

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band: 55 (2001)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Descent of fire
Autor: Hayakawa, Atsushi
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147529>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 12.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

DESCENT OF FIRE *

Atsushi Hayakawa

RV 3.3 contains a curious problem concerning Agni.

RV 3.3.11 Because of the marvellous powers of Vaiśvānara, the unique seer¹ released *br̥hat* with the creative power. Agni, who magnifies the parents, [namely] the rich-in-sperm Heaven and Earth, was born.²

Something which is called *br̥hat* (great/high) is released here. However, what is denoted by this term, and by whom it is released, is not clear.

Oldenberg Noten says: “Der ‘Weise’ wohl eben Vaiśvānara” and “Zu *br̥hāt* wird Subst. zu ergänzen sein... hier wohl etwa *bhāh̥*.” However, light is always released by Agni Vaiśvānara. The *br̥hat* which is released by “the unique seer” with “the creative power” must be something special.

Geldner suggests two possibilities: “Zu *br̥hat* ist vielleicht *rétaḥ* zu ergänzen, das zu *áriṇāt* passen würde. Es scheinen sich zwei Möglichkeiten zu ergeben. Entweder das Paradoxon, daß Agni zugleich Vater und Sohn ist (1,69,2). In 1,96,4 heißt er der Erzeuger von Himmel und Erde, 3,25,1 aber deren Sohn. *ab* wäre dann eine leichte

1 Geldner: “einzige Seher”. The word *éka* seems to mean *par excellence* here. Cf. RV 7.95.2 *ékācetat sárasvatī nadīnām*.

2 *vaiśvānarasya daṁsánābhyo br̥hád áriṇād ékaḥ svapasyáyā kavīḥ / ubhā́ pitārā maháyann ajāyatāgnír dyāvāpr̥thivī́ bhū́rretasā //*

* Acknowledgements: A prototype of this paper was written in 1995. I received some constructive criticism to it from Prof. H. W. Bodewitz. After some corrections, the prototype was exposed on my personal Internet webpage in 1998 with the title *Unit 1: Vaiśvānarīyasūkta*. This paper is a thoroughly revised, second version.

Anakoluthie. ‘Aus den außerordentlichen Kräften des Vaiśvānara entließ Agni den hohen’ (Samen) wäre s.v.a. Agni V. entließ aus seinen außerordentlichen K. den Samen. Ähnliche Redefigur 10,3,2cd; 3,4,1b; 5,3,10c; 7,39,1a. Das zu supplierende *rētaḥ* wird durch das folgende *bhūriretasā* nahegelegt. Oder der Sänger ist Subjekt. Dann ist gemeint: der einzige Seher ergoß für die *d.* des V. einen hohen (Erguß = Lied).”

Although Geldner’s second interpretation is followed by Renou EVP: “le (sacrifiant, ce) poète unique a fait couler le haut (éclat, s’exerçant)”, his first interpretation sounds more interesting. If he is right, we could explain Agni’s recursive generation from a different perspective. It would also shed some light on the meaning of the curious association between Agni and sperm, which appears sporadically in Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas.³ However, Geldner’s note to this verse is not based on a detailed study of related Vedic passages, and therefore it remains a somewhat intuitive, fragmental observation. It seems me to be a good idea to re-examine Geldner’s observaton through the discussion of RV 3.3 and related passages.

I will start with the text and translation of this hymn:

RV 3.3.1 They offer the gift of inspired hymn to Vaiśvānara, who has a wide surface⁴, so that [he] should go [down] to the firm grounds⁵, for the immortal Agni favours the gods, and he never⁶ defiles the orders.⁷

3 Cf. Eliade (1976) pp.93ff.

4 *pr̥thupājas*: Geldner: “von breiter Gestalt”, Renou EVP: “à la vaste forme-massive”. As to *pājas*, Thieme (1979): “[sichtbare, Vorder-]Seite”.

5 *dharūṇeṣu gātave*: Geldner: “um auf sicherem Grunde zu wandeln”. But *dharūṇeṣu* must be the “Localis des Zieles”. Renou translates this point correctly: “pour (obtenir d’) accéder aux fondements (de l’Ordre sacré)”. Cf. also Renou (1958) pp.1-3. However, I see no reason to add “de l’Ordre sacré”. Cf. RV 1.52.2 *sá párvato ná dharūṇeṣv ácyutaḥ sahásramūtis táviṣṣu vāvr̥dhe*, “He (Indra), who gives thousands of help, has grown in powers like a mountain immovable on the *dharūṇas*”.

6 *sanātā na*: Geldner: “von jeher nicht”, Renou “depuis longtemps s’abstient”. Hoffmann (1967: 100): “jeher nicht”. However PW: “niemals”.

7 *vaiśvānarāya pr̥thupājase vīpo rátnā vidhanta dharūṇeṣu gātave / agnir hí devāṃ amṛto divasyáti áthā dhármāṇi sanātā ná dūduṣat //*

- RV 3.3.2 As a wonderful messenger, he goes between Heaven and Earth. Being seated, he is the Hotṛ, the Purohita of a man. Being rich in hymns, Agni, who was sent by the gods, makes the high residence prosper⁸ day by day.⁹
- RV 3.3.3 The inspired ones magnify Agni, the banner of sacrifices, the performer of distribution, with insights. The sacrificer desires favours from him, on whom they have united the works [and] songs together.¹⁰
- RV 3.3.4 As the father of sacrifices, the Asura of the inspired ones, Vimāna and Vayuna¹¹ of singers, Agni has entered into Heaven and Earth, which have abundant forms. As a seer, who is dear to many, he is pleased with [his] abodes^{12, 13}
- RV 3.3.5 The gods have put here Agni Vaiśvānara, who is shining, having a shining chariot, being always yellowish¹⁴, who is in the water, the

8 *kṣāyam bṛhāntam pári bhūṣati*: Geldner: “nimmt Agni seinen hohen Wohnsitz ein”. Renou: “il entoure-de-soins la haute résidence”. But Gonda (1959a: 93): “to exert strengthening or favourable influence”.

9 *antár dūtó ródasī dasmá īyate hótā niṣatto mánuṣaḥ puróhitaḥ / kṣāyam bṛhāntam pári bhūṣati dyúbhir devébhir agnir iṣitó dhiyāvasuḥ //*

10 *ketúm yajñánāṃ vidáthasya sādhanam viprāso agnim mahayanta cittibhiḥ / āpāmsi yásminn ádhi samdadhúr giras tásmín sumnāni yajamāna ā cake //*

11 *vimānam* and *vayúnam*: The correct meaning of these words is unknown. Geldner translates *vayúnam* “die Richte”, Renou “le repère”. Thieme (1949: 23-24) translates it “die Umhegung (der umhegende Schutz)”, and proposes “Haus” for *vimānam*.

12 *Dhāmabhiḥ*: Geldner: “um seiner Eigenschaften”. Renou: “pour ses formes-institutionnelles”. But Gonda (1967: 24): “on account of [its] abodes”.

13 *pitā yajñánāṃ ásuṛo vipaścítāṃ vimānam agnir vayúnam ca vāghátām / á viveśa ródasī bhūrivarpasā purupriyó bhandate dhāmabhiḥ kavīḥ //*

14 *hárivratam*: Cf. H.-P. Schmidt (1958) “dessen (Berufs-) Gelübde (es ist,) gelb (zu glänzen)”.

bestower of light, who plunges, who is swift, who is covered by the strength, who is wild, who is splendid.¹⁵

RV 3.3.6 Agni, who performs the multiform sacrifice by means of a hymn, with the gods and Manu's offspring who carry out sacrifices, goes riding in a chariot between [Heaven and Earth] as a quick householder who keeps off imprecations.¹⁶

RV 3.3.7 O Agni, be wakeful during the life which has good offspring. Overflow with strength. Bestow tonic by shining for us.¹⁷ Incite energies and great [vigours].¹⁸ O watchful one, you are the Uṣij¹⁹ of the gods, having good magical powers of the inspired verses.²⁰

RV 3.3.8 People always praise Jātavedas, the lord of settlements, the young guest, the disposer of hymns, the Uṣij for the singers, the banner of sacrifices, energetically with salutation so that [he]²¹ increases.²²

15 *candráṃ agniṃ candráraṭhaṃ hárivratam vaiśvānarām apsuśádam svarvídám / vigāhám túrṇim táviṣibhir ávṛtam bhúrṇim devāsa ihá suśríyam dadhuḥ //*

16 *agnír devébhir mánuṣaś ca jantúbhis tanvānó yajñám purupéśasaṃ dhiyā / rathír antár īyate sādhadīṣṭibhir jīró dāmūnā abhiśasticātanaḥ //*

17 *sám iṣo didīhi naḥ*: Geldner: “bring uns Labsal mit deinem Lichte”, Renou EVP: “brille (en) nous (conférant) toutes jouissances-rituelles”. Cf. RV 3.54.22 *svádasva havyā sám iṣo didīhi*, 5.4.2 *sugārhapatyāḥ sám iṣo didīhi*.

