

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft  
**Band:** 57 (2003)  
**Heft:** 1

**Artikel:** Mtarivan, heaven, underworld  
**Autor:** Hayakawa, Atsushi  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147594>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. 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. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **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. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **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. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 18.03.2025

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

# MĀTARIŚVAN, HEAVEN, UNDERWORLD

Atsushi Hayakawa, Leiden

Kuiper (1971) put forward an interesting problem for us. Up to that time, Mātariśvan was thought to bring Agni only from heaven. He noticed that the word *parāvataḥ* “from afar” denotes the underworld,<sup>1</sup> and indicated that some of the Rigvedic Mātariśvan passages describe the derivation of fire from the underworld, not from heaven. The passages cited by him can indeed most naturally be interpreted as he does, and so he seems to be right. However, this new interpretation revealed a certain inconsistency in the Rigvedic Mātariśvan myth: There are some Rigvedic passages which explicitly say that Agni is brought by Mātariśvan from heaven.

Kuiper (1971:94) mentions this problem, but his explanation sounds somewhat ambiguous: “It remains one of the unsolved problems of Vedic mythology why terms for ‘nether world’ and ‘primeval world’ can alternate with ‘heaven’, ‘the highest heaven’, ‘the third heaven’. Possibly these terms primarily denoted the mysterious world of the totality of the dualistic cosmos, Viṣṇu’s third step, and were then also used in application to the undivided primeval world. Be that as it may, this much is obvious that the *parāvāt*, which could be identified with *Nīrṛti-*, was not a dwelling-place of the Devas.” He seems to be hesitating to apply his own theory to this problem, and just says: “The same equivalence of the distant region (*parāvāt-*) and heaven is found in the myth of Mātariśvan. On the one hand Mātariśvan is said to have brought Agni for Manu from afar: 1.128.2 *yám mātariśvā mánave parāváto, devám bhāḥ parāvataḥ*, while on the other hand Mātariśvan brought Agni from heaven (*divó*), in contrast with Soma who is said to have come from the rock.”

Although Kuiper’s work has a great significance in that he corrected the mistake of earlier studies, the above point must still be answered. Why are there

Acknowledgements: A prototype of this paper was written in 1996. 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 5: Hymn to Jātavedas*. This paper is a thoroughly revised, second version.

1 See Kuiper 1960:226 and Kuiper 1964:107.

two different types of statements concerning from whence Mātariśvan brought fire?

## 1. Chronological Scan

The first approach we could try might be a chronological one. Following Converse (1971) and Bodewitz (1994), I assume 5 layers in the Rigveda<sup>2</sup>: I. Books 2-7, II. 1.51-191, III. Book 8 and 1.1-50, IV. Book 9, V. Book 10. We will examine the relevant material in each layer.

In Stratum I, Mātariśvan appears in 3.2.13, 3.5.9, 3.5.10, 3.9.5, 3.26.2, 3.29.11, and 6.8.4. Among these, Mātariśvan is said to bring Agni “from afar” in 3.9.5 and 6.8.4:

RV 3.9.5 Mātariśvan led Agni, who has, so to say, run away by himself, who was hidden thus, who was kindled, *from afar* for the gods.<sup>3</sup>

RV 6.8.4 In the lap of the waters, the buffaloes seized [him]. The kinsmen have worshipped the praiseworthy king. The messenger of Vivasvat brought Agni. Mātariśvan [brought] Vaiśvānara *from afar*.<sup>4</sup>

3.2.13 gives us different information:

RV 3.2.13 Mātariśvan took the regular, sacrifice-worthy, inspired, praiseworthy one, *who dwelt in heaven*. We beg Agni, who has conspicuous way, who has golden hair, who shines well, for a new good advance.<sup>5</sup>

“Who dwelt in heaven” (*divi kṣáyam*)<sup>6</sup> implies the derivation of Agni from heaven.

2 Witzel 1997, following Oldenberg, discerns the following layers: I. Books 2-7, II. 1.51-191 and 8.1-66, III. 1.1-50 and 8.67-103, IV. Book 9, V. Book 10. However I have formally synchronized this paper with Bodewitz’ discussion.

