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OF COWS AND GODS: SECRET NAMES IN THE *RIGVEDA**Frank Köhler*

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In the poems of the *Rigveda* (*Rgveda*) not only are the gods of the Vedic pantheon praised and in return asked for the fulfillment of various wishes, there are also numerous statements about the poetry by means of which these requests are brought forward. In many Rigvedic hymns reference is made to poetic language and its special character and already at this early stage a terminology is developed with which this language is analyzed. One of the key terms is *nāman*, usually translated as the cognate “name”, but with a much larger scope of meaning, comprising “essence” as well as “form of appearance”. Furthermore, its use is not restricted to concrete beings, as it has also been applied to e. g. denote state of affairs. These features have already been extensively treated in the literature yet it might be worthwhile to take a closer look at a seemingly paradoxical circumstance: On the one hand, some of these names are said to be secret, and they are mentioned, but never quoted. On the other hand, Rigvedic poetry accompanies ongoing ritual activities and is recited in public. After a survey of the most important features of names it will be argued that these names are simultaneously secret and recited in public, and that the Rigvedic poets used the full range of poetic devices to achieve this.

Keywords: *nāman*, name, poet, poetry, *Rigveda*

“Kein ding sei wo das Wort gebricht”

Stefan George

1. Introduction

Language holds a prominent position in the adoration of higher beings all around the world, but it is especially in India where the importance of speech for ritual performances has given rise to an elaborate practice of oral transmission of the first sacred texts, the Vedas, as well as sophisticated linguistic models in which language, primarily, but not exclusively in its hieratic aspects has been subjected to a thorough analysis. These models have been developed in various indigenous disciplines like *nirukta*, *vyākaraṇa*, *chandas* and *śikṣā*. Furthermore, the problems of the inner structure of language and its relation to the world have been continuously discussed within the Indian philosophical schools. Rather interesting, already the oldest Indian text, the *Rigveda* (= RV), a collection (*saṃhitā*) of 1028 hymns by different poets mainly directed at several deities during the performance of a ritual, contains quite sophisticated ideas and conceptions of language. Rigvedic poetry consists mainly of poems directed to different deities who are praised and afterwards requested to grant some rewards in return. Nevertheless, linguistic speculations have made their way into this poetry, and although they are not systematically discussed, they presuppose already a high degree of linguistic awareness and may have a prehistory of Indo-European origin¹. These developments have even led to the deification of Speech itself in the form of a female deity, to whom a complete hymn is dedicated (RV 10.125); this has rightly been considered as the origin of tantric ideas about speech².

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Strictly speaking, the Rigvedic poets have mainly dealt with a subset of language, namely poetry. They have done so in their hymns and for this reason the same terms that have been used for linguistic descriptions figure as elements in poetic compositions. This poetry is distinguished by its intentionally created obscurity: ambiguities in syntax, semantics and morphology are applied to create a complex semantic unit that contains besides its obvious address to the gods, additional levels of meaning which in turn depict an enigmatic state of affairs. The interpreter's task to understand the use of these terms and the ideas behind it is not exactly facilitated by this circumstance. But in spite of these difficulties, there are already a number of studies on the topic of speech in the RV in general as well as on certain terms belonging to this domain. One of these terms, *nāman* "name", will be analysed in this article, especially with regard to the expression "secret name(s)", and the relevance it has for the way the Vedic poets have considered language. Names, especially personal names, are an essential part of speech, as their use allows (at least in theory or as long as the community of speakers is sufficiently small) the unambiguous identification of individuals, including human and divine persons. The names for them are chosen according to their most prominent features, so that names and essence of their bearer are closely related. This is true for the RV as well, and several studies have already analysed the topic of names and naming in the RV from different perspectives [cf.: Gonda 1963; 1970; Elizarenkova 2001; Mayrhofer 2003; Chakrabarti 2013]. However, among the names for deities there are those that are supposed to be secret, which in itself is not further puzzling; parallels are found throughout the world, and furthermore, at least according to some Gṛhya-Sūtras a secret name should be given to a new-born child at an early stage of his life, and last but not least the Brahmanas abound in explanations of the "real" but hidden names of deities. Nevertheless, contrary to the examples just mentioned, Rigvedic poetry was supposed to be recited in public, and this seems to contradict the secrecy of some of its elements; the following paragraphs contain an attempt to find a solution for this paradox.

2. Meaning and function of *nāman*

The term *nāman* (n.) has 117 Rigvedic attestations and is usually translated as "name". Heuristically, this translation will be used here as well, although it is not unproblematic, as will be seen below. To start with, Graßmann has given three main meanings for this word in his dictionary, and they have been more or less unanimously accepted: Denomination, essence and form of appearance³. An example for the first meaning can be found in the following stanza from a hymn addressed to Indra⁴:

7.022.05a *nā te giro āpi mṛṣye turāsyā nā suṣṭutīm asuryāsyā vidvān /*

7.022.05c *sādā te nāma svayaśo vivakmi //*

"I, a knowing (man), do not neglect the hymns for you, the surpassing one, nor the good praise of your lordship: always I keep pronouncing your name, self-glorious one".

