

Animals in Vedic Prose



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Abstract

This thesis examines a well-known axiom of ancient Indian thought: the human being is classified as one of the five domestic animals, *paśu*. Although this notion is well-known, often mentioned in secondary literature, it has not yet received a comprehensive, scholarly treatment. Drawing on the detailed philological and textual-historical study of the Vedic poetry and prose, this thesis explores the classification of the human as a domestic animal, as well as the categories of “animality” and “humanity” more broadly.

The thesis is composed of three core chapters. The first discusses the semantic history of the three most common Vedic animal terms: *paśu*, *mṛga*, and the antonymic dyad, *grāmya* and *āraṇya paśu*. As well as introducing the terms in a broad context, it argues that their evolution documents the transition of Vedic lifestyle from semi-nomadic pastoralism to agricultural sedentism.

Building on this, the second and third chapters explore the position of the human being within the *paśu* group. The second chapter discusses similarities and differences between the human and the rest of the group, in terms of both body and behaviour. The Vedic corpus suggests, however, that in the mythical past, people and domestic animals used to look and behave alike: just like people, domestic animals walked on two-feet, exercised agency, and sacrificed. I argue that this common history indicates that the species of *paśus* are mutually “related”. There is a sense of what I call “ontological proximity”: an entangled existence driven by a shared history and mutual care. The third chapter further investigates the notion of “ontological proximity” by way of detailed reading of two mythical narratives from the Vedic Brāhmaṇas, arguing that this idea is clearly present and used creatively in Vedic animal imagery.

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Abbreviations

SANSKRIT TEXTS

The abbreviations are given in the standard order of the *nāgarī* alphabet.

AB	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
AV	Atharvaveda
AVP	Atharvaveda Saṃhitā, Paippalāda
AVŚ	Atharvaveda Saṃhitā, Śaunakīya
ĀpŚS	Āpastamba Śrautasūtra
ṚV	Ṛgveda Saṃhitā
KU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
KB	Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa
KS	Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā
KSV	Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā, the Aśvamedha book
ChU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
JB	Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa
JBU	Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad
JŚS	Jaiminīya Śrautasūtra
TB	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
TKM	Trikāṇḍamaṇḍana
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā
PB	Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
BŚS	Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra
BYV	The Black Yajurveda
MDŚ	Mānava Dharmaśāstra
MBh	Mahābhārata
MS	Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā
YV	Yajurveda
VS	Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā
ŚB	Śaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
ŚBK	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Kāṇva
ŚBM	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Mādhyam̐dina

MISCELLANEOUS

The abbreviations are listed in the order of Roman alphabet.

Ac	accusative
AIW	C. Bartholomae's <i>Altiranisches Wörterbuch</i> (Bartholomae: 2012r)
BMAC	Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex
c	copyright [preceding a date, such as c1941]
DCS	Digital Corpus of Sanskrit
du.	dual
EWA	M. Mayrhofer's <i>Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen</i> (Mayrhofer: 1992-2001)
f.	feminine
G	genitive
Gk	Ancient Greek
GRETIL	Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages
HDS	P.V. Kane's <i>History of Dharmasāstra</i> (Kane: 1930)
I	instrumental
IE	Indo-European
KEWA	M. Mayrhofer's <i>Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen</i> (Mayrhofer: 1956-80)
L	locative
m.	masculine
MW	M. Monier-Williams' <i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> (Monier-Williams: 1872)
N	nominative
n.	neuter
OAv	Old Avestan
OE	Old English
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
pl.	plural
r	reprint [following a date, such as 1941r]
sg.	singular
TITUS	Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien
VPK	Viśvabandhu Śāstrī's <i>Vaidikapadānukramakoṣaḥ</i> (Śāstrī: 1935-65)
Y.	Yasna
Yt.	Yašt
YAv	Young Avestan

§ 1 Introduction

Stories are always a complex production with many tellers and hearers,
not all of them visible or audible.”

– Donna Haraway: *Primate Visions*¹

§ 1.1 SCOPE, GOALS, SOURCES, AND BACKGROUND OF THIS THESIS

At the heart of this thesis stands a simple axiom of ancient Indian thought: the human being is classified as one of the domestic animals (*paśu*). Although this is a well-known postulate, often mentioned in the secondary literature, it has not yet received detailed scholarly treatment. Since it carries far-reaching implications for a broader understanding of the categories of “humanity” and “animality”, however, it deserves thorough study. This thesis aims to do precisely that.

Although my objective is to explore what is at stake when we take seriously the assertion that the human is a *paśu*, this thesis focuses on animals rather than people. This is reflected by the name of the thesis: *Animals in Vedic Prose*. There are a couple of reasons for this name and the focus of my research. First, to understand the implications of the axiom that the human is a domestic animal, we must explore what, exactly, an animal is. Second, and perhaps more importantly, is that as scholars, we know comparatively more about the lives of Vedic people than the animals that existed alongside them. Although Vedic literature is relatively narrow in its contents and mostly devoted to ritual, it offers a keyhole through which one can catch a glimpse of the Vedic “lifestyle”. This has been the focus of most of the study of the Vedic period: religion, ritual, customs, warfare, kinship, and other matters of the human life have been explored by vernacular and Western commentators. In recent years,

¹ Haraway: 1987, p. 8.

however, many Humanities disciplines have turned their attention to the non-human world, exploring the wider environment around us, from microbes to megafauna. This thesis, inspired by these attempts, seeks to explore what an animal is for the anthropo- and ritual-centric Vedic literature.

In the hope of understanding these matters, I am guided by a handful of questions which I answer in three separate chapters. First, what is an animal in Vedic literature? What are the words used for such a creature, and in what contexts? These questions are answered in the second and longest chapter, called “Animal Terminology in Vedic Literature”. This chapter reconstructs the semantic history of the three most common animal terms in the Vedas: *paśu*, *mṛga*, and the antonymic dyad *grāmya* and *āraṇya*. The contextualisation of these terms serves as a basis for the rest of the thesis. '

Second, what is the human in relation to the other domestic animals? In what ways does the human differ from the other *paśus*, and in what way does it resemble them? These questions provide the logic of the third chapter, titled “The Unusual Suspect”.

Throughout these two chapters, I argue that the way Vedic literature depicts the relationship between human and non-human domestic animals gives the impression of relatedness and multispecies intimacy. I call this notion “ontological proximity” and explore it in detail in the fourth chapter, titled “Skin”. Using a thorough reading of two mythical narratives from the Vedic prose texts, I discuss the close symbolic relationships of people and their livestock.

The primary goal of the thesis is to explore the relationship of the human and non-human animals in Vedic literature, with a special interest in the domesticated species. Despite the title, the thesis is not a description of the zoology of ancient India. It is *not* a catalogue of certain species and their instances in the Vedic corpus.² Instead, it is an exploration of the imagery of the relationship between certain types of beings in this world, and to some extent the next world as well. Nevertheless, I believe that since this approach is rooted in a detailed textual study, it can provide a modest contribution to the general study of animals in South Asian history, especially since a large part of its discussion encompasses the meaning of individual terms for animal categories.

Furthermore, my research is motivated by my interest in ancient cultures as well as contemporary Anthropology, Animal Studies, and Philosophy, in particular the topical studies in multispecies encounters. One of the goals of my thesis is thus to join my interests and to explore how to “think with” Vedic animal imagery in the context of Anthropocene, and how the philological work

² For a catalogue of this sort, see the works of Devee: 1995; or Clason: 1979.

of Vedic Studies can be informed by reading contemporary theories of multispecies relationships. I explain these matters more thoroughly in this Introduction, in § 1. 3.

Now that I have presented my research questions in broad strokes, let me summarise the contents of this Introduction. Following this section, I present the primary sources used in this thesis and the general background of my research. I continue by explaining my methodology and theoretical background which has shaped the research questions. In the penultimate section, I provide a broader view of the field by discussing the socio-economic context of the Vedic era. I conclude by way of explaining the conventions of orthography, citations, and other technical manners used in this thesis.

§ 1. 1. 1 ON MY SOURCES

The scope of this thesis is largely delineated by the primary sources I use for my research. In the following section, I will introduce the primary materials I rely on and explain how I work with them. Although I begin with a summary of some basic facts about Vedic literature, I do not aim to provide a general introduction of the topic.³

My work is centred around the so-called Vedic texts: literature composed orally in a language known as Vedic Sanskrit, largely in the Indian subcontinent, in roughly 1500-500 BCE. The Vedic canon is a corpus of religious, namely ritual literature, consisting of two types: material used during ritual practice (usually in verse), and material external to the ritual, that is its descriptions and commentaries (usually in prose). Traditionally, the literature is catalogued into four groups according to the genre, and roughly their chronological order. The Vedas, also known as the *Samhitās* or *mantra*-type texts, are collections of poetic materials used in ritual practice. The *Brāhmaṇas* are ritual commentaries: explanations and justifications of Vedic ritual, composed in prose. The *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads* are esoteric and early philosophical prose explanations of the ritual practice. Lastly, the *Sūtras* are minute descriptions of the ritual practice in prose.⁴ These four types of literature are further divided into four groups according to their adherence to a particular Veda: *R̥gveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Atharvaveda*. The four Vedas are, furthermore, divided into a number of liturgical

³ This section is not aiming to be an introduction to ancient Indian literature but an explanation of my choices. For a summary of Vedic sources, I recommend the succinct introduction by Jamison: 1991, p. 7-16. For a book-length introduction, see Gonda: 1975. For information about editions and translations, see Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 4-28.