3 *sasṛvāmsam iva tmānāgnim itthā tiróhitam / ainam nayan mātariśvā parāvato devébhyo mathitām pári.*

4 *apām upáste mahiṣā agrbhñata víso rájānam úpa tasthur ṛgmíyam / á dūtó agnīm abharad vivásvato vaiśvānarám mātariśvā parāvataḥ //*

5 *ṛtāvānam yajniyam vipram ukthyām á yam dadhé mātariśvā divi kṣáyam / tam citráyāmaḥ hárikeśam īmahe sudītīm agniḥ suvitāya návyase //*

3.5.9 and 10 do not mention the place from whence Agni is brought: RV 3.5.9 “Being praised, the youngest one has glared up with the fire-wood towards the height of heaven at the navel of earth. Agni should be invoked as Mitra, Mātariśvan, the messenger, carries the gods for the offering.”<sup>7</sup> RV 3.5.10 “Agni, [flaming] high with the fire-wood, being the highest of the lights, has propped up the firmament, when Mātariśvan has kindled him, who was hidden for the the Bṛhas as an oblation-carrier.”<sup>8</sup>

3.26.2 and 3.29.11 does not seem to be concerned with the bringing of Agni: RV 3.26.2 “We call him, the bright Agni, for help. [We call] Vaiśvānara, Mātariśvan, who is praiseworthy. [We call] Bṛhaspati for the divine service of human. [We call] the inspired hearer, the guest who runs rapidly.”<sup>9</sup> RV 3.29.11 “The asuric embryo is called Tanūnapāt. When he is born, he becomes Narāśansa. [He is] Mātariśvan, when he is formed in [his] mother. He became the gust of wind at [his] advance.”<sup>10</sup>

Stratum II. The following verses explicitly state that Mātariśvan brings Agni from heaven.

RV 1.93.6 Mātariśvan brought one *from heaven*, the eagle stole the other from the rock. O Agni and Soma, being strengthened by the prayer, you have made a wide world for the sacrifice.<sup>11</sup>

RV1.143.2 *Being born in the highest heaven, Agni became manifest for Mātariśvan.* When he was kindled by the magical power and might, his flame illuminated Heaven and Earth.<sup>12</sup>

In the following verse, Agni is brought “from afar”:

---

6 Geldner notes: “*divi kṣāyam* ist unfertiges Bahuvrīhikompositum, vgl. 10.63.5, 8.64.4 und 8.15.9,” and he translates it “da er im Himmel wohnte”.

7 *úd u ṣṭutáh samídhā yahvó adyauḍ várṣman divó ádhi nābhā pṛthivyāḥ / mitró agnir íḍyo mātariśvā dūtó vakṣad yajáthāya devān //*

8 *úd astambhūt samídhā nākam ṛṣvò ‘gnir bhāvann uttamó rocanānām / yádī bhṛgubhyaḥ pári mātariśvā gūhā sántaṃ havyavāhaṃ samídhé //*

9 *tāṃ śubhrám agním ávase havāmahe vaiśvānarám mātariśvānam ukthyām / bṛhaspátim mánuṣo devátútaye vipraṃ śrótāram átitiṃ raghusyádam //*

10 *tánūnapād ucyate gárbha āsuró nárāśansa bhavati yád vijáyate / mātariśvā yád ámimīta mātari vātasya sárgo abhavat sárīmaṇi //*

11 *ányám divó mātariśvā jabhārámathnād anyám pári śyenó ádreḥ / ágnīṣomā bráhmaṇā vāvṛdhānórūṃ yajñāya cakrathur u lokám //*

12 *sá jáyamānaḥ paramé vyòmany āvir agnir abhavan mātariśvane / asyá krátvā samídhānāsya majmánā prá dyāvā sóciḥ pṛthiví arocayat //*

RV 1.128.2 We make the accomplisher of sacrifice intimate with us by the way of the Ṛta with the salutation accompanied with offering, with the divine service accompanied with offering. By the offering of our tonic, he does not become old in the appearance. [We make intimate with us] the god whom Mātariśvan brought *from afar* to Manu, *from afar*.<sup>13</sup>

The following verse mentions “the shaker of mead” (*mādhva ādhavé*):

RV 1.141.3 When the ruling lords liberate him from the depth, from the form of a buffalo with power, when Mātariśvan steals him, who was hidden in *the shaker of mead* since a long time.<sup>14</sup>

If “the shaker of mead” denotes the underworld where the subterranean water is, Agni is here also brought from the underworld.