In this stanza there is nothing unusual in the use of *nāman*, as it figures as the direct object to *vac-*, "to speak"; the whole stanza refers to the worship of Indra, an important part of which consists of addressing him with his names to make sure that the deity will notice it. But as already said above, the translation "name" does not exhaust the range of meanings associated with *nāman*. In the following stanza from one of the few Rigvedic hymns that are addressed to Rudra *nāman* has apparently been used to depict something like the essence of him:

2.033.08a *prā bab^hrāve vṣab^hāya svitīcé mahó mahīm suṣṭutīm īrayāmi /*

2.033.08c *namasyā kalmalīkinam nāmob^hir grṇīmāsi tveṣām rudrāsyā nāma //*

"To the red-brown, bright-faced bull, I rouse forth greatly a great good praise hymn. I shall do reverence to the sparkling one with acts of reverence. We sing the turbulent name of Rudra".

It seems quite obvious that *nāman* does not denote an individual here, although as in the preceding stanza it figures as the direct object of a *verbum dicendi* in a loose sense (if

one is willing to consider “singing” as a specific form of “speaking”), *gṛ-* “to sing”. But Rudra is turbulent, not his name, so in this case *nāman* expresses the intrinsic fierce nature of this god. It has been mentioned above that names have often been used to highlight the nature of the denotated being, and this aspect seems to have given rise to something like an exchange between the name and its bearer, so that the former can appear instead of the latter.

According to Graßmann, *nāman* can also be understood as something like “form of appearance” and the following stanza from a hymn from the 9th *maṇḍala*, to the deified beverage Soma, may serve as an example:

9.075.01a *ab^{hi} priyāṇi pavate cānohito nāmāni yāhvó ád^{hi} yéṣu vārd^{hate} /*

9.075.01c *ā sūryasya bṛható bṛhānn ád^{hi} rá^tam viṣvañcam aruhad vicakṣaṇāḥ //*

“Delighted, he purifies himself, (aiming) toward his own dear names, upon which the youthfully exuberant one grows strong. The lofty one, wide gazing, has mounted upon the chariot of the lofty sun that faces in many directions”.

“The dear names” (*priyāṇi nāmāni*) of Soma certainly denote the different stages of its preparation, and these stages express the manifestations of Soma.

One of the peculiarities of the use of *nāman* in the RV is the substitution of the name bearer by its name in some stanzas, as in the following one from a hymn addressed to the deified Heaven and Earth:

1.185.1a *katarā pūrvā katarāparāyóḥ kat^{hā} jāté kavayaḥ kó ví veda /*

1.185.1c *viśvaṃ tmānā bib^hṛto yád d^ha nāma ví vartete áhanī cakriyeva //*

“Which of these two is the earlier, which the later? How were they born, o Kavis? Who knows it exactly? By themselves the two carry everything that is a name. The two halves of the day turn like wheels” (translation by F. K.).

Somewhat unexpectedly in a hymn to Heaven and Earth, these two deities do appear, but do not contain a prominent position in this stanza where on the contrary the attention of the audience is directed to the alternation of day and night, i.e. temporal extension. In any case an exchange between names and name-bearers can be seen here, as Heaven and Earth do not carry the names but the objects which are named.

Connected with the concretization of these names and the possibility of ascribing to them a specific site as shown above is the special case that this site is located in the extreme distance. This is the case e. g. in a stanza from one of the few hymns addressed to Viṣṇu:

1.155.03a *tā īm vārd^hanti máhy asya paúmsyaṃ ní mātārā nayati ré^tase b^hujé /*

1.155.03c *dād^hāti putró ‘varam páram pitúr nāma tṛtīyam ád^{hi} rocané divāḥ //*

“They [females] strengthen this great masculine nature of him; he leads the two mothers [Heaven and Earth] down to enjoy the semen. The son places the lower, the higher [names] of the father, the third name in the luminous realm of heaven” (translation by F. K.).