⁴ Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 5, further distinguish between genres/layers “which do not always coincide with the traditional division of Vedic texts.” These are: “1. *R̥gveda* (with as late additions, book 10 and also parts of book 1), 2. the so-called Mantra language (*Atharvaveda*, *R̥gvedakhila*, the mantras of the *Yajurveda* etc., the *Sāmaveda*), 3. the expository prose of the *Yajurveda Samhitā* texts (MS, KS, KpS, TS), 4. the *Brāhmaṇa* prose (including the older portions of the *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*, as well as some of the earliest *Sūtras*), 5. the late Vedic *Sūtras*.”

schools, so-called *śākhās*, “branches”, each of which provides its own tradition of ritual exegesis. Thus, a particular Brāhmaṇa is never a general commentary on Vedic ritual but a specific perspective of a particular Vedic school.⁵

Since Vedic literature is vast and complex, I had to limit my research for this thesis to a manageable sliver of the corpus. For multiple reasons, I am drawn to the Brāhmaṇa prose texts. First, they offer fascinating information about the ancient Indian religion as well as everyday life. Although sometimes deemed boring or strange,⁶ the Brāhmaṇa texts express “controlled intelligence, [...] flashes of insight, and [...] empathy”, as Stephanie Jamison writes.⁷ Michael Witzel argues, furthermore, that in the Brāhmaṇa period, “one learnt to discourse and ‘think’ (as opposed to inspiration or ‘free’ speculation of the RV), [...] one learnt to watch and discuss nature, society, thought and speech, in a ‘pre-scientific’ manner [...]”.⁸ The observation of the world is what makes the Brāhmaṇa literature particularly valuable for this project. Second, although the Brāhmaṇas appear “to be the fountainhead of [...] many Indian arts or sciences”,⁹ as Witzel suggests, they remain a largely understudied subject in the Vedic scholarship. Every study of the Brāhmaṇa prose still enhances the field, and I hope that my thesis will, perhaps, add another piece to the jigsaw. The focus of my research is, therefore, directed primarily at the Brāhmaṇa prose, and the name of my thesis is *Animals in Vedic Prose* rather than a more general name, such as *Animals in the Vedas*. It is noteworthy, however, that the knowledge of the preceding literary types is nevertheless essential for understanding the prose texts. This means that, fundamentally, my thesis deals with the literature of the first two types: the Vedic Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas.

For the most part, my research focuses on narratives. This implies that I work primarily with texts that are more “literary” in their genre. In practice, this means that I almost never deal with the recensions of the Sāmaveda Saṃhitā, since they are collections of chants (*sāman*), mostly extracted from the RV. Equally, I concentrate on the major Brāhmaṇas, omitting late, post-Vedic texts such as the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa. Furthermore, I mostly work with the Mādhyam̐dina recension of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, since the Kāṇva recension is fairly similar and brings only limited additional understanding. Nevertheless, there are a couple of cases where I choose to use a Kāṇva version of a certain story in addition to the Mādhyam̐dina. A full list of my primary sources and their editions and translations is presented in the Bibliography.

⁵ On Vedic *śākhās*, their history, dating, and geography, see Witzel: 1987; or Renou: 1947.

⁶ For a collection of scholarly opinions about the Brāhmaṇa prose, see Witzel: 1979, p. [1].

⁷ Jamison: 1991, p. xv.

⁸ Witzel: 1987, p. 414.

⁹ Ibid.

To demonstrate certain points, I occasionally branch off into later sources, such as the Śrautasūtras (used particularly when discussing certain ritual practices), the Dharmaśāstras (especially when discussing dietetical prescriptions), or the Epics, especially the Mahābhārata. Furthermore, to illustrate the evolution from Proto-Indo-European and Indo-Iranian past, I take into consideration the evidence of the Avestan corpus.

An important part of this study has been locating the occurrence of certain terms in the corpus of Vedic texts. In the preparation of this thesis, I have used a combination of electronic and printed texts. I have relied on the texts available on the websites of initiatives such as the Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL), Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien (TITUS), and Digital Corpus of Sanskrit (DCS).¹⁰ For specific texts, I used other tools. For the research in the ṚV, I have utilised the online version of Holland and van Nooten's metrically restored text, housed online by the University of Texas, Austin, as well as Kevin Ryan's Rgveda Search Engine, and the online commentary to the newest English translation of the ṚV by Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton.¹¹ For the ŚBM, I have often used the Vedavid website.¹²

Since there is a high possibility for human error in electronic texts, I cross-referenced them with the printed editions when in doubt. In querying the corpus of electronic texts, I have made use of a program called BBEdit, available for free download.¹³ This text editor enables searching specific strings of characters across multiple texts. Although a rather rudimentary text-mining method, it has proved to be effective; in particular, in combination with more traditional methods of word-search reliant on printed concordances and lexica. These have included sources such as Grassmann's *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda* or the indispensable concordance of Vedic texts, Viśvabandhu Śāstrī's *Vaidikapadānukramakoṣaḥ* (VPAK).¹⁴

¹⁰ GRETIL [<http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil.html>, last accessed 25 August 2022]. TITUS [<https://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/indexe.htm>, last accessed 25 August 2022]. DCS [<http://www.sanskrit-linguistics.org/dcs/index.php>, last accessed 10 September 2022].

¹¹ The metrically-restored ṚV online [<https://lrc.la.utexas.edu/books/rigveda/RV01>, last accessed 25 August 2022], based on the printed version of Van Nooten and Holland: 1994. ṚV Search Engine [<https://meluhha.com/rv/>, last accessed 25 August 2022]. Rigveda Translation: Commentary [<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/>, last accessed 22 September 2022].

¹² Vedavid [<https://vedavid.org/index-sutra.html>, last accessed 25 August 2022].

¹³ BBEdit [<https://www.barebones.com/products/bbedit/>, last accessed 25 August 2022].

¹⁴ Grassmann: 1837; Śāstrī: 1935-1965.

§ 1.1.2 THE BACKGROUND OF THIS THESIS

“Why look at animals?” asked the art historian John Berger over 50 years ago in his influential eponymous essay.¹⁵ In this section, it might be useful to rephrase Berger’s question and ask why an Indologist should be interested in animals, and especially in animals of the past? There are a handful of reasons why this topic is compelling to me.

From a zoological perspective, India is one of the most interesting areas in the world. For millennia, the Indian subcontinent has been geologically and geographically isolated. This isolation was prompted by the break-off of the landmass that is now the Indian subcontinent from Africa and its drift towards Eurasia which resulted in the formation of the highest mountain ranges in the world: the Himalayas, Karakoram, and Pamir. This, in turn, locked the subcontinent away from the rest of the continental mass and enabled a local evolution of many species. Owing to the geological development, the Indian subcontinent is a habitat of many unique, endemic species, such as the Indian rhinoceros and elephant, wild ruminants such as the four-horned antelope, the blackbuck, or the spotted deer. Some South Asian species have “an African stamp”, as Alexandra van der Geer says, such as the elephant and lion: they started from the same genetic pool as their African relatives, but evolved in isolation into distinctive species, found nowhere else on the planet.¹⁶ Others, especially the big cats such as tiger, leopard, and lion, used to occur in many other parts of Eurasia but now survive only in the Indian subcontinent. Their “disappearance from South Asia”, writes the veterinary-doctor-turned-Indologist Alexandra van der Geer, “means disappearance from our planet.”¹⁷ In itself, the distinctive character of Indian fauna is an intriguing subject.

This remarkable wildlife has sparked the attention, imagination, and creativity of people living on the Indian subcontinent since prehistoric times. For example, rhinos were depicted in rock shelters and caves by Mesolithic inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, such as in Mirzapur in today’s Uttar Pradesh. Tigers and a multitude of other wild animals decorate soapstone seals used by people of the Indus Valley civilisation. Classical Indian art abounds in animal motifs of all sorts.¹⁸ Analogously, animals are as frequent in Indian literature as in the visual arts. The Ṛgvedic hymns describe cattle and other domestic animals in beautiful metaphors, preceding the famous Classical Sanskrit animal narratives of the *Pañcatantra*, *Hitopadeśa*, the Buddhist *Jātakas*, or the poetic descriptions of the environment in the rich history of *kāvya* literature.

¹⁵ Berger: 2009r (c1980).

¹⁶ Van der Geer: 2008, p. 2.

¹⁷ Van der Geer: 2008, p. 2.

¹⁸ For animals in Classical Indian sculpture, see Van der Geer: 2008. For painting and other visual arts, see e.g. Pal & Seid: 2002; Sen: 1972; or Kadgaonkar: 2008.

