb or a postposition.³² Both options are possible in this verse: *ánu* may have been used here as a preverb to *prajānán*, or a postposition to *jyótis*. Virtually every scholar who has translated this stanza has opted for the first version and connected *ánu* with *prajānán* without assuming an accompanying semantic modification of the participle.³³ The only two exceptions I am aware of are Ludwig (“...in seinem geist den gedanken dem [eigenen] liechte entsprechend erkennend; ...“) and Velankar (“... in accordance with the inner light ...”).³⁴ For the following reason their translations appear rather convincing: *ánu* is used as a postposition with the meaning given above throughout the RV, but usually not as a mere particle without any semantic content. But in most the translations of *pāda* b no modifying function is ascribed to *ánu*, so it is tacitly assumed that this particle has only a metrical value, but no semantical one. This is of course possible but should not be assumed right from the beginning; on the contrary, one should attempt to ascribe a meaning to *ánu* which arises from the context of this verse as a whole. The translation by Ludwig and Velankar has the advantage of giving *ánu* a semantic function inside this stanza, and a meaning like “according” is well-established for it. Now if this possibility is granted, the next step is to check whether the assumed meaning “according” makes sense in this context. The rigvedic poets developed several ideas about the process of inspiration, among these the idea of a light in the heart which is responsible for the act of composing a poem. The clearest attestations of this idea can be found in RV 10.5.1, 6.9.6;³⁵ 7.33.8 and presumably also in passages like RV 10.177.2 or 3.10.5. A translation of the *pādas* a and b as “Since he purified the lightbeam/the song with

³² Cf. GRASSMANN 1996, s. v. 1. *ánu*; KRISCH 2006, p. 208; CASARETTO 2011, p. 7.

³³ OLDENBERG 1897, p. 293; GRASSMANN 1996, s. v. *jñā cum ánu pra*; GELDNER 1951, Vol. 1, pp. 359f.; GONDA 1963, pp.279f.; RENOUE 1964, p. 67; ELIZARENKOVA 1989, p. 312; KRISCH 2006, p. 208; JUREWICZ 2010, p. 248; RAM GOPAL 2011, p. 31.

³⁴ LUDWIG 1876, p. 347; VELANKAR 1968, p. 56.

³⁵ S. above, fn. 28.

three strainers by recognizing the thought with the heart according to his light, ...” in accordance with the interpretations of Ludwig and Velankar would therefore be in line with rigvedic ideas about inspiration. Seen this way both Agni and the poet might be the subject of this verse: both are said to contain strainers to purify speech, and both are involved in poetic activities. The *pāda*-s c and d *prima facie* seem to refer to Sūrya or to the solar aspect of Agni. But here again it is possible to assume the poet as the subject as well. There are a few rigvedic verses which hint at the idea that the poet can be compared to or identified with the sun, since both have the property of being surveyors of the world in common. Besides verses like RV 8.6.10³⁶ or 9.10.9³⁷ the whole hymn RV 10.123 can be seen as expressing this idea.³⁸ It can therefore be assumed that this stanza fits in well with rigvedic ideas about poetry and inspiration. With regard to the supposed speaker of this stanza both options remain possible: Agni speaks about the poet and the poet speaks about Agni. Since there is no means at hand to decide this question it can be assumed that the poet of this hymn has used this ambivalence on purpose just like the ambivalent meaning of *arká*- which can be understood in both of its meanings, “lightbeam” and “song”.

One problem of this verse remains to be addressed: the rationale for the tenses used here. There are two aorists, *ápupot* and *akṛta*, followed by one imperfect, *páry apaśyat*, which is used in order to designate a later act, indicated by the use of the connective particle *āt*.³⁹ The occurrence of the two aorists is easily accounted for since this tense is used for conveying the anteriority of actions or events in the Vedic language.⁴⁰ A convincing explanation for *páry apaśyat*, however is more

³⁶ *ahám id dhí pitúṣ pári medhám ṛtásya jagrábha ahám sūrya ivājani* “For even I have received the wisdom of true order from the father, I have just been born like the sun”.