It cannot be said with certainty who the females are who occur in this stanza, presumably the songs of praise. But more important in the context of the Rigvedic use of names is their connection to localities; behind this stanza could lie the mythical idea of Viṣṇu’s three strides with which he measured out Earth and the lower and higher Heaven [cf.: Oberlies 2012, *pps.* 163]. But as Gonda has emphasized, the names are certainly not identical with these strides, as the first ones are said to belong to the father; furthermore, he has also rightly pointed out that this father may be identical with the one mentioned in RV 1.164.12 and 22, another hymn of the same poet and refer to a being connected to the creation of the world [Gonda 1970, 87]. Further reflection shows that other features of this stanza are in need of explanation as well: instead of traversing the three realms, Viṣṇu (if he is the son mentioned here) places three names on the highest realm. The most likely explanation for this unusual variation of the three strides is perhaps Gonda’s assumption that in stanzas like this one (to which RV 9.75.2 is very similar), the position of the names in remote realms is an expression for their transcendental nature [Gonda 1970, 88].

Another noteworthy feature concerns the domain of application for *nāman* in the RV; apparently, its use is not restricted to individuals, at least not in the following stanza which is addressed to the *Ṛbhus*, the divine artisans:

3.054.17a *mahát tād vaḥ kavayaś cāru nāma yád d^ha devā b^hávat^ha vísva índre /*

3.054.17c *sák^ha ṛb^húb^hiḥ puruhūta priyéb^hir imām d^hiyam sātāye takṣatā naḥ //*

“Great is this, your esteemed name, you Kavis, that you become all gods with Indra. You are a friend with the dear *Ṛbhus*, much invoked one; form this vision for us to win!” (translation by *F. K.*).

As the phrase beginning with *yád* is dependent on *nāma*, this term obviously denotes a state of affairs in this stanza.

In the following stanza *nāman* is used for the denotation of an abstract entity, in this case a state of affairs as well; according to Geldner, Agni, the the deified fire is requested by the poet to protect him, as he does not suspect Yama, the first male human, to have an incestuous relationship with his sister Yamī [Geldner, III, 1951, 139]:

10.012.06a *durmāntv átrāmṛtasya nāma sálakṣmā yád viṣurūpā b^hávāti /*

10.012.06c *yamásyā yó manávate sumāntv ágne tám ṛṣva pāhy áprayuc^han //*

“Difficult to contemplate is the name of the immortal (male) in the case that (the female) will have the same ‘marks’ [= family characteristics] (though) dissimilar form [= gender]. Whoever will contemplate Yama’s (name that is) good to contemplate – protect him unremittingly, o lofty Agni”.

The structure of this stanza does not allow for its immediate understanding, as can be inferred by the many additions put in brackets by Jamison and Brereton in their translation above. But although their translation does not reveal it at first glance, *nāman yád...* means first “the name, that...”, and *yád* introduces a declarative sentence. In other words: *nāman* is used here for denoting the name of a state of affairs.

In the RV *nāman* is not yet used for denoting the category of nouns; this use starts presumably in postvedic literature, as can be seen in Yāska’s *Nirukta*; here it is applied to express being (*sattā*) in contrast to *ākhyāta* whose function is the expression of becoming (*bhāva*)⁵. By contrast, the combination of *nāman* with *rūpā* to a *dvandva* compound *nāmarūpa* to denote the individual personality, especially in Buddhism, is already prefigured by stanzas like 5.43.10⁶:

5.043.10a *ā nāmab^hir marúto vakṣi víśvān ā rūpéb^hir jātavedo huvānāḥ /*

5.043.10c *yajñám gíro jaritúḥ suṣṭutim ca víśve ganta maruto víśva ūtī //*

“Convey all the Maruts according to their (individual) names, according to their (individual) forms, o Jātavedas, when you are invoked. The sacrifice, the hymns, and the lovely praise of the singer – all you Maruts, all come (to these) with your help”.

Here the two terms do not form a unit in form of a compound but their complementary appearance close to each other in the same hymn suggests a meaning similar to that of *nāmarūpa*.

3. Secret names

As has been shown above, *nāman* forms an important part of the poetic lexicon, as it is one of the “metapoetic” terms that can be used to express the nature of the communication between deities and poets and simultaneously figure as elements in it. In several stanzas these names are said to be “secret” (*apīcyā* or *gúhya/gúhā*), all in all 17 times⁷. This circumstance has a parallel in many cultures all over the world, as the habit to conceal real or essential names, usually proper names of family members, but also deities, is widely known across the world; the idea behind this practice is the notion that name and being of a person are closely related and therefore knowledge of the real name gives power over the person named this way⁸. In the RV, this notion has taken a specific form, as it has entered the myth of Indra’s obtainment of cows from Vala, and the following paragraphs will very briefly deal with it, since Lüders has already presented all

its essentials. However, the topic of “secret names” occurs in other stanza as well, and in these places it is difficult to reconcile the secret character of names with the (more or less) public recitation of Rigvedic poetry. Paragraph 3.2 will deal with this problem.