Indian literature and art are generally known for their usage of animal motifs. Despite this, the history and evolution of Indian animal symbolism is rather blurry. In particular, very little is known about human relationship with animals in one of the earliest periods of the Indian history, the Vedic era. The textual sources from this period are by and large ritual materials, describing and explaining the intricate Vedic sacrifices. Due to their narrow focus, they offer only limited information on the environment and its inhabitants. Any study contributing to the topic, therefore, enlarges our understanding of the environment within which they lived.

Lastly, there is a purely selfish spin to this thesis. Through my research, I am trying to cope with my own “environmental grief”, the sadness felt in relation to the loss of species, their habitats, and whole ecosystems due to anthropogenic climate change. The unique fauna of the Indian subcontinent has been dwindling since early modernity; many of its distinctive species are currently endangered. The climate crisis, however, brings a new set of challenges which might leave wildlife even more vulnerable and depleted.

When I expressed these concerns during the oral exam for my Confirmation of Status, the examiners asked how my work relates to the study of the “Anthropocene”, a relatively new “turn” within the Humanities. In the rest of this section, I will try to answer this question.

“Anthropocene” is a term for the epoch in which for the first time in history, human impact on the planet is comparable to geological forces. The term has been coined at the start of the new millennium and formally ratified by geologists as an epoch in which we are currently living.¹⁹ The world of Anthropocene is, in the words of David Haberman, an “increasingly uncertain world”, and climate change an all-encompassing phenomenon which dramatically disrupts human livelihood on the planet.²⁰

Although human-induced climate change has been associated primarily with modernity,²¹ people have had an impact on the planet in various ways since the early Holocene, a period which

¹⁹ The word “Anthropocene” has been in circulation since 2000 when it was coined by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (see Crutzen & Stoermer: 2000; cf. Crutzen: 2000). It was recognised by the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) as an unit of geological time [<http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>, last accessed on 10 September 2022]. Formally, however, we are still living in what the ICS calls the Meghalayan Age of the Holocene Epoch. Some scholars have suggested other names for the epoch, such as Capitalocene, which singles out the impact of capitalism and its dependence on fossil fuels. See e.g. Haraway: 2015. Others have pointed out problems with the concept, such as its structural whiteness; for debate on this, see Mathur: 2021, p. 13-15. On the relation between Anthropocene and precarity, see Tsing: 2015, p. 19-21.

²⁰ Haberman: 2021, p. 1ff. For what the uncertainty might mean, see e.g. Armstrong McKay: 2022.

²¹ On the timings, Graeber & Wengrow write: “Most experts point to the Industrial Revolution, but some put its origins earlier, in the late 1500s and early 1600s. At that time, a global drop in surface air temperatures occurred – part of the ‘Little Ice Age’ – which natural forces can’t explain. Quite likely, European expansion in the Americas played a role. With perhaps 90 per cent of the indigenous population eliminated by the effects of

started roughly at the end of the last Ice Age, roughly twelve thousand years ago. The anthropologist David Graeber and the archaeologist David Wengrow describe the Holocene almost as a “Golden Age” for the human species:

“[... The] Holocene Age [...] had been a ‘clean sheet’ for humanity. At its onset, many things really were new. As the ice receded, flora and fauna – once confined to small refuge zones – spread out to new vistas. People followed, helping favoured species on their way by setting fires and clearing land. The effect of global warming on the world’s shorelines was more complex, as coastal shelves formerly under ice sprang back to the surface, while others sank below rising seawaters, fed from glacial melt. For many historians, the onset of the Holocene is significant because it created conditions for the origins of agriculture. [...] By 8000 BC, their [=humans’] efforts had contributed to the extinction of roughly two-thirds of the world’s megafauna, which were ill suited to the warmer and more enclosed habitats of the Holocene.”²²

During the Holocene, people developed agriculture and domesticated animals, eventually mostly giving up the mobility associated with the hunter-fisher-gatherer or nomadic-pastoral lifestyles. The human impact, however, reached far beyond agriculture: we reshaped our immediate surroundings, caused the extinction of numerous species, changed the courses of rivers, and altered the environment in many more ways to make our lives easier. More recently, human activity has directly caused a change in climate. For example, the proliferation of domesticated livestock has contributed significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions.²³

Much of what I write about in this thesis is pre-Anthropocene. The literature I have researched documents the processes mentioned above, albeit indirectly: through change in word-usage and ritual practice, it indicates the development from a mostly nomadic towards a settled lifestyle subsistent on agriculture.²⁴ How does this, then, tie to the study of the Anthropocene? First, I read the primary sources whilst living in this “human epoch” myself; the loss of species and looming climate catastrophe necessarily influences not only the questions I ask but my choice of project as a whole. More importantly, however, inspired by David Graeber and David Wengrow’s book *The Dawn of Everything*, as well as the Oxford network “Climate Crisis Thinking in the Humanities and Social

conquest and infectious disease, forests reclaimed regions in which terraced agriculture and irrigation had been practised for centuries.” Graeber & Wengrow: 2021, p. 258.

²² Graeber & Wengrow: 2021, p. 258.

²³ According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, cattle accounted for 14.5% of all global greenhouse gas emissions in 2013. See Gerber et al.: 2013. Cf. the works of George Monbiot, especially the passages on the problems with sheep breeding in the UK, discussed in his book *Feral*. Monbiot: 2014.

²⁴ I borrow this approach to Vedic literature from Michael Jones, a former PhD student of Joel Brereton at University of Texas in Austin. In his PhD thesis (Jones: 2017), Jones argues that the change from semi-nomadic pastoralism to settled agriculturalism is observable in the texts and their theology, provided we read all the layers of the literature as a whole.

Sciences”, I propose that the knowledge of other ways of life, or other “ontologies”, might be beneficial for the re-evaluation of our current situation.²⁵ As the anthropologist Nayanika Mathur says, “Anthropocene not only unsettles the nature/culture divide but also makes clearer the connections and deep entanglements between humans and nonhumans.”²⁶

Despite the human influence on the planet, the Humanities and Social Sciences are usually not considered to be partners with the sciences in the dialogue about solutions to the climate catastrophe. Yet the knowledge, methods, imagination and values of the Humanities can support our understanding of the situation, both from a historical and future perspective. The anthropologist Michael Taussig writes that “all societies live by fictions taken as real.”²⁷ If that is true, I am hopeful that there is a certain chance to change the narrative of the fiction that currently dictates the course of our lives, and to reimagine our relationships with the natural world. The knowledge of various facets of human-animal relationships can help us to reimagine our own approach to non-human species. It can teach us, for example, how to share space and coexist with non-humans. The diligent care for cattle by the Vedic pastoralists can be an inspiration for our own involvement in the lives of domesticated animals. Perhaps, philological and textual-historical work can be radical in ways that might not be used very often. “Living in an era of climate change demands new ways of storytelling,” argues Mathur; and it is particularly stories from other times and places that can, at least partially, illuminate something as big and apocalyptic as the climate crisis.²⁸

²⁵ Graeber & Wengrow: 2021. The network “Climate Crisis Thinking in the Humanities and Social Sciences” is hosted by The Oxford Research Centre in Humanities (TORCH) and convened by the historian Amanda Powers and anthropologist Nayanika Mathur. For more details, see [<https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/climate-crisis-thinking-in-the-humanities-and-social-sciences>, last accessed on 19 September 2022].

²⁶ Mathur: 2021, p. 15.

²⁷ Taussig: 1987, p. 121.

²⁸ Mathur: 2021, p. 15.

§ 1.2 ON MY METHODOLOGY & THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

A few words are required regarding the methodology I employ in this thesis. As I explained in the previous section, my research is influenced by non-Indological concepts: for example, “Anthropocene”, “relatedness”, or “ontological proximity”.²⁹ While these concepts influenced the research questions I asked, I employed more standard philological methodology.

The main bulk of my research consists of philological and textual-historical reading of primary sources.³⁰ As detailed in § 1.1.1, a large portion of my research has been dedicated to the location of the relevant text passages in the respective layers of Vedic literature. This work has been done using both printed and digital editions of primary texts as well as printed indices and concordances.

Upon collecting the relevant passages, I have assessed them with the use of textual-historical reading. Essentially, my aim has been to “make sense” of the ancient texts, and “to engage as fully as possible with each text on all levels and to try to understand it as an entity on its own terms as far as possible, rather than subordinating it to the purposes of the investigator”, as Stephanie Jamison writes.³¹ To do that, I take into account not only a close reading of a passage in question but also its immediate textual environment, wider context, as well as its variants and parallel or fragmentary versions. As Michael Witzel says, variants are perhaps the most important commentaries for Vedic literature in general and for the Brāhmaṇa texts, in particular, because they “mention the same facts with a more or less differing choice of words or give a completely different exposition, both of which shed light on the topic under discussion.”³²

Initially, I imagined that a considerable part of my research would be spent on comparing the textual data with the zoological, archaeological, and archaeozoological research carried out in the north of the Indian subcontinent. Animals, after all, are real beings existing in the environment, not only in texts, and many disciplines can change the picture drawn by the primary literature considerably. Zoology and archaeology (as well as their combination, known either as zooarchaeology

²⁹ In the last few years, other early career researchers produced works on Vedic literature rooted in interdisciplinarity. Notable examples are, among others, Caley Smith’s PhD thesis on impersonation and mimesis in the RV (Smith: 2017) and Finnian Gerety’s PhD thesis on the history of *om*, viewed partially from the point of view of Sound Studies (Gerety: 2015).