The other verses do not mention the place Agni is brought from: 1.60.1 “Mātariśvan brought for Bhṛgu Agni, who is the famous carrier, the banner of distribution, the mindful messenger, who reaches object immediately, who has twofold birth, who is praised like wealth, as a present,”<sup>15</sup> 1.96.4 “Mātariśvan, who has rich welfare, the procurer of the heavenly light, found the way for the offspring. He is the herdsman of the settlements, the begetter of both worlds. The gods hold Agni, the treasure-impeller,”<sup>16</sup> 1.148.1 “When Mātariśvan churned out the Hotṛ, who has every form, who belongs to all the gods, whom they put down in the human settlements like the sun, who shines forth brightly for wonder,”<sup>17</sup> 1.164.46 “They call [him] Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa [and] Agni. And he is the heavenly bird Garutmat. The inspired ones speak variously about it, which is unique. They call [it] Agni, Yama, [and] Mātariśvan,”<sup>18</sup> 1.190.2 “The speeches regularly strive for him, who were discharged like an emission of those who worship gods, because Bṛhaspati, who quickly extends over the wide

13 *tām yajñasādham āpi vātayāmasy ṛtasya pathā nāmasā haviṣmatā devātātā haviṣmatā / sā na ūrjām upābhṛty ayā kṛpā nā jūryati / yām mātariśvā mānave parāvāto devām bhāḥ parāvātaḥ //*

14 *nīr yād īm budhnān mahiṣasya vārpasa īsānāsaḥ śāvasū krānta sūrāyaḥ / yād īm ānu pradīvo mādhva ādhavé gūhā sāntam mātariśvā mathāyāti //*

15 *vāhniṃ yaśāsam vidāthasya ketuṃ suprāvyāṃ dūtām sadyōartham / dvijānmānaṃ rayim iva praśastām rātim bharad bhṛgave mātariśvā //*

16 *sā mātariśvā puruvārapuṣṭir vidād gātūṃ tānayāya svarvīt / viśām gopā janitā ródasyor devā agniṃ dhārayan draviṇodām //*

17 *māthīd yād īm viṣṭó mātariśvā hótāraṃ viśvāpsuṃ viśvādevyam / nī yām dadhūr manuṣyāsu vikṣú svār nā citrām vāpuṣe vibhāvam //* I cannot translate the word *viṣṭá-* here.

18 *īndram mitrām vāruṇam agniṃ āhur ātho divyāḥ sā suparṇó garútmān / ékaṃ sād viprā bahudhā vadanty agniṃ yamām mātariśvānam āhuḥ //*

spaces, became equal to Mātariśvan at the Ṛta,”<sup>19</sup> RV 1.71.4 “When Mātariśvan, [as the fire was] distributed, churned it, and he became white and noble in every house, then Bhṛgavāna followed his duty as a messenger, just like being in attendance on a more powerful king.”<sup>20</sup>

Stratum III contains two verses:

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.<sup>21</sup>

1.31.3 is parallel to 1.143.2 “Being born in the highest heaven, Agni became manifest for Mātariśvan.” This can also be regarded as the derivation of Agni from heaven. 8.52.2 does not indicate the place: “O Indra, [just as] you were intoxicated with the pressed [Soma] at Pṛṣadra, Medhya, [and] Mātariśvan, just as [you drank] Soma at Daśaśipra, Daśoṇya, Syūmaraśmi [and] Ṛjūnas.”<sup>22</sup>

Stratum IV contains one verse: 9.67.31 “The one who learns the Pavamāna-verses by heart eats the essence which was brought together by the Ṛṣis, the all which is purified, which was made sweet by Mātariśvan.”<sup>23</sup> This also does not specify the place.

Stratum V. RV 10.46.9 “[They have put] Agni, whom heaven and earth begot, whom the waters, Tvaṣṭṛ, [and] the Bhṛgus [begot] with power. Mātariśvan [and] the gods have formed the sacrifice-worthy one, who is to be invoked first, for Manu.”<sup>24</sup> 10.105.6: “He praised by the lofty power with the lofty ones. The brave one, Mātariśvan, has formed [the club] with power just as Ṛbhū [forms it] with the magical power.”<sup>25</sup> 10.85.47: “Let all the gods and waters melt the heart of us two together. Let Mātariśvan, the creator and

19 *tām ṛtvīyā ūpa vācaḥ sacante sārgo nā yó devayatām ásarji / bṛhaspátīḥ sá hy áñjo várāmsi víbhuvābhavat sám ṛté mātariśvā //*

20 *máthīd yád īṃ víbhṛto mātariśvā gṛhé-gṛhe śyetó jéno bhūt / úd īṃ rájñe ná sáhīyase sácū sánn ū dūtyām bhṛgavāṇo vivāya //*

21 *tvám agne prathamó mātariśvana āvir bhava sukratūyā vivásvate / árejetām ródasī hotṛ-vūryé 'saghnor bhārám áyajo mahó vaso //*

22 *pṛṣadhre médhye mātariśvanīndra suvāné ámandathāḥ / yáthā sómaṃ dáśaśipre dásoṇye syūmaraśmāv ṛjūnasi //*