³⁷ *abhí priyā divás padám adhvaryúbhir gúhā hitám sūrah paśyati cákṣasā* “Towards the beloved [places], [towards] the place of heaven, which has been concealed by the *adhvaryú*-s he looks with the eye-sight of the sun”. The alleged subject of this stanza is either Soma or the poet.

³⁸ For similarities between the notion of a poet and the illuminating character of the sun cf. KÖHLER 2010.

³⁹ For *āt* as a temporal conjunctive particle cf. KLEIN 1985, pp. 130 – 138.

⁴⁰ Cf. HOFFMANN 1967, p. 157, 159.

difficult to find; in the Vedic language the imperfect describes the historical or remote past,⁴¹ but this function does not fit the situation in this verse. The purification of the song or of the light beam should have taken place in the immediate past from the perspective of the speaker, and not in remote times, otherwise it is difficult to see the connection to the other two verses of this *tr̥ca*. There cannot be offered a solution to this problem here, but I can point to a possibly related matter: Thompson and Houben have directed the attention to the fact that the well-attested first person singular imperfect *apaśyam* in most of its rigvedic attestations occurrences is used in contexts which suggest a roughly simultaneous frame of time for the perspective of the speaker and the occurrence of the act of seeing.⁴² Temporal relations like these are supposed to be represented by the aorist tense, and not by forms of the imperfect like *apaśyam*. A possible explanation for this apparent irregularity may be found in the supplementary paradigm which the roots *paś-* and *dr̥ś-* form in Vedic and Sanskrit; their meanings are originally not identical, for *paś-* originally had the rather fientive meaning “to see, to behold”, whereas *dr̥ś-* denoted the active “to take a look at”.⁴³ When a rigvedic poet wanted to express the fientive meaning he placed semantics above temporal constraints. But notwithstanding how this peculiar use of *apaśyam* will be accounted for, it is tempting to use it to explain the problem of *páry apaśyat* in this verse: it has been said that both Agni and the poet may be seen as the subject of this verse as well as the speaker of it. The poet is the one for whom *apaśyam* in its rigvedic attestations is used and if someone else (in this case Agni) reports about the poet having his vision, he may deem it necessary to “translate” as it were the poetic idiom from the first to the third person. If this is the case, *páry apaśyat* would not point to a remote past with regard to the poet, but originally to a poetical idiom which emphasizes the

⁴¹ HOFFMANN 1967, pp. 151 – 157, cf. DAHL 2010, pp. 191f.

⁴² THOMPSON 1997, p. 146; HOUBEN 2000, pp. 518f.

⁴³ Cf. KÜMMEL 2000, p. 233 and CASARETTO 2002, especially p. 42ff.

visionary character of a hymn.⁴⁴ If the poet reports the vision of Agni no such problem exists: with regard to his divine activities it may at least be possible to see them as situated in the remote past.

The hymn concludes with a stanza in which protection is requested, here again by using the speculative and esoteric vocabulary prevailing in this *tr̥ca*:

3.26.9 *śatādhāram útsam ákṣīyamāṇaṃ vipāścítam pitāraṃ*
váktvānām |
melīm mādantam pitrór upásthe tám rodasī pipṛtaṃ
satyavācam ||

“Protect the fountain of a hundred streams, which is not running dry, the knower of inspiration, the father of those (words) that are to be spoken out, the delighting swoosh in the lap of the parents, him, who speaks the truth/who receives true speech, o Heaven and Earth!”