³⁰ In my understanding of philology, I follow Michael Witzel’s definition who says that philology is a “*Kulturwissenschaft* based on texts’, or ‘the study of a civilization based on texts’.” Witzel: 1996, p. 1.

³¹ Jamison: 1996, p. 32.

³² Witzel: 1996, p. 5.

or archaeozoology)³³ are useful first ports of call when it comes to animals, as they inform our understanding of animals and their connection to humans in the past. The survey of zoological materials can give us a sense of the behaviour, distribution, habitat, and environment of various animals inhabiting the Indian subcontinent. Archaeology and zooarchaeology study ancient animal remains from archaeological excavations, which can help us reconstruct how animals contributed to past human life. Animal Studies, a recently emerged field of studies which combines zoological and ethological approaches with anthropology and ethnography, is another interesting sphere of research, especially for its theoretical foundations. Altogether, considering the research of other fields is extremely helpful in order to think outside of the Indological box.

When reviewing the material on South Asian zooarchaeology, however, I encountered a few problems that prevented me from including more discussion on material data in this thesis.³⁴ Although the combination of textual and archaeological data has a considerable tradition in the study of ancient India,³⁵ Vedic archaeozoology remains a complex topic. Mainly, this is caused by the difficulty in establishing a definite correspondence between the archaeological record and the speakers of the Indo-Aryan languages. Although the northwest of the Indian subcontinent offers bountiful archaeological evidence for the period in question, the complete orality and the semi-nomadic character of the early and middle-Vedic culture prevents us from establishing an unambiguous connection between the language and the material culture. Therefore, a large majority of scholars in Vedic Studies treat the topic with reservations and conclude that since we cannot establish any definitive links, there are effectively no material data to support the texts.

³³ For a relatively concise introduction in the field of zooarchaeology, see Albarella et al.: 2017.

³⁴ I have based my research on the reading list put together by Kelly Wilcox, PhD student in archaeology at the University of Chicago, supervised by Professor Kathleen Morrison. Many thanks to Kelly Wilcox for the references (e-mail communication, 30 October 2020).

³⁵ Perhaps the starkest example of the relationship between these two disciplines is the “Aryan question”, concerning the 200-years-old hypothesis of the movement of Indo-Aryan speaking populations from outside of the Indian subcontinent to the Greater Panjab. The “Aryan question” was an important topic of Indology and Indo-European archaeology throughout the 1990’s. Although it has been concluded that it is by and large impossible to find definitive answers (except for the improbability of the “autochthonous Aryans” theory, cf. Witzel: 2001), it has shown compelling reasons for maintaining interdisciplinary contacts. As George Erdosy writes: “Both disciplines have the power to delve into the past, illuminating different, but related facets, of cultural evolution [...]”. “Although linguists are in a better position to decide *how* Indo-Iranian languages developed and spread, only archaeologists can tell them *why* they have done so at any given point in space and time. Even in the case of Indo-Aryan languages directly documented in literature (as opposed to the hypothetical reconstructions of proto-languages), archaeology will play a crucial role in reconstructing the cultural setting in which they evolved and replaced the forms of speech previously dominant in South Asia.” See Erdosy: 1995b, p. 21, 24. Cf. the edited volumes by Erdosy: 1995a; and Bronkhorst & Deshpande: 1999. The newest addition to the literature is Witzel: 2019.

Furthermore, the material data itself is more convoluted still, with a curious scarcity of faunal reporting from Iron Age and Early Historic sites in northern India. To corroborate the textual data with the zooarchaeological record is, therefore, an extremely challenging task, although some scholars successfully combine the disciplines.³⁶ The time constraints of my Oxford doctoral program dictated that I focused on the textual material only.

Throughout the Introduction, I have mentioned that the questions I ask when approaching the primary material are shaped by other fields of study. These include, broadly speaking: a) anthropology and its subfields, namely multispecies studies and perspectivism (also known as the “ontological turn”); and b) sociology and philosophy, with subfields and turns such as the actor-network-theory (ANT). In the rest of this subchapter, I will summarise their contributions to academia as a whole and discuss why and how they influence my understanding of animals in the Vedic texts.

Above all, my attitudes are guided by writings of a relatively newly emergent field known as multispecies studies (alternatively called “multispecies anthropology/ethnography” or “posthumanism”).³⁷ The premise of this field is that human beings never exist in isolation; they always live surrounded and interlinked with many other species. In fact, the lives of all organisms (humans, animals, plants, fungi, and microbes) are inextricably linked to each other. One of the most famous proponents of the field, the anthropologist Anna Tsing, explains this beautifully in her writing, which I will quote here in full, despite its length:

“Making worlds is not limited to humans. We know that beavers reshape streams as they make dams, canals, and lodges; in fact, all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water. Without the ability to make workable living arrangements, species would die out. In the process, each organism changes everyone’s world. Bacteria made our oxygen atmosphere, and plants help maintain it. Plants live on land because fungi made soil by digesting rocks. As these examples suggest, world-making projects can overlap, allowing room for more than one species. Humans, too, have always been involved in multispecies world making. Fire was a tool for early humans not just to cook but also to burn the landscape, encouraging edible bulbs and grasses that attracted animals for hunting. Humans shape multispecies worlds when our living arrangements make room for other species. This is not just a matter of crops, livestock, and pets. Pines, with their associated fungal partners, often flourish in landscapes burned by humans; pines and fungi work together to take advantage of bright open spaces and exposed mineral soils. Humans, pines, and fungi make living arrangements simultaneously for themselves and for others: multispecies worlds.”³⁸

³⁶ E.g. Bose: 2020; or Moreau: 2009; etc.

³⁷ For an introduction in the field, see e.g. Kirksey & Helmreich: 2010. Van Dooren, Kirksey, & Münster: 2016, p. 5, list other disciplines that are sometimes subsumed under the umbrella term “multispecies studies”.

³⁸ Tsing: 2015, p. 22.

As we can see from the passage above, unlike more traditional study of relationships between human and other (usually single) non-human species, multispecies studies focus on multiplicity of perspectives and the agency and entanglements of many forms of life.

Multispecies studies operate on the boundary of nature and culture, not aiming to dissolve each into an amorphous blob, but to show the fuzziness and permeability of their boundary. The work of the French philosopher-sociologist-anthropologist Bruno Latour has been perhaps the most instrumental in exploring the borderline between nature and culture, both within the field of multispecies studies and academia more generally. In his seminal work *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour searches for the underlining meaning of (European) “modernity”, a way of life prompted by the rise of science.³⁹ Latour argues that for many modern thinkers, the core of modern thought lies in the careful distinction between nature and culture. According to Latour, however, these two categories have never been completely divided (or “purified”, as he would call it) as post-Enlightenment thought would have us believe. In fact, this careful division between nature and culture has never existed. The worldly phenomena – whether of sentient beings or things – cannot be bracketed off; they are always essentially a “hybrid” (Latour’s own term) between the two categories.⁴⁰ As Latour writes: “Nature and society are not two distinct poles, but one and the same production of successive states of societies, natures, of collectives.”⁴¹

Although associated primarily with Latour’s philosophical position, the fuzziness of the nature-culture boundary is in no way limited to his writings. It has been challenged by other scholars, most importantly by the works of the philosopher Donna Haraway. Haraway argues that there is a certain “joint kinship” between humans and animals - they exist only in relation to each other.⁴² There are also anthropologists exploring these questions specifically in their research on the Indian subcontinent, such as Nayanika Mathur, Radhika Govindrajana, or the Indologist David Haberman.⁴³ Although their work does not concern ancient Indian thinking, I have found it remarkably influential; I will discuss their work more closely as I go.

³⁹ Latour: 1993. Cf. Pearson: 2017, p. 243.

⁴⁰ As an example early in the book, Latour discusses the practice of reading a contemporary newspaper. Almost all news, he says, combines nature and culture: “On page twelve, the Pope, French bishops, Monsanto, the Fallopian tubes, and Texas fundamentalists gather in a strange cohort around a single contraceptive.” (Latour: 1993, p. 2). The same can be said about the discussions about COVID-19 which involved a virus, bats, pangolins, people, virologists, epidemiologists, and politicians. E.g. Sivasundaram: 2020, Mathur: 2021, etc.

⁴¹ Latour: 1993, p. 139.

⁴² Haraway: 2003, 2008, 2016.

⁴³ Mathur: 2021; Govindrajana: 2018; Haberman: 2013.

The entanglement of the sphere of nature and culture is an aspect that Latour has developed in his later work. Known as the actor-network theory (ANT), this theory proposes that the notion of agency should move from the human sphere to encompass all non-humans as well.⁴⁴ As one commentator summarises: “‘*Any thing*’ that makes a difference to other actors (intentionally or not) can be considered an agent,”⁴⁵ with the *thing* being any non-human entity – microbe, animal, a piece of technology. What signals that non-human entities exercise agency is not their ontology or form but their relationships to other actors.⁴⁶ Together, these relationships create a “network” that spreads between all of the individual actors.