23 *yáḥ pāvamānīr adhyéty ṛṣibhiḥ sámbhṛtaṃ rásam / sárvaṃ sá pūtám ásnāti svaditám mātariśvanā.*

24 *dyāvā yám agním pṛthivī jāniṣṭām ūpas tváṣṭā bhṛgavo yám sáhobhiḥ / ṛléniam prathamám mātariśvā devás tatakṣur mánave yájatram //*

25 *prástaud ṛṣvaújā ṛṣvébhis tatakṣa súraḥ sávasā / ṛbhúr ná krátubhir mātariśvā //*



directress, put us together.”<sup>26</sup> 10.48.2: “I am Indra, the wall [and] breast-[plate] of the Atharvans. For Trita, I released cows from the Dragon. I took manly power from the Dasyus, directing the cowherds to Dadhyañc [and] Mātariśvan.”<sup>27</sup> 10.88.19: “Before the winged one wears the face of Uṣas, o Mātariśvan, the Brahmin puts [him], coming to the sacrifice, sitting down against the Hotṛ.”<sup>28</sup> 10.109.1 “They, [namely] the limitless ocean, Mātariśvan, the heat which has strong flame, the terrible, benevolent one, the goddesses waters, the one who was first born with the Ṛta, spoke first about the offence against a Brahmin,”<sup>29</sup> and 10.114.1 “The two heats, which are next to each other, have filled the threefold [world]. Mātariśvan has enjoyed them. They, desiring to obtain the heavenly milk, flew. The gods know the song of praise which is accompanied by a melody.”<sup>30</sup>

In the later Saṃhitās, Mātariśvan is not often mentioned as the carrier of Agni. MS 4.14.15 is the same verse as RV 1.148.1, which we have already seen. RV 1.93.6, in which Mātariśvan is said to bring Agni from heaven, appears also in MS 4.14.18, and KS 4.16.

As the above material shows, both of the motifs “Mātariśvan brings Agni from the underworld” and “Mātariśvan brings Agni from heaven” appear in Stratum I and II. In Stratum III, we see one instance of the motif “Mātariśvan brings Agni from heaven”. We cannot find back these motifs in Strata IV and V. These facts mean: (1) We cannot chronologically differentiate these two motifs. As far as our existing material is concerned, we cannot say that one motif is a later development of the other. (2) Current discussion on the Vedic concept of “life after death” makes it clear that the other alternations indicated by Kuiper are observed in the latest layers of the Rigveda.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the alternation of the place from whence Mātariśvan brings Agni can be observed in the first three layers. Therefore Mātariśvan should be treated separately from the alternation of

26 *sam añjantu víśve devāḥ sám āpo hṛdayāni nau / sám mātariśvā sám dhātā sám u déṣṭrī dadhātu nau //*

27 *ahám indro ródho vákṣo átharvaṇas tritáya gā ajanayam áher ádhi / ahám dásyubhyaḥ pári nṛmṇám á dade gotrá śíkṣan dadhīcé mātariśvane //*

28 *yāvanmātrám uṣáso ná prátikaṃ suparṇyò vásate mātariśvaḥ / távad dadhāty úpa yajñám āyán brāhmaṇó hótur ávaro niśīdan //*

29 *tè ‘vadan prathamā brahmakilbiṣé ‘kūpāraḥ saliló mātariśvā / vīlúharās tápa ugró mayo- bhūr āpo devīḥ prathamajā ṛténa //*

30 *gharmā sámantā trivṛtaṃ vy āpatas táyor júṣṭim mātariśvā jagāma / divás páyo dídhīṣāṇā aveṣan vidúr devāḥ sahásāmānam arkám //*

31 See Bodewitz 1994 and Butzenberger 1996.

the Pitṛs, Yama, and Varuṇa. (3) These motifs become much less important in the newer strata.

## 2. Conceptual Scheme

Let us approach our motifs from a different angle. In which context are these motifs related?

It is conspicuous that the motif “Mātariśvan brings Agni from heaven” is related in the context of Agni’s birth in heaven and the establishment of Agni as the sacrificial fire on earth:

- RV 1.143.1 I present a powerful new hymn, a hymn of the speech to Agni, the son of strength, the dear son of water who sat down with the Vasus on earth as a pleasant Hotṛ, the regular one.<sup>32</sup>
- RV 1.143.2 *Being born in the highest heaven, Agni became manifest for Mātariśvan.* When he was kindled by the magical power and might, his flame illuminated Heaven and Earth.
- RV 1.143.3 The glaring, ageless rays of Agni, who has beautiful appearance, who has a beautiful face, who shines beautifully, who has the power of the light, trembles without sleeping, without aging, just like rivers at night<sup>33,34</sup>
- RV 1.143.4 Send forth with songs in [your] own house Agni, the all-knowing, *whom Bhṛguś have put down on the navel of the earth* with the power of the world, who, as a unique one, rules over wealth like Varuṇa<sup>35,36</sup>