18 *váyāṃsi jinva bṛhatás ca*: Oldenberg's note: “Zu *bṛhatáh* zu ergänzen *vájān*? Aehnlich II,2,7. *vájān* Obj. zu *jinva* III,15,6. Uebrigens kann *bṛhatáh* trotz des Genus zu *váyāṃsi* gehören; *váyas* empfängt gern Beiwort *bṛhát*. Schwerlich *bṛhatáh* Gen. sg. (Caland-Henry 374)”. Renou: “Anime les forces-vitales et les hauts (pouvoirs)”. Geldner: “Errege Kräfte und zwar große”. Klein (1985 Vol 1 Part 1: 127) follows Oldenberg and says: “Geldner's rendition would make this passage completely anomalous among *ca*-syntagms”.

19 *uṣij*: Geldner: “Fürbitter”, Renou: “prêtre-modèle”.

20 *ágne j́arasva svapatyá áyuny ūrjá pinvasva sám iṣo didīhi naḥ / váyāṃsi jinva bṛhatás ca jāgrva uṣig devānām ási sukrátur vipám //*

21 Renou and Geldner take “sacrifice” as the agent of the dative infinitive *vṛdhé*. This might be possible, but if we supplement the agent with a word which appears in this verse, it should be *jātavedas* or *náraḥ*.

- RV 3.3.9 The shining joyous god Agni with the beautiful chariot has encompassed²³ the residences with strength. We should confirm the observance²⁴ of the much-nourishing one at home with excellent praises.²⁵
- RV 3.3.10 O Vaiśvānara, I desire your abodes, with which you became the bestower of light, o bright one. Being born, you filled up the worlds, Heaven and Earth. O Agni, you encompass²⁶ all [the worlds] in yourself.²⁷
- RV 3.3.11 See above.

At first sight, this hymn looks like a collection of verses which has no logical thread. But when we read it carefully, it can be seen that the uses of the present and perfect tenses make a sharp contrast as to the aspects of Agni.

Verse 2, 6, 7 and 8 are related in the present tense. These verses mention Agni's attributes as "Hotṛ", "Purohita", "messenger" (2), "going between [Heaven and Earth]" (6). These are the attributes of the ritual fire Agni Jātavedas²⁸, which is also invoked in Verse 8. Uśij in Verses 7 and 8 also seems to be a priest. This fact seems to indicate that a ritual is being carried out at the present moment of the poet.

-
- 22 *viśpātiṃ yahvām átithiṃ náraḥ sádā yantāraṃ dhīnām uśijaṃ ca vāghātām / adhvarāñām cétaṇaṃ jātávedasam prá śaṃsanti námasā jūtibhir vṛdhé //*
- 23 *pári babhūva*: Gonda (1959a: 83): "to encompass, surround and to have a propitious influence".
- 24 *úpa bhūṣema*: Geldner: "Wir wollen seiner Dienste, des Viellabenden im Hause mit Lobesliedern warten", Renou: "Pussions-nous, nous (autres), veiller-avec-soin sur ses décrets". But Gonda (1959a: 84): "to confirm the ordinances (of the god) with excellent song of praise".
- 25 *vibhāvā devāḥ surāṇaḥ pári kṣitír agnir babhūva śávasā sumádrathaḥ / tásya vratāni bhūripośiṇo vayám úpa bhūṣema dáma á suvṛktibhiḥ //*
- 26 *paribhūr asi*: Cf. Verse 9 *pári babhūva*.
- 27 *vaiśvānara táva dhāmāny á cake yébhiḥ svarvid ábhavo vicakṣaṇa / jātá āprṇo bhūvanāni ródasī ágne tá víśvā paribhūr asi tmánā //*
- 28 See Hayakawa (2000) Section 1 "Functions of Vaiśvānara and Jātavedas".

On the other hand, the perfect tense appears in 4abc, 5, 9ab and 10d,²⁹ and these verses mention the cosmic aspects of Agni: “entering into heaven and earth” (4c) and “encompassing the earth” (9 and 10). The Agni mentioned here can be understood as the cosmic fire Agni Vaiśvānara³⁰, which is mentioned in Verse 5. Note that Verse 5 and the previous 4abc (in the perfect) obviously refer to the cosmogonical situation: the establishment of the cosmic Agni structure.³¹

Taking the above facts in consideration, RV 3.3 can be overviewed as follows:

| Verse | Actual ritual | Cosmogonical situation |
|-------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Introduction to this hymn. | |
| 2 | Agni goes between heaven and earth. | |
| 3ab | Inspired ones magnify Agni. | |
| 3cd | The sacrificer desires favours (of Agni). (<i>ā cake</i> has the perfect form, but usually interpreted in the present sense.) | |
| 4abc | | Agni entered into heaven and earth. |
| 4d | Still now, he is pleased with the abodes. | |
| 5 | | The cosmic fire was established. |
| 6-8 | Agni moves between heaven and earth. The poet requests him to “overflow with strength”. People praise Jātavedas. | |
| 9ab | | Agni encompassed the “residences”. |

29 Except *ā cake* in 3cd and 10ab.

30 See Hayakawa (2000) Section 1 “Agni, Agni Vaiśvānara, Agni Jātavedas”.

31 See Hayakawa (2000) especially the figure in Section 1 “Agni, Agni Vaiśvānara, Agni Jātavedas”.

- The two threads, which are concerned with the actual ritual and the cosmogony, respectively, correspond with each other: 4abc (perf.) and 4d (pres.) show the continuity between the cosmogony and the ritual taking place now. Agni encompasses heaven and earth in 9ab (perf.) and 10d (pres.). Further Agni is requested to “overflow with strength” in Verse 7, and this seems to correspond to Verse 11, the release of *br̥hat* by “the unique seer”. I interpret this correspondency as follows:
- 1) The passages in the perfect tense are flashbacks to the cosmogony, which have been inserted in the context of the ritual taking place now.
 - 2) The ritual taking place is a re-play of the cosmogony. In other words, the poet is carrying out the ritual while remembering the cosmological scenes. He requests Agni to “overflow with strength”, while “the unique seer” released *br̥hat* in the cosmogony. The correspondence between Verse 7 and 11 indicates that “the unique seer” in Verse 11 is Agni Vaiśvānara. Now, in Verse 10, Agni has encompassed all the world, just as he did in the cosmogony. Something which corresponds to the release of *br̥hat* must happen in the next scene in the actual ritual. What is released by Agni Vaiśvānara?