To a small extent, my work is influenced by the so-called “ontological turn” or “perspectivism”, a scholarly turn developed within anthropology. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the standard bearer of the “ontological turn”, also tries to unsettle the dichotomy between nature and culture in his writing, based on field research in Amazonia.⁴⁷ Viveiros de Castro and his followers contend that, while classical anthropology imagines one world and many cultures, there is rather a multiplicity of worlds. The experiences that indigenous populations have of the non-human world constitute what the ontological turn calls “radical alterity”: a complete difference in the ontology of the world. Due to this radical alterity, it is essentially impossible to understand the ontology of another culture. Though this position causes certain philosophical problems, it allows one to explore non-human ways of life and to “embrace the limits of human knowledge”, as David Graeber puts it in his critical piece on the method as such.⁴⁸ Some scholars within this field, such as Eduardo Kohn, even propose that animals and other non-humans have, in fact, their own ontologies and ways of understanding the world; this has interesting implications for the ways in which Vedic prose describes the cognitive capacities of *paśu*, as we will see in chapter § 3.⁴⁹

Why do these theories matter to the present work, which is devoted to the study of ancient texts and carried out by relatively conservative textual-historical methods? Some of the theoretical points, I believe, provide a useful backdrop to the notions found in the textual data.⁵⁰ They make us notice certain patterns and features of the texts that could be otherwise dismissed as expressions of

⁴⁴ Latour: 2007. The methodology is succinctly described by Sayes: 2014.

⁴⁵ Pearson: 2017, p. 244.

⁴⁶ Sayes: 2014, p. 144, argues that the term “agency” is almost empty of meaning for the ANT. Despite that, he agrees that the ANT provides a useful starting point for the study of complex relationships between humans and non-humans.

⁴⁷ Viveiros de Castro: 2004. See also others, such as Kohn: 2013, and Descola: 2014.

⁴⁸ Graeber: 2015, p. 22. On the problems of “radical alterity” of native knowledge, see Govindarajan: 2018, p. 12-13.

⁴⁹ Kohn: 2013. Cf. the discussion in Tsing: 2015, p. 292, n. 7.

⁵⁰ Shaw: 2016, applies it in a similar way to the archaeologies of early Buddhist and Hindu India.

“primitive thought” (as they were regarded by Jan Gonda) or “twaddling of idiots” (a charming description from Friedrich Max Müller).⁵¹

For example, the primary texts often equate people with their domestic livestock (*paśu*); as I will argue in what follows, there are multiple mythical accounts of domestic animals and people looking alike, carrying out similar tasks, sharing characteristic features, and so on. This might have been shrugged off by some earlier scholars as an expression of “animism” or “anthropomorphism”.⁵² The apparatus of the fields such as multispecies studies, however, allows us to explore the matter with an appropriate language, regardless whether we choose to call this closeness between domestic animals and people a “joint kinship” (a term coined by Donna Haraway), “relatedness” (a phrase used by Radhika Govindrajan), or “ontological proximity” (a term which I prefer myself, for reasons explained in chapter § 4).

There are several other examples. The boundary between nature and culture or human and non-human is a common denominator of the theories that I briefly summarised above. Reading them, I have realised that Vedic literature, too, straddles the nature-culture boundary. The key question of this thesis – Is the human a domestic animal, and how? – is indeed an issue of this rank. In a similar way, the question of different ontologies, raised by the “ontological turn”, allows us to account for mismatches between our contemporary views and the primary texts, without disrespectfully labelling them as work of “idiots” or “primitives”. In conclusion, this particular theoretical background allows us to pose creative questions that were not previously asked by Western Indologists: questions such as whether the human is a domestic animal, whether Vedic animals are considered to exercise agency, or what their ontological status is. The methods to explore these questions can remain philological; it is the way of asking that changes.

⁵¹ Gonda: 1960, p. 177. For Max-Müller’s quote, see Witzel: 1979.

⁵² This is discussed beautifully by David Haberman in his book on tree worship in contemporary India; see Haberman: 2013, chapter 1, called “Root Issues”.

§ 1.3 PASTORALISM, AGRICULTURE, AND ANIMAL KNOWLEDGE IN VEDIC INDIA

The aim of this section is to outline the socioeconomic context of Vedic literature, to explain the prevalent modes of production, and summarise some general facts about animals in the region.

At the time of the composition of the earliest poetry of the ṚV (ca. 1400-1000 BCE),⁵³ the Indo-Aryans lived as a semi-pastoralist society in the rich alluvial plains of the north-west of the Indian subcontinent. They were breeding, raising, and managing domesticated ungulates, especially cattle, goats, sheep, horses, and other livestock such as domesticated, or semi-domesticated water buffaloes and camels. They inherited this lifestyle from their Indo-Iranian ancestors. The floral and faunal remains suggest, however, that animal domestication and pastoralism had been established in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent prior to the Indo-Aryans. The first records of animal husbandry in South Asia are from an archaeological site called Mehrgarh, in eastern Pakistani Balochistan, from ca. sixth millennium BCE.⁵⁴ It is unclear how the transformation from hunting-gathering to pastoralism came about in the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Most likely, the process was very complex and involved various mixes of “interaction between peoples, [...] population replacement resulting from immigration, [and] societal transformation” during the development of herding and farming and the coming of urbanism.⁵⁵ Some domestic species, such as sheep or zebu cattle, might have been domesticated locally, some perhaps spread from western Asia, brought by migrating pastoralist cultures, including the Indo-Aryans, or by trade.⁵⁶ Certainly, by the time of the Harappan civilisation, pastoralism was an established way of life that did not disappear with the arrival of the Indo-Aryans.⁵⁷

As noted above, the Vedic people are usually called semi-pastoralist. The combination of pastoralism with other modes of production is not specific to the Indo-Aryans. The archaeologist Ajita Patel notes that in the South Asian context, anybody keeping any number and kind of domestic animals is called a pastoralist, and that “pastoral practices can be combined with one or more of hunting, gathering, cultivation, and plant agriculture.”⁵⁸ In the case of the Indo-Aryans, pastoralism was combined with seasonal agriculture in two modes of life. A sedentary phase (*kṣema*, literally “settlement”) during which the Indo-Aryans not only grazed their livestock but also cultivated grains

⁵³ On the dating of the ṚV, see ṚV trl Jamison & Brereton, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Meadow: 1996.

⁵⁵ Patel: 2009, p. 174.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

⁵⁷ On the contrary, pastoralism, and in particular horse husbandry, was probably one of the reasons for the wide spread of the Indo-Iranians in early-to-mid second millennium BC, as the authors of the new study on genetics of the domesticated horse suggest. See Librado et al.: 2021.

⁵⁸ Patel: 2009, p. 174.

(*dhānā*), especially barley (*yava*), was followed by a period of migration (*yoga*, literally “hitching up [the carriages]”)⁵⁹ when they would bring the cattle to new pastures. The cycles of settlement and nomadic lifestyle coincided with the seasons and therefore with the pastoral and agricultural cycles. According to Jamison and Brereton, the constant migration for better pastures most likely “contributed to the movement of the Indo-Aryans farther east and deeper into South Asia,”⁶⁰ from present-day Afghanistan towards the Gangetic basin. The migratory period was also a time of war and raids, during which the Vedic people competed with their neighbours for land and resources.

Another effect of the semi-nomadic lifestyle was the lack of permanent settlements. As Tatiana Elizarenkova explains in her lecture *The World of Things According to the Data of the Ṛgveda*, the people of the Ṛgvedic period lived predominantly on wheels, surrounded by their herds.⁶¹ The moveable carriage was the epicentre of the nomadic lifestyle (as Elizarenkova says, it was “regarded as a ‘small’ house, ‘small’ homeland, where all was intimately connected with man”),⁶² whereas the immovable house was only a temporary arrangement during the *kṣema* period which did not last longer than half a year, just enough for the barley to be sowed and harvested. Owing to the lack of enduring settlements and structures, the correlation between textual and archaeological data about the people who composed Ṛgvedic poetry has remained tentative.⁶³

I have already noted that the Vedic people engaged in agriculture during the sedentary *kṣema*. According to Gyula Wojtilla, during the Ṛgvedic period, agriculture was of lesser importance than animal husbandry, although its income was not negligible.⁶⁴ The ṚV itself shows an extensive amount of agricultural terminology. There are words for plough (*lāṅgala*, *sīra*), furrow (*sītā*), plowman (*kīnāśa*), and many others, and descriptions of scattering seeds or gathering fruits. As Brereton and Jamison note, a number of these technical terms do not have Indo-European etymologies which suggest that the Indo-Aryans must have been in contact with indigenous populations who depended more on agriculture, be it in the areas of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex or in South Asia.⁶⁵ Barley, so-called “field grain”, *yava*, is the grain most mentioned by the ṚV, and the

⁵⁹ This is a classical interpretation of Louis Renou: 1953, p. 177–178. Cf. Proferes: 2007. Marianna Ferrara (2020, p. 15) has recently interpreted the word slightly differently, suggesting that “the different uses of the term *yóga* in the early layers of the *Ṛgveda*, should be principally understood in the context of the warfare. The Ṛgvedic *yóga* was meant to indicate the passage from the moment of ‘recruitment’ before the battle to the moment of the fight, when scattered forces assemble together against ‘the other’. The moment of the *yóga* might have been a recurrent moment in the life of the migrant communities of ancient India.”