śatādhāra- “of a hundred streams”: in three out of six *ṛgvedic* attestations it is used as an epithet for Soma.

melī- “swoosh”, could with Graßmann be interpreted as a metonymy for Agni,⁴⁵ but see below.

vipāścít:- “knower of inspiration”: root compound; the first part is either formed by the genitive singular or plural accusative of *vīp*-, “inspiration”; it occurs 25 times in the RV and is used most often for Soma (seven attestations) and for human poets (at least six times).⁴⁶

pitrór upásthe “in the lap of the parents”; presumably with Velankar anywhere between heaven and earth.⁴⁷

satyavāc:- “who speaks the truth/who receives true speech”; this root compound is attested four times in the RV and explained by Scarlata as

⁴⁴ Although situated in a rather different context, RV 10.51.2 a-b may be adduced as another instance for an unusual use of the imperfect of *paś*:- *kó mā dadarśa katamāḥ śa devó yó me tanvò bahudhā paryápaśyat* “Who has seen me, who among the gods was it who multifariously saw my bodies?” The reference seems to be the discovery of the hidden Agni which has just occurred (which would require an aorist indicative), and as in RV 3.26.6 a god is apparently speaking, but he is of course represented by the poet.

⁴⁵ GRASSMANN 1996, s. v. *medī*.

⁴⁶ Cf. SCARLATA 1999, p. 122.

⁴⁷ VELANKAR 1968, p. 56.

an agent noun; however with regard to RV 10.12.1 where *satyavāc-* is used for addressing heaven and earth he assumes the possibility of understanding it as a *bahuvrīhi* compound as well.⁴⁸ This assumption would require an explanation for the oxytone accent of *satyavāc-* since *bahuvrīhi* compounds usually carry their accent on the first member; perhaps *satyavāc-* was formed analogously to the (regularly accented) *bahuvrīhi* compound *suvāc-*?⁴⁹

As was to be expected, there is no agreement in terms of the identity of the one whom protection is asked for. More or less all attributes used here suggest Agni as the one this stanza is about, but the matter is not that easy. Why should a couple of divinities be asked to protect one of the most prominent gods of the rigvedic *pantheon*? Moreover, it is a well-known pattern of rigvedic hymns that the last stanza usually contains the request of benefits for the poet himself or the employer and his clan. Bearing this in mind one may therefore be prepared to accept not Agni but the poet as the subject of this stanza, what was already the opinion of Geldner and Velankar.⁵⁰ There are no problems in assigning the attributes of *pāda* b and d to him, and those of the remaining two *pāda*-s may than be understood as to refer to him metaphorically (*pāda* a) or metonymically (*pāda* c) likewise. However, a further elaboration of this line of thought must be delayed for a moment in order to discuss two thoughtful and stimulating interpretations of parts of the last *trca* of this hymn.

3. Alternative interpretations

The first interpretation was proposed by Rönnow in his study on Trita Āptya:⁵¹ According to him stanza 7 aims at the

⁴⁸ Cf. SCARLATA 1999, p. 471 with fn. 666.

⁴⁹ This explanation would be similar to that of the irregularly accented *bahuvrīhi* compound *darśataśrī-* which has been explained by Wackernagel as an analogous formation to *agni*^o or *ghṛtaśrī-* (WACKERNAGEL 1905, p. 301).

⁵⁰ Cf. GELDNER 1951, Vol. 1, p. 360; VELANKAR 1968, p. 56.

⁵¹ RÖNNOW 1927, pp. 166f., fn. 1.

identification of the sacrificer with the heavenly Agni, who bears the characteristics of the sun: the correlation between them is established by relating *tridhātu* as attribute to *arká-* in verse 7 (*arká-* is understood as “splendor” here) to the three sieves which occur in verse 8 (*tribhīḥ pavitraiḥ*). As a result the sacrificer is linked to the solar Agni who in turn is responsible for the purification of the heavenly Soma, and that means, for rain. According to Rönnow this kind of identification stands behind the development of the Agni-ritual, but the poet of 3.26 aims at more: he shifts the reference from Agni in verse 7 to himself (or, more aptly: to his self) in verse 8. Here, *arká-* is to be understood as “hymn” and the three sieves (which are now explicitly mentioned) are the means to purify the poem; by doing this the poet attains a divine status.