32 *prá távyasīm návyasīm dhītīm agnāye vācō matim sāhasaḥ sūnāve bhare / apām nāpād yó vásubhiḥ sahā priyó hótā pṛthivyām ny āsīdad ṛtvīyaḥ //*

33 *áty aktúr:* Oldenberg and Geldner take it as adnominal. This seems more natural than the interpretation by Grassmann, who takes it as adverbial (see his *Wörterbuch* under *áti*). But *aktúr* is the nominative form. Oldenberg conjectures *áty aktúmr* > *áty aktúr*. Geldner thinks that it is a haplology of *áty aktúm aktúr* “die Nacht über gleich dem Farbenspiel”. Renou notes: “peut-être un ancien *aktún ná síndhavaḥ* a-t-il été remplacé par *aktúḥ* sous l’influence du type *sindhur ná kṣódaḥ*” (EVP 12, p.105), and translates “par delà (les nuits) comme la surface-ointe”. There are no decisive grounds to adopt one of these.

34 *asyá tveṣū ajārā asyá bhūnávaḥ susamḍśaḥ suprátikasya sudyútaḥ / bhātvakṣaso áty aktúr ná síndhavo ‘gné rejante ásasanto ajārāḥ //*

35 *yám eriré bhṛgavo vísvávedasaḥ nābhā pṛthivyā bhūvanasya majmánā / agnim táḥ gīrbhír hinuhi svá ū dáme yá éko vásvo váruṇo ná rájati //*



1.143.2 and 4ab refer to the events in the past. In these verses, Agni's birth, Mātariśvan's deed, and the Bhr̥gu's establishment of the sacrificial fire can be interpreted as sequential events. RV 3.2 gives another instance:

- 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.<sup>37</sup>
- 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.<sup>38</sup>
- RV 3.2.12 Vaiśvānara has ascended heaven as in the ancient time. Being honoured by singers, he [ascends] the top of heaven. Producing the wealth for people as before, the watchful one goes round the same course.<sup>39</sup>
- RV 3.2.13 *Mātariśvan put the regular, sacrifice-worthy, inspired, praiseworthy one, who dwelt in heaven. We beg Agni, who has a conspicuous way, who has golden hair, who shines well, for a new good advance.*

- 
- 36 The rest of the hymn: RV 1.143.5 *ná yó várāya marútām iva svanáḥ séneva sṛṣṭhā divyā yáthāsāniḥ / agnir jámbhais tigitair atti bhārvati yodhó ná sátrūnt sá vánā ny ṛñjate //* “Agni, who cannot be braked just like the noise of Maruts, like a discharged army, like the heavenly lightning, eats and devours with sharp teeth. He overpowers woods just as a warrior [overpowers] enemies.” RV 1.143.6 *kuvín no agnir ucáthasya vír ásad vásuṣ kuvíd vásubhiḥ kāmam āvārat / codāḥ kuvít tutujyāt sātāye dhíyaḥ súcipratikaṃ tám ayā dhíyā gr̥ṇe //* “I wonder whether Agni is eager for the verse of us, whether the good one fulfils [our] desire with good ones, whether the impeller would urge our hymns for the booty. I praise with this hymn the one who has shining face.” RV 1.143.7 *ghṛtápratikaṃ va ṛtāsyā dhūrśadam agnim mitráṃ ná samidhāná ṛñjate / índhāno akró vidátheṣu dídyac chukrávarṇām úd u no yaṃsate dhíyam //* “The kindling one launches your Agni, whose face is Ghr̥ta, who sits on the shaft of the R̥ta, like a friend. Let the kindled race-horse, shining at the distributions, raise our bright-coloured hymn.” RV 1.143.8 *áprayuchann áprayuchadbbhir agne sívébbhir naḥ pāyúbhiḥ páhi śagmaiḥ / ádabdhebbhir áṛpítebbhir iṣṭé ‘nimíśadbbhiḥ pári páhi no jáḥ //* “O Agni, protect us, being attentive, with the attentive, friendly, powerful protectors. O Iṣṭi, protect our offsprings with the undeceivable, uncheatable, vigilant [protectors].”
- 37 *viśám kavim viśpátim mánuṣír iṣaḥ sám sīm akr̥ṇvan svádhitim ná téjase / sá udvátó nivátó yāti véviṣat sá gárbbham eṣú bhúvaneṣu dídharat //*
- 38 *sá jinvate jaṭháreṣu prajajñiván vṛṣā citreṣu nánadan ná simháh / vaiśvānaráh pṛthupájā ámartyo vásu rátnā dáyamāno ví dāsúṣe //*
- 39 *vaiśvānaráh pratnáthū nákam áruhad divás pṛṣṭhám bhándamānaḥ sumánmabhiḥ / sá pūrvaváj janāyañ jantáve dhánaṃ samānám ájmam páry eti jágrviḥ //*