⁶⁰ Jamison & Brereton: 2020, p. 32.

⁶¹ Elizarenkova: 1995, ch. 1.

⁶² Ibid., p. 5.

⁶³ On the relationship of Vedic texts and archaeological evidence, see Witzel: 1989, p. 133–144.

⁶⁴ Wojtilla: 2003, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Brereton and Jamison: 2020, p. 31.

archaeological data suggest that it was widespread in the Indian subcontinent from the sixth millennium BCE, thus preceding the Indo-Aryans.⁶⁶ Rice (*vrihi*), the grain that is nowadays strongly associated with Indian agriculture and cuisine, is famously missing from the earliest Vedic poetry and occurs only from the AV onwards.⁶⁷ Subsequently, it became a staple not only as a means of subsistence, but also as a prominent ritual offering. Other grains which dominated later Indian agriculture, such as wheat and millet (*śyāmāka*) were possibly unknown to the Indo-Aryans until the time of the Vedic prose. Notwithstanding the abundance of agricultural imagery, the poetry of the ṚV and the later Vedic texts is dominated by pastoral metaphors and *topoi* which suggest the foremost place of pastoralism in the early Vedic conceptual universe. Due to their prime position in the pastoral economy, cattle are ubiquitous in Vedic literature, as Jamison and Brereton state.⁶⁸

By the time of the later Vedic prose (ca. 1000-500 BCE), the Indo-Aryans had undergone a period of significant transition. Geographically, the Vedic tribes migrated further east, from the Punjab towards the Gangetic Basin. On a socio-cultural level, we can speak of a transition from the Bronze to Iron Age and from semi-nomadic pastoralism to sedentism. These processes must have taken several centuries; due to the nature of our textual sources, we might only speculate on the lengths of time. The turn to sedentism meant a new practice of static settlement and with it, the transition from a single annual harvest of barley during the *kṣema* period to adoption of new staple grains (rice, millet, and wheat) and multiple harvests per year, usually during spring (wheat, grown in winter) and autumn (rice and millet, grown during the summer monsoon).⁶⁹ As Michael Jones argues, the change from pastoralism to sedentism is represented in the ritual and theology of the late Vedic texts, particularly in the first fruit (*āgrayaṇa*) and the fourth-monthly (*caturmāsya*) rites. These were developed around this time “as a systematic adaptation to the multiple staple crops throughout the year”, namely barley, rice, and millet.⁷⁰ In this adaptation of new agricultural events as focal points of newly developed ritual practices, we can see the widening of the Vedic conceptual universe, that is, the fact that new concepts (regular seasonal harvests of recently adopted grains) were transposed onto the Vedic ritual structure suggests that along with the changes in agricultural practices, the period of sedentism must have

⁶⁶ Wojtilla: 2003, p. 39, quotes Meadow: 1993, p. 63. On the comparative linguistics of barley, see Watkins: 1995, p. 47-9.

⁶⁷ RV trl Brereton and Jamison, p. 6; Witzel: 1989, p. 140-144; Wojtilla: 2003, p. 43. Wojtilla also notes that unlike the Indo-Aryans, the proto-Munda speakers apparently “knew rice, two or three kinds of millet, at least three species of legumes but it is not sure whether these were domesticated plants [...]” See *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶⁸ Brereton and Jamison: 2020, p. 123, 170.

⁶⁹ Jones: 2017, p. 86-7. Jones uses the terms *rabi* and *kharif* for the spring and autumn harvests respectively, utilising a modern Hindi terminology which has its basis in Arabic loanwords from Mughal era.

⁷⁰ Jones: 2017, p. 114.

brought a change in pastoral practices and animal care. When we compare the ṚV with the later Vedic texts, it is clear that the approach to animals has changed. It was already noted that the ṚV poetry abounds in domestic animals, especially cattle. They are central to Ṛgvedic imagery: female cows are associated with an array of things of female grammatical gender, such as natural phenomena (e.g. rays, water, earth), various ritual features, or poetry.⁷¹ Bulls, buffaloes, and horses symbolise male strength and virility. Other farm animals such as sheep and goats are also represented. Moreover, one even finds examples of domestic animals aside from livestock, such as dogs (e.g., Indra's companion Saramā) or animals that live around people: mice, frogs, or various insects (cf. ṚV 1.191.4).

Despite this, Ṛgvedic poetry does not tell us much about wild animals, especially wild beasts. Lions are mentioned a handful of times, tigers not at all, and elephants start to make an appearance only in the newer books of the ṚV. Wolves and bears, the animals inherited from Indo-European poetic imagery but native only to the highest regions of the Indian subcontinent, are frequently mentioned in the time of the ṚV. Already in the AV, however, they are receding from the Vedic symbolic universe, possibly because they stopped being an imminent threat to the Vedic people and their livestock. Notably, birds stand apart from wild mammals; Vedic literature classifies them separately. Their attestation is common to all stages of Vedic literature, from *cakravāka* ducks and owls to birds of prey such as vultures or falcons.

From the AV onwards, the zoology of the Vedic poetry widens, and we start to see the appearance of more and more species, especially wild mammals. The Vedic prose mentions wild animals often, as we will discuss in chapter § 2.2. This “sudden” expansion of Vedic animal knowledge is peculiar. Why did the Vedic poets and ritualists start noticing new animal species, and when?

There have been a few theories regarding the first attestations of certain animals. Most frequently, the widening of Vedic animal knowledge is ascribed to the gradual trickling of Vedic people first to the northwest of the subcontinent, and then to the lowlands, south and east from the Punjab, where they started encountering local animal species on a more regular basis.

The singular evidence of Vedic texts is, nevertheless, insufficient. The absence of a certain animal in Vedic literature – which is well-known to be narrow and highly selective in its topics – is not enough to argue that the people never encountered it. The tiger (*Panthera tigris*), one of the most

⁷¹ Summarised by Jamison & Brereton: 2020, p. 123: “Thus, any cow encountered in the Ṛgveda could in fact be just a cow: real cows are among the most highly prized goods we seek from gods and human patrons. But she also has a high probability of standing in for something else, in the realm of nature, ritual, or mythology. And in many, many passages, more than one of the cow's values will be in play. The audience of the Ṛgveda would be well aware of the cow's boundary crossing capabilities and flexible enough to interpret each cow in the appropriate context.”

iconic animals living in the Indian subcontinent, is a good example of this.⁷² Now confined to only a handful of nature reserves due to poaching, habitat loss, and decline in prey, tigers once roamed most of the forested areas of the Indian subcontinent, except for Sri Lanka. Despite its characteristic striped appearance, domination in the wilderness, and its symbolic importance throughout the history of India, this animal is famously not mentioned in the ṚV, and first appears only in the AV.⁷³ This absence made scholars deduce that the bulk of the ṚV must have been composed before the Indo-Aryans arrived in the Indian subcontinent where they were introduced to domesticated rice and wild animals such as the tiger and leopard.⁷⁴ Yet archaeological and paleozoological data show that the Indo-Iranians could easily have encountered tigers in the wild even before accessing India.⁷⁵ Allan Gilbert notes that “the Caspian tiger (*Panthera tigris virgata*) occupied riverine jungles of northern Iran and Afghanistan until hunting and habitat reduction caused their local demise only about half a century ago”.⁷⁶ Since the habitat of the Caspian tiger reached from eastern Turkey to Xinjiang, it is theoretically possible for the Indo-Aryans to have encountered them.⁷⁷ The ṚV, on top of that, mentions the lion (*Panthera leo persica*) multiple times, an animal with a very similar form and roughly the same habitat as the tiger's, although the lion prefers drier areas. Its symbolic value in later Sanskrit literature is largely analogous to the tiger. The presence of the lion and the lack of the tiger in the ṚV could have been influenced by a cultural, religious, or symbolical norm rather than by an early or late encounter in South Asia.⁷⁸

⁷² On this topic, see also Moreau: 2007.

⁷³ In contrast, as many as sixteen seals clearly depicting tigers with their characteristic stripes have been found, including the famous “Proto-Śiva” seal. Moreover, the tiger seems to be the only felid represented on the Indus Valley seals. See Mahadevan: 1977, p. 793.

⁷⁴ In one of his earlier papers on the localisations of Vedic schools, Michael Witzel used this fact as one of the criteria for geographically localising the ṚV stating plainly that “it is also important to note that the tiger and rice are still unknown to the ṚV [*sic*] [...]”. See Witzel: 1987, p. 176. This observation has been made as early as 1890 by Otto Schrader, but it was Witzel's authoritative paper which gave the idea a lot of scholarly traction.

⁷⁵ This is especially the case if we accept the theory of Hiebert and Lamberg-Karlovsky that the oasis culture of the so-called Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) can be correlated with the territory of the early Indo-Iranian speakers before their movement into Iran and South Asia. Hiebert and Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1992. See also Hiebert in Erdosy: 1995a, p. 192-205; and Kuz'mina: 2007, especially p. 267-288.