Rönnow’s ideas were simultaneously balanced and stimulating, and he was certainly correct when he tried to deal with the esoteric content of rigvedic verses in general by taking all elements of them seriously. Many rigvedic passages indeed are liable to an interpretation which emphasizes the intimate relation between the poet (not necessarily the sacrificer) and Agni.⁵² And his interpretation of the poet in RV 3.26.7-8 as a searching mind who tries to transcend the borders of ritualism and to reach for a more subtle mental or spiritual level shows a way to analyze not only the verses in question but other verses of the same *maṇḍala* as well.⁵³ However, his approach is not convincing in every respect: Rönnow bases his interpretation on the small base of just two rigvedic verses and some additional passages of other Vedic texts. But these very few instances do not suffice to establish such far-reaching interpretations with regard to the assumed purpose of ritual and the means of transcending it. Furthermore, it is not explained exactly how this identification of Agni and sacrifice shall come about and what this identification will be like (e. g. is it of a temporary, complete etc. nature?). And finally Rönnow failed to put his interpretation into a context. He refrained from taking the last

⁵² Especially those that speak of a light or Agni in the heart: RV 4.58; 6.9.6 and 10.5.1.

⁵³ Cf. for example RV 3.1-14; 3.3; 3.5; 3.7; 3.20 and 3.54-56.

verse of this *ṛca*, 3.26.9 into consideration as well and thereby left his analysis fragmentary. In fact, the three verses form a whole and are meant to be understood this way. Therefore the ideas of Rönnow somewhat unnecessarily lose much of their plausibility.

Another attempt to interpret the verses RV 3.26.7 to 9 has been carried out by Jurewicz.⁵⁴ Within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics Jurewicz understands these verses as examples of conceptualized metaphors and metonymies which according to her form the basic tools for philosophical discourse in the RV; by connecting several of them in a single verse the *ṛgvedic* poet was able to create a blend of overlapping pictures which functions as a means to reflect about the fundamental realities.⁵⁵ Applying this scheme to the last *ṛca* of RV 3.26, Jurewicz sees in 3.26.7 an expression of two of Agni's aspects: the self-manifestation of Agni in his creation and his own cognition of it.⁵⁶ This cognition takes place in exultation caused by Soma, who is being referred to by *amṛta* via metonymy. The syntagma *arká- tridhātu-* carries the double meaning „threefold light/song“ and is used by the poet to highlight the self-reflective activity of Agni who establishes the threefold world while singing. The last two *pādas* of this verse again emphasize the dual nature of Agni, this time as subject and object. The same dual nature of Agni is also the topic of RV 3.26.8. According to Jurewicz it is stressed by the double meaning of *arká-* as well as by the syntagma *matim jyótir ánu prajānán*. The cognitive and creative activities of Agni are linked to the rise of the sun and its reaching of the highest point in *pādas* c and d. Eventually, RV 3.26.9 contains the metaphorical description of Agni filled with Soma which is used to indicate that the ritual is a transformation of Agni and since the same metaphor is used for the sun as well the recipient of this verse will simultaneously understand the solar nature of Agni. In addition to that the metaphor of a vessel filled with liquid is

⁵⁴ JUREWICZ 2010, pp. 189 – 190 and pp. 246 – 248.

⁵⁵ JUREWICZ 2010, pp. 34 – 41.

⁵⁶ JUREWICZ 2010, pp. 246 – 248.

used to convey the image of Agni carrying Soma to heaven and at the same time bringing the gods to the sacrificial ground.