This passage was discussed in Hayakawa (2001:305-306) as an instance of “Agni’s birth in heaven” = Heaven’s ejaculation. In 3.2.10-12, Agni Vaiśvānara releases the sperm. The sperm is infused into “these beings” (3.2.11) or “the conspicuous wombs” (3.2.11), which seems to be the plant from which the churning sticks are taken.<sup>40</sup> 3.2.13ab can be interpreted as the establishment of the sacrificial fire.

As discussed in Hayakawa (2001:301-302), RV 1.31 contrasts Agni’s birth on earth with Agni’s birth in heaven:

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.

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.<sup>41</sup>

In 1.31.4, Agni is born from the parents = the churning sticks, through the movement “forward and again backward”. As already mentioned above, 3ab is parallel to 1.143.2, which explicitly relates Agni’s birth in heaven. “Heaven and Earth” in 1.31.3 corresponds to the “parents” in 1.31.4, and implies the churning out of Agni through the union of Heaven and Earth.<sup>42</sup>

The above Rigvedic passages associate Agni’s birth in heaven with the establishment of the sacrificial fire. Mātariśvan appears as a figure who combines these two elements.

As to the other motif, RV 3.9 gives a comprehensive picture of it:

RV 3.9.4 After he has escaped the faults and many droughts, the attentive, undeceivable ones have found him, *who abided in the waters* just like a lion.<sup>43</sup>

RV 3.9.5 *Mātariśvan led Agni, who has, so to say, run away by himself, who was hidden thus, who was kindled, from afar for the gods.*

40 See Hayakawa 2001, section “Agni’s Birth in the Highest Heaven”.

41 *tvām agne mánave dyām avāśayaḥ purūrāvase sukṛte sukṛttaraḥ / śvātrēṇa yāt pitrōr mūcyase páry á tvā pūrvam anayann āparam pūnaḥ //*

42 See Hayakawa 2001, section “Agni’s Birth in the Highest Heaven”.

43 *īyivāmsam áti sridhaḥ śásvatīr áti saścátaḥ / ánv īm avindan nicirāso adruho apsú simhām iva śritám //*

- RV 3.9.6 The mortals seized you, o oblation-carrier for the gods, so that you watch all the sacrifices, o humanly one, with your magical power, o the youngest one.<sup>44</sup>
- RV 3.9.9 The three thousand and three hundred thirty nine gods honoured Agni. They sprinkled Ghṛta and scattered Barhis for him. And then they put him down as the Hotṛ.<sup>45</sup>

Agni is found abiding “in the waters” in 3.9.4, and Mātariśvan brings him “from afar” = the underworld. Obviously, these two places are identical. As was discussed in Hayakawa (2001:313ff), the underworld is associated with “Agni’s birth in the waters” in the Rigveda. In other words, this passage, which relates the derivation of Agni from the underworld, can be interpreted as a variant of “Agni’s birth in the waters”. Agni is received by people in 3.9.6, and his presence at the sacrifices is mentioned. And 3.9.9 states that Agni is put down as the Hotṛ. As far as this hymn is concerned, Agni’s stay in the waters, Mātariśvan’s bringing of Agni, and the establishment of the sacrificial fire, are three successive events. And Mātariśvan’s deed can be interpreted as combining “Agni’s birth in the waters” and “establishment of the sacrificial fire on earth”.

RV 1.128 gives another instance of this motif:

- RV 1.128.1 This one is born in the fire-holder of Manu. The Hotṛ who sacrifices the best [is born] according to the obedience of Uśijes. Agni [is born] according to [his] own obedience. [He is] the one who listens to everything for the one who attends as a friend. [He is] like treasure for the one who seeks for fame. *The undecivable Hotṛ sits down at the place of libation, being covered at the place of libation.*<sup>46</sup>
- RV 1.128.2 We make the accomplisher of sacrifice intimate with us by the way of the Ṛta with the salutation accompanied with offering, with the divine service accompanied with offering. By the offering of our tonic, he does not become old in the appearance. [We make intimate with us] the god whom Mātariśvan brought from afar to Manu, from afar.
- RV 1.128.3 He surrounds the earth with the speedy [movement] at once. Raising voice suddenly, *the seed bull [puts] sperm while roaring*, putting sperm while roaring.