⁷⁶ Gilbert: 2002, p. 28.

⁷⁷ Tigers are even mentioned in lists of animals in the Hittite lexica from Anatolia. Collins: 2002, p. 237.

⁷⁸ Another possibility of the absence of the tiger in the early Vedic poetry is that it might be due to terminology. Neither the word *vyāghra* nor *śārdūla*, used for the tiger in the Classical language, come up until the AV and YV respectively. Witzel: 2001, p. 51, argues that both of these have “clear, non-IE local origins” and must have been introduced by immigrating speakers of Indo-Aryan when they first arrived in the Greater Punjab. Lions are the only big cats mentioned by the ṚV. Romila Thapar suggests that perhaps, at this stage of the language, the words used for a lion “could have indicated a lion, panther, or leopard”, and perhaps possibly even a tiger. Thapar: 2004, p. 157. Cf. Mathur: 2021, p. 31, who argues that “the Hindi language doesn't distinguish between leopard, tiger, and lion by referring to all three as *bagh*.”

In one of the few secondary sources on animals in Vedic India, the paper *The Function of Animals in the Rigveda*, Stephanie Jamison argues that the movement of Vedic people might not be the only possible reason for the change.⁷⁹ Jamison states that the RV poetry tends to concentrate on the domesticated sphere, as if the R̥gvedic poets and their audiences were afraid of the wilderness. According to Jamison, the imagination of R̥gvedic poets “refuses to go beyond the limits of their (temporary) settlements, leaving a blank beyond the transitional space where the smaller and less dangerous wild animals (like frogs) were found.”⁸⁰

Further on, Jamison speculates that the reason behind the textual change between early and later Vedic imagery might not only be the geographical relocation and increasing familiarity with the local ecosystems, mentioned above, but also “the increasing prominence of the kṣatriya, indeed royal, ritual, and of the figure of the king in the AV and in the Middle Vedic Sources”, and its connection with the rise of the Kuru state and its theology.⁸¹ The development of the Kuru state brought about a wide socio-religious transformation, as is seen for example in the introduction of the pompous regal rituals of *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha* which widely use wild animal symbolism.

Due to the lack of historic data available to us, it is hard to speculate which came first and influenced the symbolism of the later Vedic texts more: the Kuru state and its transformed Vedic ritualism, or the local animals and new environment that the Indo-Aryans met on the way. I agree with Jamison that the “kṣatriyasation” of Vedic society and ritual, to use Hermann Kulke’s term, could have been an important factor in the development of the wild animal symbolism. Despite that, I do not think we can take it as a singular cause of the process of recognition of new animal species in literature, or of including new metaphorical material into the already quite solid symbolic canon. In fact, I believe that there is no *single* cause but many *entangled* factors that influenced the development of Vedic animal knowledge.

The movement of the Indo-Aryans towards the centre of the Indian subcontinent is without a doubt a significant factor. I suggest, however, that it is not the only or even the most significant one – the change of agricultural practices and modes of subsistence described above are of a similar importance. Permanent settlements subsisting on two seasonal harvests, in opposition to almost-constant migration, must have brought about a change in the way the later Vedic people tended to their animals. With the permanent settlement came the permanent pastoral structures and, in turn,

⁷⁹ Jamison: 2009b.

⁸⁰ Jamison: 2009b, p. 203. Jamison bases her understanding on an examination of the RV hymn 10.146, addressed to the Araṇyāni, the “Lady of the Wilderness”. I will describe this hymn in detail in § 2.3.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 209-10. On the development of the Kuru state, see Witzel: 1997.

less worry about livestock being constantly jeopardised by wild beasts. Accompanying a transformation of everyday care for their main source of livelihood could have come a change in cosmology. Michael Jones argues that along with the introduction of sedentism, new agriculture rituals were developed. I suggest that the process of “kṣatriyasation” and the rise of the Kuru-Pañcāla state, usually understood from the perspective of the political elites reforming the Vedic theology, could have gone hand in hand with the change of the socio-economic situation. The *śrauta* rites of the classical Vedic ritual system, such as the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha* would be more or less “analogous” to the newly developed agricultural rituals – the latter reacting to the newly adopted agricultural production, the former to the number of wild animals seen in the environment.⁸² I suggest that the turn to sedentism is also noticeable in two cases. First, in the reinterpretation of hunting in the time of the Brāhmaṇa prose, when hunting became a sport of men of certain classes rather than a necessity, carried out on top of pastoralist practices. I explore this topic in detail in chapter § 2.2. Second, the Brāhmaṇa myths on the proximity of people and domestic animals might be equally anchored in the new, fully sedentary pastoral way of life. I discuss these in chapters § 3 and § 4.

Jamison’s interpretation, suggesting that wild animals were not at first included due to their unfamiliarity, otherness, and danger, is tempting. Yet thinking about it in wider context, I am reluctant to accept it without hesitation. I am wondering whether the fact that wild animals are rarely mentioned could be a question of textual conventions, rather than fear. I do not deny that people fear wild animals – that is tangible even today: for example, when the possibility of the reintroduction of wolves in Scotland is debated. Yet, this primal fear does not prevent other literatures of the ancient world from mentioning wild creatures. Moreover, Ṛgvedic poetry rarely mentions the facts of everyday life, or even the details of the lives of non-Brahmins or non-Aryan inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. “[The Vedas],” writes Ronan Moreau, “are not intended to describe the human environment”.⁸³ I wonder whether in the eyes of the Indo-Aryans, wild animals were not considered to be symbolically worthy because they were associated with the local, non-Aryan population, or with non-Vedic rituals. Perhaps only as the Indo-Aryans gradually assimilated, did they begin to incorporate the local fauna into their symbolic canon. As with the previous factors, there is insufficient evidence for this suggestion. I believe, however, that this explains some peculiarities about the Vedic choices of animal symbolism. The tiger is perhaps a fitting example of this theory: it was widely

⁸² Unfortunately, in comparison with South India, the Iron Age and Early Historic sites in the north of the subcontinent do not offer much of faunal reporting, especially when it comes to wild animals. It is, therefore, extremely difficult to verify these propositions. Thanks to Kelly Wilcox of the University of Pennsylvania for this information. E-mail communication, 30 October 2020.

⁸³ Moreau: 2007, p. 417.

pictured within the visual canon of the Indus Valley Civilisation and its original habitat encompassed that of the early Indo-Aryans. Their early literature, however, never mentions it. If this was from fear, we would not expect the Indo-Aryans to mention any carnivorous beasts at all. Nevertheless, the ṚV speaks of lions and dangerous carnivorous animals inherited from the Indo-European symbolic repertoire.

Perhaps the choice of animals in Vedic texts was influenced by the Indo-European, or Indo-Iranian legacy. On the other side of the mountains, in Iran, animal species were categorised as “beneficial” or “malevolent”. The beneficial ones were domestic, sacrificable, and edible species, whereas the malevolent (YAv *xrafstra*) were beings such as frogs, scorpions, and various kinds of insects.⁸⁴ I am aware that this grouping is attested in the much later *Bundahišn*, and is, therefore, most likely ascribed to the dualistic character of Zoroastrianism. Nevertheless, looking at the animals that the ṚV mentions, I cannot help but think that there is a cosmology, perhaps similar to the Iranian one, in the background: only the “symbolically potent” animals have their place in the highly elite, ritualistic poetry of the ṚV.

Perhaps it was all these factors combined, or perhaps none of them: whatever made the Vedic poets mention particular animal species in the times after the ṚV, it seems highly likely that there was not a sudden, *singular* cause.

⁸⁴ Moazami: 2005, p. 301ff. For more discussion on the Iranian animals, see § 2.1.1 and § 2.2.1.

§ 1.4 THE CONVENTIONS

Throughout the thesis, I adhere to following conventions. I quote transliterated Sanskrit texts using the conventions of the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST). When quoting Avestan sources, I follow Karl Hoffmann's orthography.⁸⁵ Comparative material in other Indo-European languages, such as Ancient Greek, is transliterated into Roman script following the standard conventions of the respective discipline. If a Vedic text retained the accent, I mark it following the standard presentation. In the case of the Ṛgveda Saṃhitā, I always use the metrically restored text of Van Nooten and Holland, even though I acknowledge that some scholars consider its usage problematic.⁸⁶ When quoting the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, I am adhering to the *bhāṣika* accentuation system which marks only the *udātta* syllable instead of reconstructing the full accent.⁸⁷

Long passages of primary texts in Sanskrit or other Indo-European languages are indented, in a smaller, italicised font, alongside the translation, and without quotation marks. Curly brackets "{}" are used when a word is emended or when I supply a word from a different *śākhā*; an explanation of the emendation or addition is provided in a footnote. An individual Sanskrit word, phrase, or a shorter sentence discussed in the main body of the text and outside of a full passage is generally cited in italics. This excludes the English plural -s, sometimes added to Sanskrit words, which is always written in regular font; for example, "*paśus*". Individual words are cited in stem form and without an accent, unless the accent is specifically commented upon in the argument. Sanskrit and Avestan verbal roots are preceded by a radical sign "√". Technical terms in languages other than English, such as names of rituals or individual ritual specialists, are in italics and are not capitalised.