It is impossible to do full justice to Jurewicz's innovative approach of analyzing rigvedic hymns, since this would require a thorough discussion of her study and of Cognitive Linguistics in general as well as of its applicability to Vedic Studies in particular. Irrespective of that, Jurewicz rightly emphasizes that it is important to try to understand the use of metaphors and metonymies in rigvedic hymns, especially in those which comprise a huge part of enigmatic verses. And she is certainly right about the simultaneous existence of several layers of meaning within the rigvedic hymns which do not exclude but complement each other. In every attempt to understand these hymns it is therefore necessary to take the existence of a plurality of meanings into consideration. However, with regard to RV 3.26.7 to 9, some problems come up: like Rönnow, Jurewicz does not interpret the *trca* as a whole but deals with the verses separately, only treating verses 7 and 8 as a unit, and just like him, she disregards the context of this *trca* completely. Furthermore, Jurewicz lays stress on the use of metaphors and metonymies, but does not sufficiently deal with all of the elements which make them up. Thus, it remains unclear what exactly is meant by *meli-* in verse 9. Why are two aorists (*ápupot* and *akṛta*) followed by an imperfect (*pári apaśyat*) in Verse 8? And finally, although Jurewicz reckons with semantic ambiguities and makes in fact use of them in her interpretation of these verses she has not attended to their fundamental uncertainty: who is meant? Without further discussion she assumes that this *trca* is about Agni, and though this seems obvious for 3.26.7 (but it only seems so, see below), the same cannot be said for the following two verses. In fact, it is the very possibility of connecting them with Agni or with the poet which makes them so interesting! It is of course asked too much from anybody to deliver a completely convincing explanation for every detail of a rigvedic verse, let alone of a hymn. But if fundamental details have not been satisfyingly been accounted for, the analysis of larger units is apt to lose some of its explanatory power.

4. The enigma of Agni

From what has been outlined above it can be inferred that there may be an alternative way of connecting several elements of this hymn. The three *trca*-s have not been arbitrarily arranged to form a single hymn, but their arrangement reveals an elaborate scheme, as can be seen by integrating the following signs. Indications for an underlying unity are given in the hymn itself: the hymn begins with a verse which contains the compound *anuṣatyá-* and it ends with one that contains the compound *satyavāca-*. Thus, *satyá-* “true” is a common element of both of the compounds, and they frame this hymn as a whole. This framing in turn points to a consciously composed poem. The compound *anuṣatyá-* is used with regard to the true praise of Agni, but in fact there is not much of a praise of him in the first *trca*! The mere enumeration of epithets does not outbalance the strong emphasis which is laid on the act of invoking Agni by the poet and his companions. Thus, the sudden request for a reward in verse 3 seems slightly strange. Seen this way, it seems somewhat dubious whether this *trca* really represents an independent unit. But this appearance loses some of its mystery, if the following *trcas* are taken into account, in which the poet reveals more of Agni’s aspects and thus lets the praise of Agni be “according to truth”. And this is what the poet has announced to do: by using *anuṣatyám* as an adverb and by interpreting *mānasā nicāyyā* as a reference to the composition of a poem, it is possible to see a description of Agni according to his real nature in the following verses. Furthermore, it has been shown by Lüders in his seminal study, that *satyá-* often has the meaning of “to come true, become real”.⁵⁷ If this is applied to the compound *satyavāca-* here, the resulting meaning is “the one who has spoken what becomes real” and this in turn points directly to the beginning of the poem and can therefore be understood as a reference to the hymn as a unit, not only to its last *trca*, which in itself is somewhat incomprehensible, as has

⁵⁷ LÜDERS 1959, pp. 640f. This aspect of the use of *satyá-* is also emphasized by Thompson (THOMPSON 1997).