3.1. The secret names of cows

The myth of Vala is one of the two great myths where Indra figures prominently (the other one is Indra’s fight with, and defeat of Vṛtra and the ensuing liberation of the rivers), and it is attested throughout the RV⁹. In primeval times the dawns, imagined as ruddy cows, have been kept hidden inside a huge rock by the Paṇis, a group of misers. Indra wants to free them, but in order to do so he needs the help of Bṛhaspati, the deified priest, and the Aṅgiras, the deified ancestors of the Rigvedic seers (*ṛṣis*). Together, they assemble for a ritual session (*sattra*) and split up the rock by means of the poems recited there. But this feat is only possible because these poems contained the secret name of the cows, which is “dawn” (*Uṣas*) and which is in accordance with *rtá*, “truth”, but also “cosmic order”; such formulations of or according to *rtá* possess a magical power. The liberation of the cows figures as the founding myth, where the first poets, together with Indra and Bṛhaspati, demonstrated for the first time this power of formulating *rtá* by speaking out the secret name. Here, pronouncing this knowledge acquires even a cosmogonic character, as the liberation of dawns was a precondition for orderly regulated human life, and in some stanzas (e.g. RV 10.68.8) not only they, but also the sun and fire have been found in the rock and freed. At this deed hints the following stanza, also from RV 10.68:

10.068.7a *bṛhaspátir ámata hí tyád āsām nāma svarīṇām sádane gúhā yát /*

10.068.7c *āṇḍéva b^hittvā śakunásya gárb^ham úd usriyāḥ párvatasya tmánājat //*

“For Bṛhaspati brought to mind this very name of these who were resounding (with)in the seat – (the name) that was hidden. Having split the womb of the mountain like the eggs of a bird, he drove up the ruddy ones by himself”.

One characteristic of Rigvedic poetry is the tendency to ascribe feats performed by several beings sometimes to only one of them, depending on who is to be worshipped by the poem at the moment. This tendency is manifest in this stanza as well as in the whole hymn, as neither Indra nor the Aṅgiras appear there, at least not openly¹⁰. Nevertheless, it illustrates the importance the secret names have in connection with this myth.

However, these names do not exclusively occur within this mythical context. In a hymn of praise addressed to Varuṇa from the eighth book, this god is credited with their knowledge as well, although he plays no part in the Vala myth:

8.041.05a *yó d^hartā b^húvanānām yá usrāṇām apīcyā véda nāmāni gúhyā /*

8.041.05d *sá kavīḥ kāvya purú rūpām dyaúr iva puṣyati náb^hantām anyaké same //*

“Who is the upholder of beings, who knows the secret, hidden names of the ruddy, he as a Kavi fosters the many Kāvyas, like heaven [its] form. – Let all the other squirts burst! (translation by F. K. except *pāda d*)”.

The complete hymn emphasizes the cosmogonic activities of Varuṇa, who is here depicted as being responsible for the creation of an ordered and structured world, so at first glance there seems to be a relation to the Vala myth, which has cosmogonic implications as well. But in this hymn the topic of cosmogony is brought to the fore much more explicitly, and there is no reference to a rock. Furthermore, the existence of cows is only alluded to here by means of their attribute “ruddy”, *usrá*. Presumably, the ruddy cows are the dawns, but in the context of this stanza a reference to their regular succession as a symbol for the diurnal progression is more likely than to a mythical feat of the god. But there are possibly more semantic layers here: The two terms *kavī-* and *kāvya-* could suggest a reference to poetry, as the former term means “poet” in classical Sanskrit, and the later one “poem, poetry”. However, their Rigvedic use is much more comprehensive and includes cosmogonic aspects as well, as illustrated in the following two *pādas*: RV 9.70.2a-b: *sá b^hikṣamāṇo amṛtasya cāruṇa ub^hé dyāvā kāvyeṇā ví śásrat^he* “He, wishing to obtain a share from the dear immortal one has separated both, Heaven and

Earth by his Kāvya”. Here, *kāvya*- apparently denotes something like know-how and the power to do so; possibly with the help of, but certainly not exclusively in the form of verbal artistry, and the Kavi is the one who possesses these abilities [cf.: Köhler 2011]. The knowledge of secret names nevertheless points to the domain of poetry, which appears in a cosmogonic framework as well. Poetic recitations embedded in ritual activities are not only a means to receive requested goods from the deities; they strengthen them so that they can maintain the world order. Therefore, *usrá*- may not only allude to the cows who in turn stand for the dawns, but furthermore could refer also to the set of different expressions that are applicable in the poetic-ritualistic setting [cf.: Srinivasan 1979, *pps.* 179].