As is well known, Agni is said to have threefold births.³² RV 10.45.1 mentions them in the most clear way:

32 Cf. Oldenberg (1917) pp.106-107, Hillebrandt (1927) p.136.

RV 10.45.1 First, Agni was born from heaven. Jātavedas [was born] from us secondly. Thirdly [he was born] in the waters. Having heroic mind, kindling the perpetual [fire], the heedful [priest] watches over him.³³

Here Agni's births are said to be: 1) from heaven (*divás*), 2) from us (*asmád*), and 3) in the waters (*apsú*).³⁴ Among these, the second one clearly refers to his birth on earth as the sacrificial fire.³⁵ In the

33 *divás pári prathamám jajñe agnir asmád dvitīyam pári jātavedāḥ / tṛtīyam apsú nṛmānā ájasram indhāna enaṃ jarate svādhiḥ //*

34 RV 1.95.3 seems to be somewhat parallel to the above verse: *trīṇi jñā pári bhūṣanty asya samudrá ékaṃ divy ékaṃ apsú* “They make his three births prosper: one in the heavenly ocean, one in the waters.” This passage is ambiguous. Geldner's translation is: “Seine drei Geburten umfassen sie (im Geiste): die eine im Meere, eine im Himmel, (eine?) in den Gewässern”. He adds *ékaṃ* to make his translation consistent, but as a result of this addition, his translation contradicts with the statement in RV 10.45.1. If one takes *samudré* and *divi* as in apposition, he obtains a translation as presented above. The other birth of Agni, which is not mentioned in this verse, is actually mentioned in the preceding verse as the earthly one: 1.95.2 *dáśemám tváṣṭur janayanta gárbham átandrāso yuvatāyo vibhṛtram / tigmāṇikaṃ sváyaśasaṃ jáneṣu virócamānam pári ṣīm nayanti //* “Ten [fingers] beget this womb of Tvaṣṭṛ. The unwearied young ones [begets] *vibhṛtra*. They lead him around, who has sharp face, who is glorious through his own deeds, who shines among people”. But Geldner's translation might be supported by RV 1.163.4, a statement about the birth of a horse: *trīṇi ta āhur divi bāndhanāni trīṇy apsú trīṇy antáḥ samudré / utéva me váruṇaś chantsy arvan yátrā ta āhuh paramám janítram //* “They say that he has three bindings in heaven, three in the waters, [and] three inside the ocean. And you, o runner, appear to me just like Varuṇa, where they say that his highest birthplace is.” This verse is not directly concerned with Agni's birth, but it seems to give *samudré*, *divi*, and *apsú* as three different places, and that corresponds well with Geldner's translation of RV 1.95.3. If Geldner is correct, we have two different statements about the threefold birth of Agni. But in any case “heaven” and “the waters” are contained in this statement.

35 Cf. e.g. RV 5.11.6 *tvām agne āṅgirasó gúhā hitám ánv avindañ chiśriyāṇām váne-vane / sá jāyase mathyámānaḥ sáho mahát tvām āhuh sáhasas putráṃ āṅgiraḥ //* “O Agni, the Aṅgirases discovered you hidden, abiding in every

following subsection, we will discuss Agni's birth in heaven. "Agni's birth in the waters" will be treated in the appendix to this paper.

Agni's birth in the highest heaven

The following verses mention Agni's birth in the highest heaven (*paramé vyòmani*):

RV 1.143.2 Being born in the highest heaven, Agni became manifest for Mātariśvan³⁶. When he is kindled by the magical power and greatness, his flame illuminated Heaven and Earth.³⁷

RV 6.8.2 Being born in the highest heaven, Agni, the lord of obedience, protected the obedience. Vaiśvānara, who has good magical power, measured out the Antarikṣa, and touched the vault with greatness.³⁸

The following verse mentions "Agni's highest birthplace":

RV 2.9.3 We should offer you at your highest birthplace. O Agni, we should offer with Stomas at your lower seat. I honour the womb from which you have started out. When you are kindled, the oblations have been offered to you.³⁹

wood. You are born, when rubbed with mighty strength. They call you the son of strength. O Aṅgiras".

36 There are two kinds of the statements on Mātariśvan. Some Rigvedic verses say that he comes from the highest heaven, others say that he comes "from afar" (= underworld). However, this does not mean that "the highest heaven" is identical with "the underworld". Even Kuiper (1971: 94) himself hesitates to apply his alternation-theory to Mātariśvan. This problem will be discussed elsewhere.

37 *sá jāyamānaḥ paramé vyòmany āvīr agnīr abhavan mātariśvane / asyá krátvā samidhānāsya majmánā prá dyāvā śociḥ pṛthivī arocayat //*

38 *sá jāyamānaḥ paramé vyòmani vratāny agnīr vratapā arakṣata / vy àntarikṣam amimīta sukrátur vaiśvānaró mahinā nākam asprṣat //*

39 *vidhēma te paramé jánmann agne vidhēma stómair ávare sadhásthe / yásmād yóner udārithā yáje tám prá tvé havīmṣi juhure sámiddhe //*

The highest birthplace, which is contrasted with his lower seat, must be, as Geldner claims in his note to this verse, the sun. Pāda b seems to support this interpretation: the sacrificial fire on earth is kindled, and the sun in heaven receives the oblations.

Macdonell (1897), based on AV 3.21.1, 3.21.7, 8.1.11 and AitB 7.7.2, identifies this heavenly birth of Agni with the lightning. In contrast, Oldenberg (1917: 108) guesses:

Beim himmlischen Agni kann die Sonne, kann auch der Blitz in Betracht kommen. Der Blitz seinerseits wieder kann wie als himmlisches so auch als dem Wasserreich entstammendes Wesen verstanden werden: seine Heimat ist ja die Wolke. Wir werden aber sehen, daß für die vedische Vorstellung noch außer dem Blitz in ganz anderem Sinne Feuer in allem Wasser, im irdischen wie im himmlischen enthalten ist. Wo nun Himmelsagni und Wasseragni nebeneinander genannt werden, glaube ich im ganzen, daß jener eher als die Sonne, dieser in der eben berührten, vom Blitz verschiedenen Bedeutung zu verstehen ist.

Hillebrandt (1927: 136 and 139-141) also connects the heavenly birth with the sun, and refutes the identification of Agni with lightning:

Wir finden als Zeugen für sie in der Hauptsache nur Kommentare und spätere Quellen, auf die sich wohl auch Alberunī India 1, 41 stützt; vereinzelt natürlich auch andere Angaben, denn die Inder haben selbstverständlich den Blitz beobachtet und seine feurige Natur erkannt. Die Stellen aber, wo sie ihn zu einer Gottheit erhoben haben, sind gering an Zahl und gehören mehr dem Adbhuta-Ritual als dem regulären Kultus an... Im allgemeinen sehen wir den Blitz als Waffe in der Hand Indra's, Soma's, Bṛhaspati's und anderer... Wenn wir von den mythologischen Wesen wie Indra, Bṛhaspati u.a. absehen und uns an die durchsichtigen Natur-erscheinungen selber halten, so steht der Blitz *aśmān*, *vidyūt* in naher Beziehung zur Sonne als deren Waffe... Ferner steht, wie natürlich, der Blitz in naher Beziehung zu Wolke und Regen. Er wird im übrigen sehr verschiedenartig symbolisiert, aber nirgends fällt eine Äusserung etwa wie *agnir vai vajrah* (*vidyut*) oder *devo vai vajrah*.

Hillebrandt's discussion is persuasive. And at least we can see no Rigvedic passage which identifies the birth of Agni with that of lightning. And especially the above RV 2.9.3 shows that "Agni's

highest birthplace” literally denotes “the highest heaven”. However, we still do not know what “Agni’s birth in heaven” is. At least, we do not know any natural phenomenon which can be associated with it. The sun appears every morning in the eastern horizon, and disappears every evening into the western horizon. Between the sunrise and sunset, we only see the movement of the sun, and nothing which could be called “Agni’s birth in the highest heaven”.