been shown. There are other hints as well: *arká- tridhātu-* in verse 7 carries the two meanings “threefold song” or “threefold light beam” and in both of its meanings there is a reference to this hymn itself:⁵⁸ the first interpretation refers to this hymn, which consists of three *ṛca*-s,⁵⁹ the second to the three forms of Agni which are underlined in them: the sacrificial fire (verses 1 to 3), the lightning (verses 4 to 6) and the mysterious entity which resides in the heart and simultaneously figures as the sun.⁶⁰ Acknowledging these presumptions this hymn illustrates a tripartite ascension of Agni from the ground through the atmosphere to the sun.⁶¹ Since the fire in the atmosphere is the lightning, in the second *ṛca* Agni is evoked in association with the Maruts. The third *ṛca* reveals Agni’s nature as the light which is present as the sun, since *rájaso vimāna-* in verse 7c and *dyāvāprthivī páry apaśyat* in verse 8d at first sight do not allow for other interpretations. But in this *ṛca* Agni is related to the poet as well! Verse 7 starts with *agnír asmi* “I am Agni”, but any attempt to understand this and the following two verses has to deal with the fact that it is the poet (or later on the reciting priest) who speaks them. It is therefore mandatory to relate the content of these verses to his person. Taking this into consideration, RV 3.26.7 turns into a statement about the mysterious nature of the poet: rather than Agni the poet himself

⁵⁸ This does not exclude other interpretations like that of Findly, who explains this junction to designate the three sacrificial fires (FINDLY 1981, p. 355). It may appear less probable (but still possible) to see here with Oldenberg a designation for the three singing *udgātṛ*-s or alternatively for the three verses of this *ṛca* (OLDENBERG 1897, p. 295). The term *udgātṛ* occurs only once in the RV (RV 2.43.2), and there only in the singular. A reference to the three verses of this *ṛca* seems unlikely since – as argued for above – the self-referential elements of this hymn point to a larger unit.

⁵⁹ According to Geldner it is impossible to consider *tridhātu-* as representing the arrangement of this hymn into three *ṛca*-s, since the only other rigvedic attestation of this word (RV 8.51.4a-b *yásmā arkám saptáśīrṣāṇam ānṛçcúis tridhātum uttamé padé* “for whom they have sung the threefold song with seven heads”) does not allow for an analogous interpretation, since RV 8.51 cannot be divided into *ṛca*-s (GELDNER 1901, p. 158). But given the nature of the esoteric lexicon of the RV, where semantic content often is dependent upon the context, Geldner’s objection loses its plausibility. For polysemy in the RV cf. ELIZARENKOVA 1995, pp. 29 – 105.

⁶⁰ Cf. the commentary of Ludwig who interprets *arká-* in verse 8 analogously, however, with an opposite direction: sun – lightning – fire (LUDWIG 1881, p. 305).

⁶¹ Similarly BERGAIGNE 1878, p. 288 and JUREWICZ 2010, p. 246, but without referring to the structure of this hymn.

and his speech are identified with sacrificial elements. With his poetical creations he picks up terms of the ongoing ritual and thereby adds a more subtle meaning to it. This thought finds its definite expression in *pāda* b, where the two most important sacrificial offerings are mentioned, clarified butter and Soma. When he announces *ghṛtām me cākṣur*, his words can be understood to as “my eye is clarified butter” and so the poet apparently refers to his peculiar faculty of vision which finally leads to the formulation of a poem. And the same holds for *amṛtam ma āsān* “the immortal in my mouth”. Here, *amṛta*- which is a common rigvedic denomination for Soma may be comprehended as being metaphorical related to the recitation of poems which is understood as an offering. Thus, the poet’s proclamation that he is *jánmanā jātávedas* „by birth Jātavedas“ receives an additional significance as well: it may well be understood as a statement of his extraordinary knowledge. He himself has the knowledge of all originated beings besides Agni Jātavedas, since being something by origin may amount to being it by nature (a meaning which is assumed for rigvedic *jánman*- besides “birth”)⁶². If this interpretation is accepted, the contents of *pāda*-s c and d may be understood accordingly: Once his basic activities are seen as the essential sacrificial offerings, it is a small step for the poet to declare himself as the embodiment of ritual himself. He does so by identifying himself with *arká*-, *gharmá*- and *havis*-. Somewhat more problematic is the relation between the poet and *rájaso vimāna*- “the one who measures the middle region”. This expression is suitable for Agni in the form of the sun, but it may be assigned here to the poet as well, since it was argued above that he is comparable to the sun in that he overviews the whole world. Finally, by understanding the poet himself as its subject also the beginning of this verse finds an explanation: since it is the poet who makes the sacrifice succeed, he may be compared to Agni or even identified with him, and so he can legitimately state “I am