Stanzas like RV 8.41.5 above help to understand how the *syntagma* “secret names” has not been restricted to a mythical event and how it has acquired a more comprehensive meaning. The following stanza, featuring Varuṇa again, illustrates that the use of secret names becomes a task, but also a privilege of the Rigvedic poet:

7.087.04a *uvāca me váruṇo méd^hirāya tríḥ saptá nāmāg^hnyā bib^harti /*
7.087.04c *vidvān padāsya gúhyā ná vocad yugāya vípra úparāya śikṣan //*

“Varuṇa said to me who am wise: ‘The inviolable cow bears three times seven names’.

Knowing of the track/place/word, let him speak [them] like secrets, the inspired one, who is beneficial to the later generation” (*pādas* c-d. – F. K.).

The lyrical ego is addressed directly by Varuṇa who proclaims the 21 names of the cow that are presumably secret. The meaning of *pāda* c is difficult to determine, due to the semantic ambiguity of *padá* (n.): this word can denote “track”, but also “place” as well as “word”, or more precisely “enigmatic semantic unit”¹¹. As there are no further complements like attributes, relative sentences or the like, it is practically impossible to select one fixed meaning out of several options: One could with Geldner and Lüders consider *padá* here as the track to the right denotations, *i. e.* so that the poet knows how to find the secret names, which are probably the denominations required by the poetic context [cf.: Geldner, II, 1951, 258; Lüders 1959, 522]. But it may be equally possible to understand it as the place or the track of the “inviolable cow”, which in turn may be a denotation for a transcendent or divine being. In any case, the last two *pādas* suggest ongoing ritual activity and the importance of these names for it; the revelation of the god has to be kept and understood in order to use these names further on¹². This emphasis of the actual ritual has interesting consequences for the pragmatics of secret names, as will be seen below. But first, some more general deliberations about the use of the *syntagma* “secret names” outside the context of cattle and the Vala myth.

3.2. Secret names of gods

It has been shown above that the *syntagma* “secret names” has acquired its peculiar Rigvedic connotations in the context of the myth of the liberation of the cows out of the Vala rock. Its combination of secrecy with the ability to express at the same time truth as an embodiment of cosmic order (*rtá*) respectively, made this *syntagma* very attractive for Rigvedic poets, and its use soon became generalized, as the following stanzas will show. Not only is there no social existence without a name, as Gladigow has rightly emphasized, in an aniconic religion there is no cultic one as well; the name of the deity is the only mode of its presence [Gladigow 1998, *pps.* 209]. The following stanza from a hymn addressed to Agni refers to his true, *i. e.* cosmic identity, and the poet’s knowledge of it:

10.045.02a *vidmā te agne tred^hā trayāṇi vidmā te d^hāma vib^hrtā purutrā /*
10.045.02c *vidmā te nāma paramam gúhā yád vidmā tám útsam yáta ājagánt^ha //*

“We know your threefold triads, Agni; we know your domains dispersed in many places. We know your highest name, which is hidden; we know the wellspring whence you have come here”.

Agni is depicted here as being present in many places, and this fact is reflected in two different ways; first, as numerically ordered by triads, and then with an indetermined plurality. The knowledge of Agni’s secret name is emphasized, and the singular *nāma*

contrasts with the statements of *pādas* a and b, so that a contrast may have been intended here between the one name and the plurality of *dhāmans* “domains”¹³. Finally, the source of Agni’s origin, his “wellspring” (*útsa*) is known to the poet as well, unfortunately, he gives his audience no clues as to what that would be. In the first stanza of this hymn three birthplaces of Agni are mentioned, heaven, the sacrificial ground and the waters; the singular *útsam* in this stanza may indicate once again the hidden unity behind the many manifestations of Agni¹⁴.

The next two stanzas are taken from a hymn addressed to Indra, which shows a quite unusual character. Instead of praising Indra’s combative spirit, it features the hidden and enigmatic traits of this god, which are described in a way that reminds one rather of Agni’s or Soma’s mysterious nature.

10.055.01a *dūré tán nāma gūhyam parācair yát tvā b^hītē áhvayetām vayod^hai /*

10.055.01c *úd astab^hnāḥ pṛ^tivīm dyām ab^hīke b^hrātuḥ putrān mag^havan titviṣānāḥ //*

“Far away in the distance is that hidden name which the two, frightened, called you, to grant them vigor. You propped up Earth and Heaven at the critical moment, when you were sparking the sons of your brother, bounteous one”.

This stanza seems to be about a critical moment for Heaven and Earth (they are in all probability the two mentioned in *pāda* b) who requested Indra to intervene. In this stanza the name is localized, which presumably means that this word denotes not only the proper name of the deity, but also his hidden nature with which he was able to act on their behalf by propping them up. Therefore, Indra’s secret name seems to contain a dynamic aspect as well. Stanza 2 continues the description of the event just described:

10.055.02a *mahát tán nāma gūhyam puruspr̥g yéna b^hūtām janáyo yéna b^hávyam /*

10.055.02c *pratnām jātām jyótir yád asya priyām priyāḥ sám avisanta pāñca //*

“Great is that hidden, much-coveted name by which you begot what has been and by which (you will beget) what is to be. The light born of old that is his – that dear light do the five dear ones merge into”.