44 *tām tvā mártū agrbhñata devébhyo havyvāhana / vísvān yád yajñám abhipási mānuṣa táva krátvā yaviṣṭhya //*

45 *trīṇi satá trī sahásrāṇy agniṃ trimśac ca devá náva cāsaparyan / aúkṣan ghṛtair ástrñan barhír asmā ád id dhótāraṃ ny āsādayanta //*

46 *ayám jāyata mānuṣo dhārīmaṇi hótū yájiṣṭha uśijām ánu vratám agniḥ svám ánu vratám / víśváśruṣṭiḥ sakhīyaté rayír iva śravasyaté / ádabdho hótū ni ṣadad ilás padé párivīta ilás padé //*

Seeing with hundred eyes, the god is victorious in the woods. *Putting the seat in the lower summits, Agni, in the higher summits.*<sup>47</sup>

RV 1.128.4 Agni, the Purohita who has good magical power, gives consideration to the sacrifice and Soma sacrifice at every house. He gives consideration to the sacrifice with the magical power. With magical power, Vedhas for the one who shoots arrows has seen all the creatures, *as soon as the guest, being beautiful with Ghṛta, was born, [namely when] the draught animal, Vedhas, was born.*<sup>48</sup>

1.128.1 “The undeceivable Hotṛ sits down at the place of libation, being covered at the place of libation” implies the establishment of the sacrificial fire. Agni’s birth, which is mentioned in the same verse, can be interpreted as its birth on earth. 1.128.2 “the god whom Mātariśvan brings from a distance to Manu” mentions the derivation of Agni from the underworld. 1.128.3 “the seed bull [puts] sperm while roaring” and “putting the seat in the higher summits” seem to imply Heaven’s ejaculation = Agni’s birth in heaven.<sup>49</sup> 1.128.4 “when the guest, being beautiful with Ghṛta, was born” is again concerned with Agni’s birth on earth. As is already clear, Agni’s threefold birth is related in this passage. The following passage also mentions two of the Agni’s births:

RV 6.8.1 Now, I praise the strength and wisdom of Jātavedas, [namely] the strong, reddish bull. For Vaiśvānara the new hymn purifies himself, just like the pure soma which is dear to Agni.<sup>50</sup>

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.*<sup>51</sup>

RV 6.8.3 As the wonderful Mitra, he supported the two worlds apart. He made the darkness in-between splitted with light. He rolled up both Dhiṣaṇās just like hides. Vaiśvānara obtained the whole strength.<sup>52</sup>

47 *évena sadyáh páry eti pārhivam muhurgí réto vṛṣabháh kánikradad dádhad rétaḥ káni-kradat / sátám cákṣāṇo akṣábhīr devó váneṣu turvániḥ / sádo dádhdāna úpareṣu sūnuṣv agniḥ páreṣu sūnuṣu //*

48 *sá sukrátuḥ puróhito dáme-dame ‘gnir yajñásyādhvarásya cetati krátvā yajñásya cetati / krátvā vedhá išūyaté vísvā jātāni paspaṣe / yáto ghṛtaśrīr átithir ájāyata váhnir vedhá ájāyata //*

49 See Hayakawa 2001, section “Agni’s Birth in the Highest Heaven”.

50 *prkṣásya vṛṣṇo aruśásya nú sáhaḥ prá nú vocam vidáthā jātávedasaḥ / vaiśvānarāya matír návyasī súciḥ sóma iva pavate cārun agnáye //*

51 *sá jāyamānaḥ paramé vyòmani vratāny agnir vratapā arakṣata / vy àntárikṣam amimīta sukrátur vaiśvānaró mahinā nákam asprśat //*

RV 6.8.4 *In the lap of the waters, the buffaloes seized [him]. The kinsmen have worshipped the praiseworthy king. The messenger of Vivasvat brought Agni. Mātariśvan [brought] Vaiśvānara from afar.*

“The highest heaven” (6.8.2) and “the lap of the waters” (6.8.4) denote Agni’s birth in heaven and in the waters, respectively.

The above instances of the motifs “Mātariśvan brings Agni from heaven / underworld” show that these motifs are directly connected with “Agni’s birth in heaven/in the waters”. And, as some of the above passages show, these motifs are connected with the establishment of the sacrificial fire. This means that the motifs of Mātariśvan had the function to integrate the threefold birth of Agni into the sacrificial fire. Through the stories of Mātariśvan, the sacrificial fire is identified with the Agnis born in heaven and in the waters.