We have come back again to the same place. What is “Agni’s birth in heaven”? Let us start again from RV 3.3.11, our verse in question, which runs “Agni, who magnifies the parents, [namely] the rich-in-sperm Heaven and Earth, was born”. A similar expression appears in RV 10.45.8:

RV 10.45.8 Looking like a gold plate, he shone forth widely, illuminating the unforgettable life-energy in the splendour. Agni became immortal with the powers, *when Heaven, who has good sperm, begot him.*⁴⁰

Note that both of these verses mention sperm: Heaven (and earth) is said to be “rich in sperm” (3.3.11) and “having good sperm” (10.45.8). This might imply that Agni’s birth has something to do with Heaven’s sperm. And, inasmuch as father Heaven and mother Earth are mentioned, there must be a sexual intercourse, through which the sperm is released. The following RV passage is crucially important to think of this point:

RV 1.31.3 O Agni, be first manifest for Mātariśvan with the good magical power for Vivasvat. *Heaven and Earth* trembled at the Hotṛ-selection. You became a match for the burden. You sacrificed to the great, o Vasu.⁴¹

40 *dr̥śānó rukmá urviyá vy àdyaud durmárṣam áyuh śriyé rucānáḥ / agnir amṛto abhavad váyobhir yád enaṃ dyaúr janáyat surétāḥ //*

41 *tvám agne prathamó mātariśvana āvīr bhava sukratūyá vivásvate / árejetāṃ ródasī hotṛvúryé ‘saghnor bhārám áyajo mahó vaso //*

RV 1.31.4 O Agni, you caused Heaven to roar for a man. For the benevolent Purūravas, a more benevolent one [caused Heaven to roar]. When you are released at the *parents* with the power, they lead you around forward and again backward.⁴²

RV 1.31.3 is parallel to RV 1.143.2 “Being born in the highest sky, Agni became visible to Mātariśvan.”⁴³ This can be regarded as mentioning Agni’s birth in heaven.⁴⁴ As Geldner correctly notes, “the parents” in 1.31.4 are churning-sticks. The fact that Purūravas is mentioned in 1.31.4 also supports his interpretation, because he represents the “male” churning-stick.⁴⁵ However, “the parents” also correspond with the “Heaven and Earth” in 1.31.3, which leads us to the observation that two births of Agni are contrasted in this passage: Agni’s birth in heaven (through the sexual intercourse between Heaven and Earth) in 1.31.3, and Agni’s birth on earth through using the churning sticks (1.31.4). But why are these two births of Agni contrasted with each other?

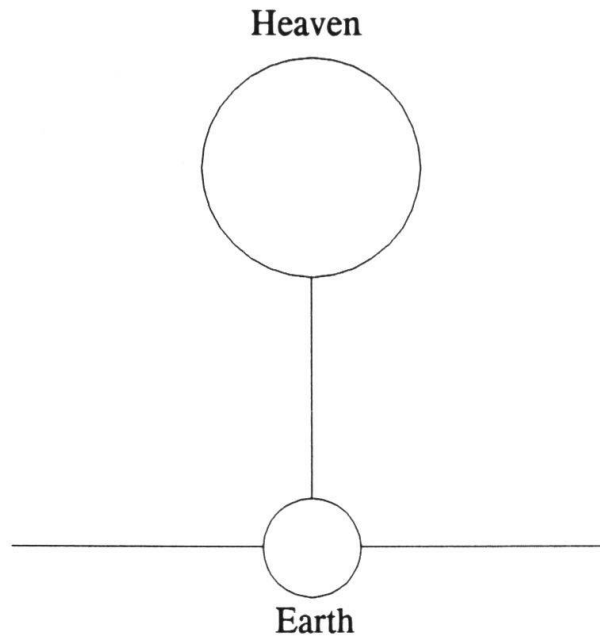
The answer is hidden in the spatial structure of the cosmic Agni. As discussed in Hayakawa (2000), the cosmic Agni structure consists of the sun, spoke, and the sacrificial fire. When the sun reaches the vault, the total structure will be as the following figure, which looks like the churning sticks:

42 *tvám agne mánave dyām avāśayaḥ purūravase sukṛte sukṛttaraḥ / śvātrēṇa yāt pitrór mūcyase páry ā tvā pūrvam anayann āparam pūnaḥ //*

43 *sá jāyamānaḥ paramé vyòmany āvir agnir abhavan mātariśvane*

44 See note 36.

45 See Krick (1982) p.203ff.



Also, the above figure gives a straight image of sexual intercourse between Heaven and Earth. Namely, Heaven is inserting his penis vertically into Earth.

As already seen, sperm is mentioned in some instances of Agni's birth in heaven. If sperm is released as a result of this sexual intercourse, it must be released through the sun, and possibly runs through the spoke towards earth. The reason why this ejaculation is called "Agni's birth" must be that the sperm was conceived as a form of fire.⁴⁶

There are at least three Rigvedic passages including RV 3.3, which depicts the scene of Agni's birth in heaven concretely:

46 As Krick (1982: 189-223) shows, some Brāhmaṇa and Śrautasūtra passages imply the derivation of Agni from heaven, and some of them refer to "Agni's sperm". This point can be explained through the correspondence between Agni's births in heaven and on earth. These two processes have a formal similarity, and they can be likened to each other. It might also be possible to think that they form a conceptual sequence.

- RV 7.5.7 *Being born in the highest heaven, you protect the enclosure around at once, like Vāyu. Producing the creatures, you have roared towards [them], being helpful for the offspring, o Jātavedas.*⁴⁷
- RV 7.5.8 *O Agni Vaiśvānara, Jātavedas, procure us the bright tonic with which you let overflow the gift, o procurer of everything, a great fame for the mortal who offers.*⁴⁸
- RV 7.5.9 *O Agni, procure the wealth which is rich in cattle and the glorious booty for our patrons. O Agni Vaiśvānara, give a great protection to us, in accordance with Rudras and Vasus.*⁴⁹

In 7.5.8, Agni is requested to bestow “tonic” (*iṣ*) with which he should “let overflow the gift”. From the above discussion, we can assume that Agni’s sperm is overflowing here. As Gonda (1989: 177-178) says, “gift” (*rādhas*) has a close relation to the success of a ritual,⁵⁰ and it sometimes comes from a god⁵¹. In the context of this passage, the word

47 *sá jāyamānaḥ paramé vyòman vāyúr ná páthaḥ pári pāsi sadyāḥ / tvám bhúvanā janāyann abhí krann ápatyāya jātavedo daśayān //*

48 *tām agne asmé iṣam érayasva vaiśvānara dyumátīm jātavedaḥ / yáyā rādhaḥ pínvasi viśvavāra pṛthú śrávo dāśúṣe mártvāya //*

49 *tām no agne maghāvadbhyaḥ purukṣum rayim ní vājam śrútyam yuvasva / vaiśvānara máhi naḥ śárma yacha rudrébhir agne vásubhiḥ sajóṣāḥ //*

50 “However, the above disquisition appears to lead to the conclusion that *rādhas* is one of those words ending in the suffix *-as-* which express a potency, power-concept or power-substance, that empirically, or within some form of experience, was supposed to express the idea conveyed by the root *rādh* (the verb *rādhati*, *rādhnoti*), i.e. “to succeed, to be successful, to complete a task, to accomplish one’s purpose”, and could therefore denote facts, events, processes, concrete objects which were believed to represent or manifest that idea. Although in principle any manifestation or localization of this power concept could be called *rādhas*, it was in the literature known to us, and as far as we are able to see, especially used to denote those objects or actions which produced, manifested or represented the success of the sacrificial rites and ceremonies such as the *dakṣiṇās* offered to the officiants, including those given to the poets and eulogists inducing the gods to comply with the worshippers’ wishes, resulted in the desired effect”.

51 Gonda op. cit. p.162ff.

means a gift which is given back from the gods in return for the oblations from the sacrificer.

While the new-born Agni is called Jātavedas in 7.5.7, Agni is called Vaiśvānara as well as Jātavedas in 7.5.8. The releasing Agni is Agni the sun = Agni Vaiśvānara. The released Agni is the Agni which moves between heaven and earth, which must be Agni Jātavedas.⁵² At the moment of the ejaculation, these two are unseparable. That is why Agni is called Vaiśvānara-Jātavedas in 7.5.8. It might be worth noting that 7.5.7cd mentions “producing the creatures” and “being helpful for the offspring”. As discussed in Hayakawa (2000), Agni Jātavedas is concerned with the procreation of the cattle. It is highly possible that the sperm released here falls down to earth and promotes the propagation of the cattle.

RV 3.2 contains a similar passage:

- RV 3.2.10 The human tonics made the seer of the settlements, the chief of the settlements, sharp like an axe. He goes upwards and downwards, while working. *He puts the embryo in these beings.*⁵³
- RV 3.2.11 *The procreating seed bull incites himself into the conspicuous wombs, while roaring like a lion. Vaiśvānara, who has a wide surface, the immortal one, who distributes the treasure and wealth for a pious one.*⁵⁴
- RV 3.2.12 Vaiśvānara has ascended heaven as in the ancient time. Being honoured by good hymns, he [ascends] the top of heaven. Producing the wealth for people as before, the watchful one goes round the same course.⁵⁵

52 The new-born Agni appears to be called Vaiśvānara in RV 6.8.2 and 3.3.10. However, the invocation of Vaiśvānara in 3.3.10a belongs to the description of the present situation, while 3.3.10cd, which describes Agni’s birth, belongs to the description of the cosmogonical situation. 6.8.2ab, which describes Agni’s birth, should also be separated from 6.8.2cd, which describes Vaiśvānara’s ascent.