Indra is directly spoken to in the first two *pādas* where another characteristic of his secret nature is mentioned; apart from spatially ordering the world by stabilizing Heaven and Earth, Indra allotted to the world a temporal structure as well, as he acted according to his hidden nature and created past and future beings.

In these three stanzas some aspects of Rigvedic views on names for the divine and their consequences for the understanding of its poetry and its ritual background appear side by side: these names can sometimes be localized, they denote the divine being, with which they are interchangeable within the poem, and the success of the ritual depends on their proclamation. But there is problem lurking here, which will be the topic of the next paragraph.

3.3. Secret names and publicity

For secret names to be effective it is essential that they remain secret, as we have seen. But how can this feature be reconciled with the fact that Rigvedic poetry is to be recited in public while ritual activities are carried out on the sacrificial ground? And it is indeed the case that sometimes these names are openly proclaimed, as in the following stanza from a hymn in which ghee, clarified melted butter, which is poured into the sacrificial fire during the rituals is eulogized:

4.058.01a *samudrād ūrmir mād^humām úd ārad upāṁśúnā sám amṛtatvám ānaḥ /*

4.058.01c *g^hṛtāsya nāma gūhyam yád ásti jihvā devānām amṛtasya nāb^hiḥ //*

“From the sea a honeyed wave has arisen; along with the (soma) plant it has reached all the way to immortality. The name of Ghee that is hidden: ‘the tongue of the gods’, ‘the navel of the immortal’”.

Consequently, in the first two *pādas* of the next stanza of this hymn the poet announces that he and his fellows will continue to make the name of Ghee known: “We will proclaim the name of Ghee; at this sacrifice here we will uphold it with reverences” (*vayám*

nāma prā bravāmā g^hṛtásyāsmín yajñé d^hārayāmā námob^hiḥ). Another instance is the next stanza from the ninth book:

9.095.02a *hāriḥ srjānāḥ pat^hyām ṛtásyeyarti vācam aritēva nāvam /*
9.095.02c *devó devānām gúhyāni nāmāviṣ kṛṇoti barhīsi pravāce //*

“The tawny one, having been set loose on the path of truth, directs his speech, like an oarsman his boat. The god reveals the hidden names of the gods to be proclaimed on the ritual grass”.

Soma is depicted in this stanza as the inspiring force behind the activities of the poets, and in doing so he reveals the secret names of the gods to them, so that they will be able to announce them. But if that is the case, can these names remain secret at all? And if not, what is reason for the insistence on their secrecy? There are several options to deal with this apparent contradiction: (1) The first option is simply to deny their existence; postulating their existence belongs to the language game of the Rigvedic poets and may just serve to highlight the legitimacy of their work (they claim after all a reward for their activities), as they can claim to possess esoteric knowledge by referring to these names. (2) Another option would be to acknowledge the existence of secret names without considering them an essential part of Rigvedic poetic practice. They could e.g. figure as parts of riddles and therefore in principle be guessed [cf.: Maggi 1989, 99]; the existence of numerous riddles in the RV seems to support this assumption. The solutions for these riddles could e.g. be found in phonetic similarities as in the Brahmanas, where for example in Śatapatha-Brahmaṇa 6.1.1.2 “Indra” is the hidden name for the “kindler” (*indha*).

But none of these proposals is really satisfying. In the light of RV 9.95.2, where Soma is praised as the inspiring force for the Rigvedic poets, it seems impossible to deny that he does exactly what he is said to do in this stanza: to reveal the secret names of the gods¹⁵. And as most of the examples presented here amply demonstrate, Rigvedic poetry abounds in enigmatic and sophisticated language. But this language has a purpose, as the following stanza makes clear:

10.053.10a *sató nūnām kavayaḥ sām śiśīta vāśīb^hir yāb^hir amṛtāya tákṣat^ha /*
10.053.10c *vidvāmsaḥ padā gúhyāni kartana yéna devāso amṛtatvām ānaśúḥ //*

“Now, poets, sharpen up (the hatchets) that are (here), the axes with which you carve for the immortal. As knowing ones, create hidden tracks, (like the track) by which the gods achieved immortality”.