⁶² Cf. GRASSMANN 1996, s. v. *jánman* (where this meaning is not explicitly given) and BÖHTLINGK, 1859-61, s. v. *jánman* (especially the entries under 11. “Natur, Beschaffenheit ... Art und Weise”).

Agni”. As we have seen, the reason for doing so is given by him in what follows, and at the end of verse 7 another aspect of composing poems is mentioned: the verse closes with *asmi nāma* “I am [...] by name”. As Elizarenkova rightly remarks, name-giving is connected with cosmogony,⁶³ which holds also for this verse: on one level Agni reveals himself as being identical to several sacrificial objects. In the rigvedic idiom this means that he is carrying their names. On the other hand the reciting poet claims to be Agni, since he is the speaking person. But being the composer of the poem at the same time, he is in fact responsible for giving names to the objects or persons he speaks about, and all the speculation of this verse and the following ones rest on this creative feat of the poet alone.⁶⁴

The ambiguous semantics of verse 8, in which both the poet and Agni are referred to, has already been discussed. With regard to the unity of the hymn one further point needs to be emphasized: the first *tr̥ca* closes with a request for reward for the poet and his companions, expressed with *dād̥hātu rātnam* (verse 3). And this is reminiscent to what is said about the subject of verse 8c where the acting person – either Agni or the poet – is said to have made the highest treasure for himself by means of his own dispositions: *vār̥ṣiṣṭhaṃ rātnam akṛta svadhābhiḥ*. *Rātna-* appears in both syntagmas, and *dād̥hātu* is phonologically related to *svadhā-*. It is not exactly clear what the highest treasure could be for Agni,⁶⁵ with regard to the poet it may describe the special gift of vision which allows him to overview the process of creation. And it seems that the

⁶³ ELIZARENKOVA 2001, p. 36: “As the name creates its bearer, name-giving belongs to the cosmogonic sphere, and is regarded as an act of creation of the universe and its elements.”

⁶⁴ The referential ambivalence inherent in verse 7 and 8 has prompted Rönnow to assume, that the poet aims at identifying himself with Agni (RÖNNOW 1927, p. 166). More generally, Thompson has argued that the identification of the poet with a god is the main characteristic of the so-called *ātmastuti-s*, where a god assumes the role of a speaker within a hymn (THOMPSON 1997 pp. 15, 171). Both interpretations are possible, but there is however, a serious objection: there is a referential ambiguity not only with regard to the subject, but at least for some of the predicates as well. “Purifying the *arkā-* with three strainers” simultaneously describes two different activities depending on who is supposed to be the subject of this verse. And as their activities are different, so are the respective subjects (Agni and the poet), who maintain therefore their individuality.

⁶⁵ Perhaps the sun is literally seen as the highest treasure for Agni?

resemblance is not arbitrary but in line with the progress of this hymn: first, the more “mundane” rewards are asked for, which are bestowed by the god. Secondly, the poet demonstrates in a highly sophisticated manner that Agni has set for himself the highest treasure, and he, the poet, has done the same.

In summary, it becomes clear that RV 3.26 involves several layers of meaning included in this hymn: it consists of a series of praises to Agni and the Maruts combined with the usual requests for rewards. But it also includes a visualization of several of Agni’s aspects, which prevail in different regions of the world: sacrificial fire on the ground, lightning in the atmosphere and sunlight in the sky. Furthermore, Agni is seen as the essential component of the sacrifice. In the end, the poet has brought himself into the poem, and what started as a standard invocation, turns out to be a statement about the mystery of inspiration.