53 *viśāṃ kavīṃ viśpátim mānuṣīr iṣaḥ sām sīm akr̥ṇvan svádhitim ná téjase / sá udváto niváto yāti véviṣat sá gárbham eṣú bhúvaneṣu dīdharat //*

54 *sá jinvate jaṭhāreṣu prajāñivān vṛṣā citrēṣu nānadan ná siṃhāḥ / vaiśvānarāḥ pr̥thupājā ámartyo vásu rátnā dáyamāno ví dāśúṣe //*

Agni's birth is mentioned/implicit in the preceding verses 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.7, and 3.2.9.⁵⁶ Although it is not explicitly stated that Agni's birth in heaven is described here, the expressions in 3.2.11 that are parallel with RV 3.3 and 7.5,⁵⁷ and the description of the sun reaching the vault in 3.2.12 make it plausible. Geldner notes to 3.2.10cd: "Wie das irdische Feuer als Material das Brennholz hat, so wird ein solches mystisches auch für die beiden anderen Formen des Agni, für Blitz und Sonne vorausgesetzt." However, the deity who "goes upwards and downwards, while working" must be Agni as Jātavedas, which is also mentioned in 3.2.8, and not the lightning. The deity who "incite himself into the shining wombs" can be interpreted as Agni as Vaiśvānara. So, Agni the Sun puts his "embryo" in "these beings" through the movement of Jātavedas. The "conspicuous wombs" in 3.2.11, which seems to denote the same thing as the "beings" in 3.2.10, might be the plants from which the churning sticks are taken⁵⁸. He "incites himself", which seems to mean ejaculation. He is also said to "distribute the treasure and wealth", which corresponds with "gift" (7.5.8) and "glorious booty" (7.5.9).

Let us go back to RV 3.3:

RV 3.3.7 O Agni, be wakeful during the life which has good offspring. *Overflow with strength. Bestow tonic by shining for us. Incite energies and great [vigours].* O watchful one, you are the Uṣij of the gods, having good magical powers of the verses.

55 *vaiśvānarāḥ pratnāthā nākam āruhad divās prṣṭhām bhādamānaḥ sumānmabhiḥ / sā pūrvavāj janāyañ jantāve dhānaṃ samānām ājmaṃ pāry eti jāgrviḥ //*

56 3.2.2 *sā rocayaj janūṣā ródasī ubhé*, 3.2.3 *krátvā dáksasya táruṣo vídharmaṇi devāso agniṃ janayanta cittibhiḥ*, 3.2.7 *ā ródasī aprṇad ā svār mahāj jātām yád enam apāso ádhārayan*, 3.2.9 *tisró yahvāsya samídhaḥ párijmano 'gnér apunann uśijo ámrtyavaḥ*.

57 3.3.7c *váyāmsi jinva bṛhatás ca*, 3.3.1a *vaiśvānarāya prthupājase*, 7.5.8d *prthú śrávo dāśúṣe mártiyāya*.

58 See RV 5.83.1 below.

- RV 3.3.10 O Vaiśvānara, I desire your abodes, with which you became the bestower of light, o bright one. *Being born, you filled up the worlds, Heaven and Earth.* O Agni, you encompass all [the worlds] in yourself.
- RV 3.3.11 Because of the marvellous powers of Vaiśvānara, *the unique seer released br̥hat with the creative power. Agni, who magnifies the parents, [namely] the rich-in-sperm Heaven and Earth, was born.*

Through the examination of the parallel passages, we can see some implicit associations, which had been hidden in the background of the text: Agni Vaiśvānara = the sun = “the unique seer” releases heaven’s sperm = *br̥hat* = Agni Jātavedas towards earth, when it reaches the vault. “Agni’s birth” mentioned in 3.3.10 is this ejaculation. Just as in the parallel passages, Agni is said to “overflow”. As already discussed, this passage is a replay of the cosmogony. The poet requests the sun to release the sperm again for the propagation of the cattle and the fertilization of earth.

From the above discussion, we can support Geldner’s interpretation: The *br̥hat* in RV 3.3.11 is Heaven’s sperm, which is released by Agni Vaiśvānara.

Come Rain or Come Shine?

I would also like to mention a series of Rigvedic hymns, in which “the overflowing sun” is associated with rainfall:

- RV 5.83.1 Speak towards the powerful one with these songs. Praise Parjanya, seek to win [him] with bow. Roaring, the seed bull who gives quickly puts the sperm as an embryo in the plants.⁵⁹
- RV 5.83.3 Just as a chariot-rider who whips horses with a whip, he reveals the messengers of rain. From afar, roars of a Lion arise, when Parjanya makes the cloud of rain.⁶⁰

59 *āchā vada tavāsaṃ gīrbhīr ābhī stuhī parjanyaṃ nāmasā vivāsa / kánikradad vṛṣabhó jīrádānū réto dadhāty óṣadhīṣu gārbham //*

60 *rathīva káśayāśvāṃ abhikṣipánn āvīr dūtān kṛṇute varṣyāṃ áha / dūrāt siñhāsya stanáthā úd īrate yát parjanyaḥ kṛṇuté varṣyāṃ nábhaḥ //*

RV 5.83.4 The winds blow forth. The thunders fall, the plants rise up, *the sun overflows*. The *tonic* is born for every creature, *when Parjanya helps the earth with sperm*.⁶¹

RV 5.83.10 *You have poured rain*. Now stop [it] well. Now you have made the desert passable. You have begot plants to eat. And you found a hymn for creatures.⁶²

“Tonic” (*írā*) and “sperm” in 5.83.4 seems to mean rain. Note that “the release of the tonic”, and “sperm” also appear in the context of Agni’s birth in the highest heaven. According to Lüders (1951) the overflowing of the sun in 5.83.4 implies that the sun releases the rain.⁶³ The following verse might also support his interpretation:

RV 8.44.16 Agni is the head of the heaven, the summit, the protector of the earth here. *He incites the sperm of the water*.⁶⁴

Agni, who is at the head of the heaven, is obviously the sun. “The sperm of the water” can be understood as rain.

RV 10.98, a rain-charm hymn, also suggests a close relation between Agni the sun and rain:

RV 10.98.12 O *Agni*, drive detractors and dangerous ways away. Keep disease and rakṣases away. From this ocean of the great heaven, *send us abundance of waters hither*.⁶⁵

The following Rigvedic verse, which precedes RV 7.5.7-9, seems interesting:

61 *prā vātā vānti patáyanti vidyúta úd óṣadhīr jihatē pínvate svàḥ / irā víśvasmai bhívanāya jāyate yát parjanyaḥ pṛthivīm rétasāvati //*

62 *ávarṣīr varṣám úd u ṣú gr̥bhāyākar dhánvāny átyetavā u / ájījana óṣadhīr bhójanāya kām utá prajābhyo ‘vido manīṣām //*

63 IX *Die Sonne als Spenderin des Regens*. (p.308ff.)

64 *agnīr mūrdhā divāḥ kakūt pātiḥ pṛthivyā ayám / apām rétāmsi jinvati.*

65 *ágne bādhasva ví mṛdho ví durgáhāpāmīvām ápa rákṣāmsi sedha / asmāt samudrād bṛható divó no ‘pām bhūmánam úpa naḥ srjehá //*

RV 7.5.2 Being sought in heaven, *Agni is put on earth as the leader of the streams*, the seed bull of the still water. Vaiśvānara shines forth to the human settlements, being brought up according to wish.⁶⁶

Pādas ab correspond to the myth of Agni's birth and his descent in RV 7.5.7-9. The words "the leader of the streams" suggest that the Agni who is brought to the earth was associated with rainfall.