This stanza, aptly characterized by Renou as the quintessence of Vedic poetics [Renou 1958, 22], makes it sufficiently clear that enigma and secrecy are an essential part of Rigvedic poetry. Enigmatic language is a means to reach immortality, and if secret names are a part of it, their appearance is only to be expected in such a frame. And that they figure in riddles or can otherwise be guessed cannot of course be excluded, but it is also not very likely. Usually no clues are given, and phonetic similarities of the Brahmana type of explanation do actually not fit to the enigmatic character of this poetry. Furthermore, the cryptic character of this poetry is related to and is presumably an outcome of the awareness these poets had of their activities; they have been made the topic of several hymns, e.g. RV 1.164, RV 4.3, RV 6.9 and RV 10.114, to name a few. The poets have found it important to deal with the topic of poetic inspiration and creativity in their hymns and considered ambiguous language as being most adequate for this purpose. Therefore, secret names have in all probability been meant to remain secret.

3.4. Secrecy and enigma

If the existence of actual secret names is taken for granted within Rigvedic poetry, it remains to be shown how this could happen without their being revealed to the public. One way to do so would be to use the ambiguities of the poetic language. One fitting example of how this is possible is the following stanza from a hymn addressed to Agni:

10.005.2a *samānām nīlām vīṣaṇo vāsānāḥ sām jagmire mahiṣā árvatīb^hiḥ /*
10.005.2c *ṛtásya padām kaváyo ní pānti gúhā nāmāni dad^hire párāṇi //*

“Cloaking themselves [/dwelling] in the same nest, the bullish buffaloes have united with the mares. The sage poets protect the track of truth: they have placed in hiding the highest names”.

According to this stanza, it is the task of the poets to hide the names, which surely means that they prevent their understanding by unauthorised persons. The first two *pādas* perhaps illustrate their technique; who are the buffaloes and who are the mares? Jamison and Brereton suppose that these terms could refer to the flames on the sacrificial site [Jamison & Brereton 2014, 1373], but equally well could the soma streams be the object of reference at least of the former one. In any case, one could take *pādas* a and b as examples for the ability of the Rigvedic poets to keep their audience in the dark about the real state of affairs behind the names they have used. Therefore, even if the names are known, it remains obscure which are the entities so named. Many of the stanzas already presented here could be seen as similar examples for this technique.

There are also more sophisticated ways to hide names. As has been shown above, *nāman* can also be used to denote state of affairs, and if this fact is taken into account, a stanza like the following one, again from a hymn to Agni, can be understood in more than one way:

3.026.07a *agnir asmi jānmanā jātavedā gḥṛtām me cáksur amṛtam ma āsán /*

3.026.07c *arkás tridhātū rájaso vimānó 'jasro gḥarmó havir asmi nāma //*

“I am Agni, Jātavedas by birth; ghee is my eye, the immortal in my mouth. The three-fold song/lightbeam, the one who measures the middle region, the undecaying heat, offering I am by name”¹⁶.

At first glance Agni seems to present himself in this poem as the embodiment of the ritual *per se*, as he comprises its essential elements ghee, praise song, possibly Soma (if *amṛta* refers to him) and of course the sacrificial fire. Furthermore, he emphasizes his knowledge of beings (*jātavedas*) and his identity with the sun, who is most likely the one who measures the middle region (*rájaso vimāna*). But one could also see in the second half of this stanza an allusion to a hidden monistic connection not between Agni and his different aspects, but between them all and the speaker! First of all, there is no syntactic rule what parts of chain of nouns in *pādas* c and d are part of the predicate, so they can be understood as “a is b, c is d, I am d...” or “a, b, c, d, e I am”. Furthermore, *nāman* in the nominative usually occurs in nominal sentences [Elizarenkova 2001, 37], but this is not possible in this case, so one has to choose between either “I am the name” or “‘I am’ is the name”. And as there are no criteria for choosing, both alternatives are equally justified. And finally, Agni is the fictitious speaker of the stanza, but in fact, it is the poet who speaks, and in this way, the mystical unity or to put it more cautiously, connection between the poet and Agni is not directly announced, but suggested in this stanza on several levels. By the use of *nāman* here, it is, after all, obvious, that this connection is a part of Agni’s nature. In footnote 14, reference was made to Mādhava’s attempt to anachronistically interpret RV 10.45.2d along Vedantic lines. One would not do justice to the creative spirit of the Rigvedic poets if their works were taken as mere “illustrations” of philosophical doctrines, but monistic tendencies seem to appear in at least some Rigvedic hymns. The syntagma “secret names” was for these poets one of the means to suggest this and other hidden connections.

4. Conclusions

It has been argued above that secret names form an important part of the self-perception of the Rigvedic poets. Based on the myth of the liberation of the cows, this *syntagma* was mainly used to designate the inner being of a deity. The apparent paradox of the public recitation of secret names has been solved by taking into account the application of *nāman* for abstract entities like state of affairs and the ambiguities of poetic speech, for which RV 3.26.8 has been taken as an example. It would be worthwhile to link these results together with other studies on the Rigvedic metalanguage¹⁷.