5. Conclusion

It has been shown that RV 3.26 displays several features which allow to consider it as an intentionally organized composition. But if it is legitimate to consider this hymn accordingly, its position within the third *maṇḍala* violates the rigvedic ordering principle of decreasing number of verses for hymns addressed to the same god. Beginning with RV 3.13 all preceding hymns addressed to Agni are shorter, and it was for this reason, that a division into *trca*-s has been proposed and carried out by Oldenberg. It cannot be denied that Oldenberg has succeeded in using this method of separation to explain the irregular position of a number of rigvedic hymns.⁶⁶ But how does this fit with the occurrences of hymns displaying an elaborate structure? And with regard to the content of this hymn, another question suggests itself: In what way does the poetological interpretation of RV 3.26 affect our understanding of rigvedic poetry?

⁶⁶ OLDENBERG 1888, pp. 191 – 209.

Ad 1: The successful analysis of hymns irregularly placed within the RV as consisting of smaller units should not preclude the assumption of an underlying thematic unity of these *hymns* whenever this seems to be indicated. It was argued here that such a unity can be assumed for RV 3.26. Thus, it may be promising to reconsider other rigvedic hymns which have been analyzed as consisting of *trca*-s in a similar way. And if more instances of such hymns, which display a thematic unity, are found, other questions can be raised: are the forms of these hymns, in which they have been placed within the rigvedic *maṇḍalas* the result of editorial constructions, or are they genuine compositions of the poets? It is of course not possible to give a definite answer in advance. Since the *trca*-s presumably have been composed by the same poet or poets who were responsible for the composition of the other hymns of the same *maṇḍala*-, it is unlikely to find stylistic differences which would allow for a clear separation. Any argument for an original unity will therefore have to rest on evidence of similar lines of thoughts in those hymns whose unity is taken for granted. Alternatively, the possibility that certain rigvedic hymns have been made up by the rigvedic editors out of *trca*-s according to thematic criteria, deserves to be taken seriously. It does not seem far-fetched to assume in the case of RV 3.26 an original composition by Viśvāmitra himself, since he speaks about the nature of Agni and his contribution to the composition of poems in other hymns as well,⁶⁷ but the case may be different with hymns coming from other *maṇḍalas*. But if a case could be made for the inclusion of hymns in the RV, which show a thematic unity but which are likely to have been put together by the rigvedic editors, one may speculate about their reasons for doing so; did they feel the need to create some sort of commentary on aspects of rigvedic poetry?

Ad 2. The interpretation which has been argued for here is not the only way of understanding the hymn under discussion. Many of the terms used here (e. g. *arká*-, *tridhātu*-, *pavitra*-) show an ambiguity of meaning which

⁶⁷ Cf. the hymns listed in fn. 49 above.

makes them liable to different ways of understanding even for the contemporary audience. Originally, rigvedic poetry was meant to be recited during the performance of ritual activities. But throughout the RV we find poems whose composers used the opportunity to emphasize the nature of their poetic inspiration and its function within the sacrificial realm. The use of a semantically ambiguous vocabulary was one way to illustrate this. Unsurprisingly the poets stressed their specific contribution to the success of the sacrifice, and RV 3.26 can be seen as an example of this. However, in considerations like these the oral character of this poetry is not to be forgotten: even if the poems contained complex deliberations, the audience had no means for recording them, except their memories. There were no means of writing and it seems questionable that the participants of the ritual found spare time enough to ponder on the contents of the poems, the one exception being the respective poets themselves. Therefore the more enigmatic hymns of the RV may be regarded as metrical units which were subject to revised speculation every time they are called back to mind, and they were consciously composed as such.⁶⁸

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⁶⁸ I am sincerely grateful to Rainer Kimmig and Mareike Heinritz for comments and criticism.

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