The connection between the sun and rainfall can also be observed in the Brāhmaṇas. TS 3.3.4.1: "The rays of the sun, he makes the rain to fall from the sky", ŚB 14.2.1.21: "Hail to Sūrya's ray, the rain-winner – for one of the sun's rays is called 'rain-winner', whereby he supports all these creatures", TĀ 5.7.7: "I offer you as an oblation for the sun's ray which gains (and gives) rain."

It is clear that the motif "the release of sperm = Agni" and "the release of sperm = rain" overlap with each other in the above Vedic passages. To explain it is not very difficult: Heaven's sperm is fire, because it is released by the sun. On the other hand, it is liquid, because it is sperm. Therefore, Agni's sperm is fire as well as water. Namely, it is sunshine and rain, both of which bring people fertility⁶⁷.

66 *prṣṭó diví dhāy agniḥ prthivyām netā sindhūnām vṛṣabhā stiyānām / sá mānuṣīr abhi víśo ví bhāti vaiśvānaró vāvṛdhānó vāreṇa //*

67 This might be difficult to imagine, because nothing can be fire and water at the same time in our empirical world. However, it is important to understand that the myth of heaven's ejaculation = Agni's birth in heaven is a wholly conceptual myth. In other words, all the aspects of this myth can be derived from the concept "the sexual intercourse of heaven and earth" through simple logic and association, without any identification with natural phenomena, e.g.: "Heaven and earth have sexual intercourse with each other." "And?" "He releases sperm, of course." "From where?" "From the sun, because the sun is the joint between heaven and the cosmic spoke. Heaven inserts the spoke into earth." "The sun is a form of Agni. Is the sperm also Agni?" "Yes, it is. In other words, a new Agni is born from the sun." "But, you know, sperm is fluid." "Heaven's sperm is fluid, because it is sperm." "Then, is it fire and fluid at the same time?" "Yes, it is. And the fluid that falls from heaven is, of course, rain."

Related Motifs in the Brāhmaṇas

As Eliade (1976: 95ff) indicates, we can see the trace of the motif “Agni’s ejaculation” or “Agni’s sperm” in some Brāhmaṇa passages. I would like to indicate only two instances of this motif, which seems important for our future research:

TS 6.5.8.3-6 “O drop” he says. The drop is seed. Verily thus he impregnates seed. “Possessing power” he says. Power is offspring. Verily he produces offspring for him. “O Agni” he says. *The impregnator of seed is Agni.* “With the wives” he says, for pairing. “In unison with the god Tvaṣṭṛ drink the Soma” he says..... “O Agnīdh, sit on the lap of the Neṣṭṛ. O Neṣṭṛ, lead up the wife” he says. Verily the Agnīdh impregnates the Neṣṭṛ, the Neṣṭṛ the wife. He causes the Udgāṭṛ to look (at the wife). The Udgāṭṛ is the Prajāpati. Verily it serves for the production of offspring. He causes water to follow along. Verily thus he pours seed. Along the thigh he causes it to flow, for along the thigh is seed poured. Baring the thigh he causes it to flow, for when the thigh is bared, they pair. Then seed is poured. Then offspring are born.

The above translation is taken over from Keith’s. This is an elucidation of a procedure in the Third Soma-pressing: After the Patnīvata Graha is offered, the Agnīdh sits on the lap of the Neṣṭṛ. Then the Neṣṭṛ fetches the wife of the sacrificer, and he causes her to be looked at by the Udgāṭṛ. Then she pours water along her thigh, while a laud called Yajñāyajñīyastotra is sung. Meanwhile the mantra “O Agni, may I receive all seed in the lovers” is recited. After the laud, a series of mantras called Āgnimārutaśastra is recited by the Hotṛ. Note that RV 3.3, which relates Agni’s birth in heaven, forms the first part of Āgnimārutaśastra. This procedure was analysed by Jamison (1996) as follows: Soma (= sperm) is first consumed by the Agnīdh, who takes the female role. Then the Agnīdh takes the male role in turn and transmits the Soma to the Neṣṭṛ, who takes the female role. The Neṣṭṛ now takes the male role, and transmits the Soma to the sacrificer’s wife. Here, the procedure is interpreted as the process of the transmission of Soma to the sacrificer’s wife, who cannot approach Soma directly

because of her female gender. The whole procedure is a sort of conceptual sexual intercourse. The Udgātṛ functions as the releaser of the sperm.

Jamison's interpretation is quite sharp and elegant. It can explain a lot of details in the Brāhmaṇas. However, the presence of Agni in this procedure cannot be explained by her scheme. The above TS passage, the Mantra used in the procedure, and the RV 3.3 recited as a part of the Āgnimārutaśāstra indicate that the sperm originally comes from Agni.⁶⁸

The Agnihotra oblation is identified with Agni's sperm in some Brāhmaṇa passages. I took over the translation of the following passages from Bodewitz (1976):

KS 6.3 Sūrya (the sun) and Agni were in the same receptacle (*yoni*). Thereupon Sūrya rose upwards. *He lost his seed*. Agni received it with an iron receptacle. He made it stick (burn) (to the iron pan). While it was burning (to the pan), he transferred it to the cow. It (became) this milk.⁶⁹

MS 1.8.2 It (i.e. the milk) should not be boiled too much. One would boil the seed dry. If one should let it boil over, someone fond of drinking would be born in one's progeny. *The seed of yonder sun is offered here*.⁷⁰

ŚB 2.2.4.15 Agni set his heart upon her (the cow) (thinking:) "May I become paired with her". He cohabited with her. *He poured his seed in her*. That became the milk. Therefore it is cooked (i.e. warm) though being in a cow who is uncooked. *For it is Agni's seed*.⁷¹

68 This does not necessarily mean that Jamison's scheme is wrong. At this moment I consider that there are several historical/conceptual layers in this procedure and that Jamison's scheme represents one of the layers. I am preparing a separate paper to discuss this point. The reason why Agni's sperm falls at a Soma-sacrifice will also be discussed there.

69 Bodewitz (1976) p.34.

70 Bodewitz (1976) p.34.

71 Bodewitz (1976) p.38.

ŚB 2.3.1.14-15 Before offering it he should put it on the fire. *In that it is Agni's seed*, thereby it is cooked.⁷²

ŚB 2.3.1.32-35 On the other hand that one (i.e. the formula) "Agni is the light, the light is Agni, hail" is a form of generation. Thereby he encloses the seed which is the light on both sides with the deity. Now seed enclosed on both sides is born. Therefore he causes it to be born by enclosing it on both sides... And this indeed is a form of generation. Jīvala Cailaki, however, said: "Alruṇi produces only conception, not birth." He should offer with this same (formula) in the evening. And then in the morning (with the formula) "The light is Sūrya, Sūrya is the light, hail" he places the seed which is light outside by means of the deity. Now seed is born as offspring outside (the body of the mother). Thereby he reproduces it.⁷³

Bodewitz (1976: 152) comments: "evidently this aspect of the agnihotra, which is hardly found outside the Yajurvedic texts, is secondary. Conception and delivery (as the image of sunset and sunrise) were just a motif rather than being a fundamental concept of the agnihotra, and as such it was transmitted within a number of related texts." This comment seems in itself correct.⁷⁴ However, as Bodewitz himself indicates,⁷⁵ it does not imply that the secondary aspects are without importance. Although Bodewitz does not discuss this point further than the comment cited above, the intention of these passages seems to be the re-interpretation of the Agnihotra ritual as the process of the daily reproduction of the cosmic fire. In other words, the Yajurvedic priests were trying to re-interpret the Agnihotra for some reason, and they used the traditional motif "Agni's sperm" for it.

72 Bodewitz (1976) pp.62-63.

73 Bodewitz (1976) p.151.

74 See also the Introduction of Bodewitz (1976), where he discusses what is originally intended by the Agnihotra.

75 Bodewitz (1976) pp.3-4.

Appendix: Agni's Birth in the Waters

Although "Agni's birth in the waters" is not actually concerned with RV 3.3, we should also mention this problem, because it forms a part of the concept "the threefold birth of Agni".