If we understand the meaning of the motifs “Mātariśvan brings Agni from heaven / the waters” as above, we can explain the reason why there are two different motifs concerning Mātariśvan: inasmuch as there are three births for Agni, the sacrificial fire must be associated with all the three births to guarantee the conceptual completeness and consistency of Agni. Agni’s birth on earth is implicitly associated with the sacrificial fire. The other two births must also be associated with it in some way. The motifs of Mātariśvan must have been created from this need. If we think of it like this, the “alternation” of the place from whence Mātariśvan brings Agni is not a peculiar phenomenon at all, but it is a logical consequence of the concept “Agni’s threefold birth”.

Although Mātariśvan becomes less important in the later Rigvedic period, the conceptual scheme of “Agni’s completeness” remained in the thought of Vedic ritualists, and was implemented in the classical Agnyādheya ritual.<sup>53</sup> See Krick (1982:118-188) for the image of the primordial water which is associated with almost each Sambhāra-item, and especially MS 3.2.3 (Krick 1982:119): “Die Wasser sind der Mutterschoß (*yoniḥ*) des Feuers; somit wird das Feuer auf seiner eigenen Geburtsstätte geschichtet.” See also the motif “Agni’s sperm” which appears in connection with Araṇī (Krick 1982:188-203) and the story of Purūravas and Urvaśī (Krick 1982:203-223), and especially MS 1.6.12 (Krick

---

52 *vy āstabhnād ródasī mitró ádbhuto ‘ntarvāvad akṛṇoj jyótiṣā támaḥ / vi cármaṇīva dhiṣāṇe avartayad vaiśvānaró vísvam adhatta vṣṣnyam //*

53 The reason why these motifs became less important is unknown. Possibly the formation of the standard Agnyādheya procedure (i.e. the Sambhāra and the churning out) might have something to do with it. Once the standard procedure was formed, they did not have to create new Mātariśvan hymns, because now the completeness and the consistency of the fire was guaranteed by the ritual procedure.

1982:205), which identifies Agni's sperm with Aśvattha Āroha, which are used as the churning sticks. She further says: "Die himmlische Abstammung des Feuers wird durch das Material der Reibhölzer (Araṇī) sowie die Gesänge, die die Feuerreibung begleiten, garantiert; die Vollkommenheit des Feuerleibes (der 'Gesamtperson Agni') wird dadurch erreicht, daß die einzelnen Teilkörper Agnis bzw. seine ihm eigenen Wohnstätten gesammelt und im Altar vereint werden."<sup>54</sup> She could have answered Kuiper's question from the viewpoint of the classical ritual. The sacrificial fire in the classical Agnyādheya is established with the material associated with the water, in which Agni was hidden. The fire is churned out with the churning sticks of Aśvattha, which is identified with Agni's sperm. Therefore, the sacrificial fire on earth is the unification of the fires born on earth, in the waters, and in heaven. All of them are necessary for the conceptual completeness and consistency of the sacrificial fire.

## Bibliography

### *Texts*

KS	Kāthaka Saṃhitā
MS	Maitrāyaṇīya Saṃhitā
RV	Rigveda Saṃhitā
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā

### *Translations and commentaries*

GELDNER, K.F.

1951-57 *Der Rig-veda*, Cambridge/Mass.

OLDENBERG, H.

1909-12 *Ṛgveda, Textkritische und exegetische Noten I-II*, Berlin.

### *Reference works*

GRASSMANN, H.

1955 *Wörterbuch zum Rig-veda*, 3., unveränderte Auflage, Wiesbaden 1955.

54 Krick 1982:99.



*Secondary literature*

BODEWITZ, H.W.

1994 Life after Death in the R̥gvedasam̐hitā. In: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 38, 23-41.

BUTZENBERGER, K.

1996 Ancient Indian Conceptions on Man's Destiny After Death. In: *Berliner Indologische Studien* 9, 55-118.

CONVERSE, H.S.

1971 *The Historical Significance of the First Occurences of the Doctrine of Transmigration in the Early Upaniṣads*. Columbia University.

HAYAKAWA, A.

2001 Descent of Fire. In: *Asiatische Studien* LV-2, 291-320.

KRICK, H.

1982 *Das Ritual der Feuergründung*, Wien.

KUIPER, F.B.J.

1960 The Ancient Aryan Verbal Contest. In: *Indo-Iranian Journal* 4, 217-281.

1964 The Bliss of Aṣa. In: *Indo-Iranian Journal* 8, 96-129.

1971 An Indian Prometheus? In: *Asiatische Studien* XXV, 85-98.

WITZEL, M.

1997 The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu. In: *Inside The Texts Beyond The Texts*, Cambridge.