¹ For these R̥gvedic ideas cf.: [Staal 1975; Maggi 1989], for the assumed Indo-European precursors: [Toporov 1981; Watkins 1995].

² Cf.: [Padoux 1990], especially pps. 1–30.

³ “Benennung [...], Wesen [...], Erscheinungsform [...]” ([Grassmann 1996], s. v. *nāman*).

⁴ For the text of the RV the version of the Titus Textcollection is used; if not mentioned otherwise, the translations are by Jamison & Brereton [Jamison & Brereton 2014].

⁵ Nirukta 1.1 [...] *catvāri padajātāni nāmākhyāte copasarganipātāśca.tānīmāni bhavanti. tatra.etan nāmākhyātayor lakṣaṇam.pradiśanti. bhāva.pradhānam.ākhyātam. sattvapradhānāni nāmāni*. “These are the four parts of speech: nouns, verbs, prepositions and particles. This they teach as the main characteristic of nouns and verbs: nouns express being, verbs becoming” [The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta... 1984].

⁶ So according to: [Lüders 1959, 525; Elizarenkova 2001, 45]. For the development of the notion of *nāmarūpa* cf.: [Wayman 1982].

⁷ RV 1.84.5; 1.155.3; 2.35.11; 4.58.1; 5.3.2–3; 5.5.10; 8.41.5; 9.75.2; 9.87.3; 9.95.2; 9.96.16; 10.5.2; 10.45.2; 10.55.1–2; 10.68.7.

⁸ Cf.: [Gonda 1970], especially 79–91 with parallels from other cultures.

⁹ The description of the myth follows in a shortened form [Lüders 1959, pps. 510–537].

¹⁰ The Aṅgiras are at least indirectly present, as Bṛhaspati is depicted in stanza 1 with the adjective *āṅgirasá*, “belonging to the Aṅgiras”.

¹¹ For the meaning of *padá* cf.: [Thompson 1995].

¹² The injunctive aorist *vocad* has presumably a hortative function here, as equivalent imperatives of the root *vac-* are not attested [cf.: Hoffmann 1967, pps. 255].

¹³ Strictly speaking “foundations”, but it is difficult to avoid a spatial understanding of this term here [cf.: Gonda 1967].

¹⁴ It is tempting to consult the commentary of Mādhava for an interpretation of this, although his formulation is not completely precise either. He explains *tam utsam* with *utsyandayitāraṃ utpādayitāraṃ kārāṇātmānam* roughly “the one who makes flow up, [i.e.] the generator, the Self that is the cause” (Mādhava, *ad loc.*). If this understanding is correct, his explanation would amount to a Vedantic explanation, which may strike many researchers as anachronistic; we will return to this point later.

¹⁵ One may treat RV 4.58, where the secret name of Ghee is openly declared, as an exception.

¹⁶ Translation according to: [Köhler 2013, 163], slightly modified.

¹⁷ This article is the result of a lecture given on 15.9.2022 at the 34th German Orientalists’ Day, and I would like to thank Kyoko Amano, Tiziana Pontillo and Rainer Grafenhorst for their suggestions and criticism. I would also like to thank Dmitry Markov for his forbearance in my late submission of this article. Finally, I would like to dedicate it to the Ukrainian people who so courageously defend their freedom and dignity against a barbaric and ruthless aggressor.

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Ф. Кьолер

Коров’ячі й божі: таємні імена в “Ригведі”

Вірші “Ригведи” не лише прославляють богів ведійського пантеону, просячи їх про здійснення різноманітних бажань, – у “Ригведі” є також численні висловлювання про поезію, засобами якої ці прохання виражаються. У багатьох гімнах згадуються поетична мова та її особливий характер, і вже на цій ранній стадії була розроблена термінологія, за допомогою якої цю мову аналізують. Одним із ключових термінів є слово *nātan*, яке зазвичай перекладається як “ім’я” чи щось подібне. Але в “Ригведі” воно має набагато більше значень, зокрема “сутність”, “форма, подоба”. До того ж його вживання не обмежується конкретними істотами, воно застосовувалося також для позначення ситуації. Ці особливості вже широко розглядалися в літературі, проте, можливо, варто уважніше розглянути, здавалося б, парадоксальний факт: з одного боку, деякі з цих імен вважаються таємними, про них є згадки, але вони не називаються; з другого боку, гімнами “Ригведи” супроводжується проведення обрядів, під час яких гімни озвучуються публічно. Після розгляду найважливіших особливостей імен у статті стверджується, що ці імена водночас і таємні, і виголошені публічно і що задля цього творці “Ригведи” використали повний спектр поетичних прийомів.

Ключові слова: *nātan*, ім’я, поет, поезія, “Ригведа”

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