Oldenberg (1917: 108 and 113) associates "Agni's birth in the waters" with the concept "fire in all the water" and indicates its relation to "die schon in indoiranischer Zeit stehend gewordene Verbindung 'Wasser und Pflanzen'." His view is followed by Gonda (1960: 68) and it seems to be commonly accepted. However, as Hillebrandt (1927: 150 note 3) says, Oldenberg's observation is mainly based on later Vedic texts, and the early Vedic passages which Oldenberg quotes⁷⁶ do not necessarily support his opinion. Hillebrandt (1927: 152-153), based mainly on KauṣB 25.1⁷⁷, claims that Agni's birth in the water means the return of the sun after the rainy season. Although KauṣB is newer than Oldenberg's material, Hillebrandt's suggestion seems important in that it associates "Agni's birth in the waters" with (a special kind of) sunrise⁷⁸.

In RV 4.1 and 5.45, "Agni's birth in the waters" is associated with the Vala-myth, the cosmogonical sunrise:

RV 4.1.11 First he (Agni) was born in *pastyās*, on the bottom of the great space, in his womb, without foot, without head, concealing both ends, retreating in the nest of the seed bull.⁷⁹

76 AV 12.1.37, 8.1.11, 3.21.1, 3.21.7, RV 8.39.8, 8.39.10.

77 KauṣB 25.1: "The waters practised fervour, after practising fervour they conceived; thence was this sun born on the sixth month ... "From the ocean the wave rich in sweetness hath arisen" is the Ājya; for from the ocean, from the waters he comes out. It contains (the word) 'sun' in 'Indra one, the sun one hath produced'; this is a symbol of this day" (Keith).

78 Lüders (1951: 301-302) tried to reconstruct the mythological structure in which the sun goes into the ocean every evening and rises from it every morning, and he further associates it with KauṣB 25.1.

79 *sá jāyata prathamāḥ pastyāsu mahó budhné rájaso asyá yónau / apād aśrṣā guhāmāno ántāyóyuvāno vṛṣabhāsya nīlé //*

- RV 4.1.12 First the flock proceeded with praise to the womb of R̥ta, to the nest of the seed bull. The desired young, wonderful, shining [flock]. The seven lovely ones were born for the seed bull.⁸⁰
- RV 4.1.13 Our human fathers, blowing up the R̥ta, have sat in front. They drove out the good-milking cows, which were enclosed in the rock, inside the hole, while they invoked Uṣas.⁸¹

“Seed bull” in 4.1.11 and 12 is a well-known epithet for Agni. Therefore “retreating in the nest of the seed bull” must simply mean that Agni was in his “nest”. “The bottom of the great space” and “his womb” denotes the same place as “nest”. The verses which follow this passage relate the Vala-myth. Therefore, this “nest of Agni” can be interpreted as the Vala. The meaning of the word *pastyā* is somewhat vague, but it is supposed to mean “stream”⁸².

- RV 5.45.10 Sūrya has climbed the bright stream, when he yoked the straight-backed yellowish horses. The wise men lead [him] just as [they lead] a ship through water. The water stood still, while listening to [it].⁸³
- RV 5.45.11 You have put the hymn which procures us *the sun in the waters*, with which Navagvas got through *ten months*. With this hymn may we be those who have gods as guardians. With this hymn may we cross over difficulty.⁸⁴

While Lüders (1951: 330-331) regards this passage as a description of the daily sunrise, Oldenberg Noten and Geldner interpret it as the return of the sun after the rainy season. H.-P. Schmidt noticed the words “ten

80 *prá śárdha āṛta prathamāṃ vipanyāṃ ṛtasya yonā vṛṣabhāsya nīlē / spārhó yūvā vapuṣyò vibhāvā sapta priyāso ‘janayanta vṛṣṇe //*

81 *asmākam ātra pitāro manuṣyā abhi prá sedur ṛtām āśuṣāṇāḥ / āśmavrajāḥ sudūghā vavrē antār úd usrā ājann uṣāso huvānāḥ //*

82 Geldner translates “in den Flüssen”. See also H.-P. Schmidt (1968: 43), Lüders (1959: 705), and the discussion of Mayrhofer under *pastyā*.

83 *ā sūryo aruhac chukram āṇḥo ‘yukta yād dharito vītāprṣṭāḥ / udnā ná nāvam anayanta dhīrā āśṛṇvatīr āpo arvāḥ atiṣṭhan //*

84 *dhīyaṃ vo apsú dadhiṣe svarṣāṃ yáyātaran dáśa māsó nāvagvāḥ / ayā dhīyā syāma devágopā ayā dhīyā tuturyāmāty āṃhaḥ //*

months” in Verse 10, which must imply the period of pregnancy, and through comparison with RV 3.31 he concludes that this passage is a description of the sunrise on the first day of a new year⁸⁵. Note that the verses which precede this passage show a typical Vala-myth. Therefore, in any case, “the sun in the waters” in 5.45.11 is to rise up from the Vala.

Although the above passages are not definitive enough to identify the origin of the concept “Agni’s birth in the waters” with the Vala-myth, they might be enough to show the existence of the association between these two motifs. It might be possible that “Agni’s birth in the waters” was derived from some Indo-Iranian concept as Oldenberg claims. However, (some of the) Rigvedic poets associated it with the Vala-myth, although it might be a secondary development.

As we have already seen, RV 10.45.1 mentions the threefold birth of Agni. According to the result of our discussion, they are: 1) on earth, in the ritual enclosure, 2) in heaven, as the ejaculation of heaven, and 3) in the waters, which can be associated with the opening of the Vala. Let us see the rest of the hymn. Verses 1-3ab are the introduction, which states the threefold birth:

- RV 10.45.1 First, Agni was born from heaven. Jātavedas [was born] from us secondly. Thirdly [he was born] in the waters. Having heroic mind, kindling the perpetual [fire], the heedful [priest] watches over it.
- RV 10.45.2 We know your threefold triple. We know your abodes which are held apart in many places. We know your highest name which is a secret. We know the fountain from where you have come.⁸⁶
- RV 10.45.3ab The one who has heroic mind [has kindled] you in the ocean, inside the waters. The one who has heroic sight kindled [you] in the udder of the heaven, o Agni.⁸⁷

Verses 3cd-4abc, 6, and 8 are related in the imperfect. These verses tell Agni’s birth in heaven and in the waters:

85 H.-P. Schmidt (1968) p.180.

86 *vidmā te agne tredhā trayāṇi vidmā te dhāma vibhṛtā purutrā / vidmā te nāma paramāṃ gūhā yád vidmā tám útsaṃ yāta ājagāntha //*

87 *samudré tvā nṛmānā apsv àntār nṛcákṣā īdhe divó agna údhan //*

- RV 10.45.3cd The buffaloes increased you, who were in the third space, [and] on the lap of the waters.⁸⁸
- RV 10.45.4abc Agni roared like the thundering heaven, while licking up the grounds, while smearing plants. Being born, the kindled one shone forth immediately.⁸⁹
- RV 10.45.6 The banner of all, the womb of the world, filled heaven and earth, while being born. Going away, he splitted the hard rock, when the five folks sacrificed to Agni.⁹⁰
- RV 10.45.8 Looking like a gold plate, he shone forth widely, illuminating the unforgettable life-energy in the splendour. Agni became immortal with the powers, when the heaven, who has good sperm, begets him.⁹¹

“The third space” in Verse 3 denotes heaven, while “the lap of the waters” in the same verse seems to denote the Vala. Agni’s birth is mentioned in Verse 4, but we cannot identify which birth of Agni it is. Verse 6 also relates Agni’s birth, and this can be easily identified with the Vala-myth = Agni’s birth in the waters. Verse 8 again relates Agni’s birth. As already discussed, this is Heaven’s ejaculation = Agni’s birth in heaven.

Verses 4d, 5, 7, 9, and 10, are generally related in the Present. They are concerned with the actual ritual:

- RV 10.45.4d He illuminates heaven and earth with the glare from between.⁹²
- RV 10.45.5 Being generous with splendours, the basis of goods, the arouser of thoughts, the keeper of Soma, the good son of power, the king in the waters, shines forth in front of the Uṣases, while being kindled.⁹³

88 *ṛṭīye tvā rājasi tasthivāṃsam apām upásthe mahiṣā avaradhan //*

89 *ákrandad agni stanáyann iva dyaúḥ kṣāmā rérihad vīrúdhah samañján / sadyó jajñāno ví hīm iddhó ákhyad //*

90 *vīśvasya ketúr bhūvanasya gárbha á ródasī aprṇāj jáyamānah / vīlūm cid ádrim abhinat parāyāñ jánā yád agním áyajanta páñca //*

91 *dr̥śāno rukmá urviyá vy ádyaud durmárṣam áyuh śriyé rucānāḥ / agnir amṛto abhavad váyobhir yád enaṃ dyaúr janáyat surétāḥ //*

92 *á ródasī bhānúnā bhāty antāḥ //*

- RV 10.45.7 Agni, [namely] the pure Uśij, wise spoke-man, is put down as an immortal among mortals. He sets the reddish smoke in motion, while trembling, wishing to reach the heaven with the bright glow.⁹⁴
- RV 10.45.9 O auspiciously shining god Agni, lead him, who shall make a cake with Ghṛta, further forward to happiness, to the welfare, which is granted by gods, o the youngest one.⁹⁵
- RV 10.45.10 Give him a share at the famous [works]. O Agni, give a share at every Ukta which is sung. Let him be dear to Sūrya, dear to Agni. Let him break out with the new-born [Agni], with the new-born [sons].⁹⁶

4d, which directly follows the description of Agni's birth in 4abc, is not perfectly clear, but my interpretation is that this is a description of the ascending sun. In this case, Agni's birth in 4abc must be the break of dawn = "in the waters". Seemingly, 4abc relates Agni's birth in the waters in the cosmogonical situation, and 4d is concerned with its re-play in the actual ritual. The relation between Verse 5 (Present) and Verse 6 (Imperfect) can be explained in the same way. Verse 6 relates Agni's birth in the waters in the cosmogony, and Verse 5 is concerned with its re-play. Thus, Verses 4-6 are concerned with Agni's birth in the waters and its re-play. Verse 7 is concerned with the establishment of Agni on earth. Assuming that this is related in the present, this does not seem to denote the cosmogonical situation. Verse 9 invokes "the youngest one", which of course denotes Agni. Geldner translates 10d *új jāténa bhinádad új jánitvaiḥ* "mit dem geborenen und den künftigen (Söhnen) soll er Erfolg haben", and notes "Sāy. ergänzt richtig *putreṇa, putraiḥ*". However, I see absolutely no reason to think that the poet repeated almost the same words, first in the singular and then in the

93 *śrīṇām udāro dharūṇo rayīṇām manīṣāṇām prārpaṇaḥ sōmagopāḥ / vāsuh sūnūḥ sāhaso apsú rājā vi bhāty āgra uṣāsām idhānāḥ //*

94 *uśik pāvako aratiḥ sumedhā mārteṣv agnir amṛto ni dhāyi / iyarti dhūmām aruṣām bhāribhṛad uc chukreṇa śociṣā dyām inakṣan //*

95 *yās te adyā kṛṇāvad bhadraśoce 'pūpām deva ghṛtāvantam agne / prā tāṃ naya pratarām vāsyo āchābhī sumnām devābhaktaṃ yaviṣṭha //*

96 *ā tāṃ bhaja sauśravasēṣv agna ukthā-ukthā ā bhaja śasyāmāne / priyāḥ sūrye priyo agnā bhavāty új jāténa bhinádad új jánitvaiḥ //*

plural. Assuming that the theme of the whole hymn is Agni's birth, if we complement the singular *jāténa* with *agnínā*, the total scheme is in focus: Agni is being born in the sacrificial enclosure together with the sacrificer's sons. Thus, verses 7-10 are concerned with Agni's birth on earth and Agni's birth in heaven, which, as we have already seen, can be contrasted with each other.

Verses 11-12 are the ending of this hymn:

- RV 10.45.11 O Agni, worshipping you day by day, they have acquired all the valuable goods. Wishing wealth together with you, the Uśij has opened the enclosure which contains cows.⁹⁷
- RV 10.45.12 Agni Vaiśvānara, the cowherd who is gracious to men, has been praised by the seers. We should invoke the heaven and earth, which have no enemies. O gods, procure us the wealth, which is rich in heroes.⁹⁸

Thus, if we take "Agni's birth in the waters" as the Vala-myth, we can interpret this hymn as a consistent description of Agni's threefold birth. Otherwise this hymn would be an inconsistent collection of various characters of Agni.

97 *tvām agne yájamānā ánu dyúñ víśvā vásu dadhire vāryāṇi / tváyā sahá dráviṇam ichámānā vrajáṃ gómantam uśijo ví vavruḥ //*

98 *ástāvy agnir narām suśévo vaiśvānará řṣibhiḥ sómagopāḥ / adveṣé dyāvāpṛthivī huvema dévā dhattá rayim asmé suvīram //*

List of publications which are referred to in this study

Texts:

| | |
|---------|------------------------|
| AitB | Aitareya Brāhmaṇa |
| AV | Atharvaveda Saṃhitā |
| BaudhŚS | Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra |
| KS | Kāthaka Saṃhitā |
| MS | Maitrāyaṇīya Saṃhitā |
| RV | Rigveda Saṃhitā |
| ŚB | Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa |
| TĀ | Taittirīya Āraṇyaka |
| TB | Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa |
| TS | Taittirīya Saṃhitā |

Translations and commentaries:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Geldner | K.F. Geldner, <i>Der Rig-veda</i> , Cambridge/Mass. 1951-1957. |
| Keith | A.B. Keith, <i>The Veda of the Black Yajus School</i> , Cambridge/Mass. 1914. |
| Oldenberg Noten | H. Oldenberg, <i>Rgveda, Textkritische und exegetische Noten I-II</i> , Berlin 1909-1912. |
| Oldenberg SBE | H. Oldenberg, <i>Vedic hymns part 2</i> , Sacred Books of the East vol. 46, Oxford 1897. |
| Renou | L. Renou, EVP = <i>Études védiques et pāṇinéennes I-XVI</i> , Paris 1954-1967. |

Reference works:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Delbrück | B. Delbrück, <i>Altindische Syntax</i> , Halle 1888. |
| Grassmann | H. Grassmann, <i>Wörterbuch zum Rig-veda</i> , 3., unveränderte Auflage, Wiesbaden 1955. |
| Mayrhofer | M. Mayrhofer, <i>Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen</i> , Heidelberg 1986 - . |
| PW | O. Böhtlingk & R. Roth, <i>Sanskrit Wörterbuch</i> , St. Petersburg 1855-1875. |

Secondary literature:

- Bodewitz, H.W. 1976 *The Daily Evening and Morning Offering (Agnihotra) According to the Brāhmaṇas*, Leiden
- Doniger O'Flaherty, W. 1980 *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago
- Eliade, M. 1976 "Spirit Light and Seed", *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions*, Chicago, 93-119.
- Gonda, J. 1989 *Prayer and Blessing*, Leiden.
- Hillebrandt, A. 1927-1929 *Vedische Mythologie I-II*, Zweite Auflage, Breslau.
- Hayakawa, A. 2000 "Three Steps to Heaven", *Asiatische Studien* 54-1, 209-247.
- Hoffmann, K. 1967 *Der Injunktiv im Veda*, Heidelberg.
- Jamison, S.W. 1996 *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife*, New York
- Klein, J.S. 1985 *Toward a Discourse Grammar of the Rigveda Vol.1 part 1*, Heidelberg.
- Krick, H. 1982 *Das Ritual der Feuergründung*, Wien.
- Kuiper, F.B.J. 1971 "An Indian Prometheus?", *Asiatische Studien* 25, 85-98.
- Lüders, H. 1951-1959 *Varuṇa I-II*, Göttingen.
- Macdonell, A.A. 1897 *Vedic Mythology*, Strassburg.
- Oldenberg, H. 1917 *Die Religion des Veda*, Zweite Auflage, Stuttgart und Berlin.
- Renou, L. 1958 *Études sur le vocabulaire du Ṛgveda*, Pondichéry.
- Schmidt, H.-P. 1968 *Brhaspati und Indra*, Wiesbaden.
- Thieme, P. 1979 "Über dualische Bezeichnungen von Himmel und Erde im Veda", *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft* 92, 32ff.