I am using the standard abbreviations of the names of Vedic texts, for example "RV" for the Ṛgveda Saṃhitā. This is also the case for the Avestan texts, for example "Y." stands for Yasna. All abbreviations are listed separately at the beginning of the thesis, preceding this Introduction. When citing texts of non-Indo-Iranian provenience, I am referring to them by their full title. Titles of primary texts are always capitalised, and in regular font. When citing texts that are traditionally divided into *maṇḍalas*, hymns, verses, *kāṇḍas*, *ādhyāyas*, etc., or their Avestan counterparts, I have given a series of Arabic numbers, separated by a period beginning with the largest division and terminating with the smallest. For example, ŚBM 2.5.3.5 indicates the fifth verse of the third *brāhmaṇa*, "exposition", of the fifth *ādhyāya*, "chapter", of the second *kāṇḍa*, "book" of the Mādhyamīna recension of the Śatapatha

⁸⁵ Hoffmann: 1971.

⁸⁶ Van Nooten and Holland: 1994. On the problems, see Smith: 2006, p. 329.

⁸⁷ For more details on this system of accent, see Cardona: 1993.

Brāhmaṇa. In case of the ṚV, unlike the convention, I do not use the Roman numerals for the numbering of the *maṇḍalas*.

I generally use existing English translations, unless otherwise stated. Due to space constraints, I note the used translation in a footnote only at the first appearance of a primary text. References to the translations are given in footnotes, in an abbreviated form, for example “ṚV trl Brereton and Jamison” indicates the translation of the Ṛgveda Saṃhitā by Joel Brereton and Stephanie Jamison. A list of all translations used is found in the Bibliography. Translations of full passages are quoted indented, in a smaller font, alongside the original text, and without quotation marks. If the author of the published translation supplies a word, I mark it with square brackets “[]”. If I amend the published translation myself, I mark this with curly brackets “{ }” and note this in a footnote. In certain cases, I specify the subject or vocative of the passage; I mark this with curly brackets and equals sign “{= }”. Usually, I do not note this in a footnote. In translations, parentheses “()” are used to indicate which specific Sanskrit word is translated. The slash “/” marks an end of a metrical unit.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, preceded by an Introduction and followed by a Conclusion. The chapters are marked by a silcrow “§” and a Roman numeral starting with the Introduction under § 1 and finishing with the Bibliography under § 6. The chapters are further divided into subchapters and sections, each marked by a Roman numeral: for instance, this subchapter is marked § 1.4. A full list of chapters, subchapters, and sections is presented in the Table of Contents.

Finally, when writing impersonally about human beings, I often use the pronoun “he/him/his”. Whilst I would prefer to use the singular they, I acknowledge the social reality of the Vedic texts that I research. The texts were composed by *ārya* ritualists for male *ārya* ritualists themselves and although women took part in the rituals, their role was only marginal.⁸⁸ In that sense, our sources themselves refer to an indefinite person of any gender with the masculine, and I reluctantly follow their lead.

⁸⁸ On women’s role in Vedic ritual, see Jamison: 1996.

§ 2 Animal Terminology in Vedic Literature

“Beings do not preexist their relatings.”

– Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*⁸⁹

At the heart of this dissertation lies a simple axiom: the human being, according to Vedic literature, is classified as a *paśu*, a domestic animal. To understand this postulate, however, we have to carefully dissect and define it. What is the *paśu*, and what is the human being? Are there any other animals that are not *paśu*, and if so, how do they differ from each other? How do they relate? Is there a general word for an “animal” in Vedic Sanskrit? This chapter aims to explore these questions, except for the enquiry on the human nature which is the focus of the following chapter § 3.

Although the Introduction to my thesis has promised the influence of Multispecies Studies, this chapter is slightly more conservative in its approach and framing. Its aim is to build a stable base for a further discussion by defining the meaning of several animal terms: *paśu*, *mṛga*, and the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āraṇya*. The methods of this chapter cannot deny its philological pedigree: it is a thorough study of the individual terms in the various genres of Vedic literature, with the goal to reconstruct the histories of the semantics of the terms.

In what follows, I dedicate a long subchapter to each of the terms: *paśu* (subchapter § 2.1), *mṛga* (subchapter § 2.2), and *grāmya/āraṇya paśu* (subchapter § 2.3). In all the chapters, I proceed chronologically: I first explore Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Iranian predecessors of the terms, followed by the oldest Vedic sources, the Ṛgveda, the Atharvaveda and the Yajurvedic Saṃhitās, before discussing the Brāhmaṇa prose. I aim to engage with the respective genres of the literature on their own terms, if possible.

⁸⁹ Haraway: 2003, p. 6.

Much of the scholarship in Vedic studies usually takes a synchronic perspective, looking in detail at a specific text. In this thesis, I am proposing a broader approach. In my opinion, if we read the various strata of the corpus diachronically, almost with a *longue durée* approach, they can reveal a lot about the nature of human-animal relationships and their evolution.⁹⁰ This attitude to reading the Vedic corpus does not disregard the findings of synchronic philology but incorporates them to create a fuller idea.

Why bother with a long-winded study of animal terminology, you might ask? After all, with the advances of Animal and Multispecies Studies, the study of animal representations (terminology as well as imagery, visual material, narratives, etc.) has been often criticised because it “has come with the assumption that all that animal history can ever do is to rephrase what other humans in different times have thought of animals without being able to look at the animal beyond its symbolic and anthropomorphized self.”⁹¹ Nevertheless, there are a couple of reasons why I think a study of the representation of animals and animal terminology in particular is worthwhile. First, although it might be viewed as an intellectual “trap”, as the editors of the *Handbook of Historical Animal Studies* suggest,⁹² it can be used as a starting point for research encompassing animals “as subjects, actors, and beings in their own right”.⁹³ Furthermore, Vedic literature is, by and large, our only definite access point to the Vedic thought; material remains that can be definitely identified with the people of our texts are completely absent. Without solid zooarchaeological data, our study must be anchored in the texts, and to understand them, we need to understand the terminology they employ.

As well as with terminology, this chapter deals with categorisation of animals, in particular the classification strategies pertaining to the domestic species. “Categorisation is not a matter to be taken lightly”, writes George Lakoff in his seminal book on categorisation, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*.⁹⁴ Lakoff famously argues that “without the ability to categorize, we couldn’t function at all, either in the physical world or in our social and intellectual lives.”⁹⁵ Every human activity is governed by an automatic and unconscious categorisation, be it a relatively simple motor activity (such as hammering or writing) or a complex mental task (such as discerning human speech sounds and making sense of them). If we understand how categories work, Lakoff argues, we will understand what makes us human.

⁹⁰ As we will see in § 2.2 on *mrga*, diachronic reading of the primary material can change the picture considerably and explain the wider changes in terminology.

⁹¹ Krebber et al.: 2021, p. 8.

⁹² Ibid., p. 9.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁴ Lakoff: 1987, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

Since the goal of this thesis is, after all, to understand what it means that the human is categorised as a *paśu*, thinking in terms of categories is of the utmost importance. Whilst I do not claim that the exploration of Vedic animal categories will make us understand what makes us the human nature in general, as Lakoff promises, it will certainly situate us in our discussion of the Vedic categorisation of humans.

In my thinking about categories, I am inspired by past scholarship, especially by Brian K. Smith's monograph, *Classifying the Universe*.⁹⁶ Smith's work was to some degree an application of George Lakoff's principles to the area of Vedic literature. He argued that the organisational framework that governs all Vedic thinking is the concept of *varṇa* (literally "colour", but Smith understands it in the sense of "characteristic" or "class"). The notion of *varṇa* is best known from its application to the social classes (i.e. the hierarchy of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras) but it is equally related to other spheres of life, including animal taxonomy. Smith argues that the concept is rooted in and legitimated by various cosmological narratives, found throughout the Vedic corpus.⁹⁷

Smith's approach to animals was, aside from his Lakoffian tendencies, influenced by a famous notion of the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who argued that the indigenous people he studied chose particular animals as their totemic symbols not because they were tasty or easy to hunt but because they were "good to think with".⁹⁸ They had a characteristic trait that made them a useful tool for the categorisation of other phenomena, and especially for the categorisation of human society. Based on this theoretical approach, Smith suggested that when Vedic people thought about animals, or gods for that matter, they usually thought about themselves, about their own society, institutions, and activities.⁹⁹ "Human beings," Smith says, "are always implicated in their own classificatory schemes."¹⁰⁰

Unlike Smith, I am not interested in what he calls the "supercategory", that is the *varṇa* principle which orders the whole Vedic cosmos, in this thesis, and I will not treat it at all in the following pages. Equally, I am not discussing the discourse of power adjacent to the *varṇa* principle. Furthermore, I am wary of generalising non-human animals as pure representations of human ideas and institutions. I hope to show in this thesis that there was more to animals in the Veda than that – even though our knowledge of human-animal encounters in Vedic India is based predominantly on anthropogenic material.

⁹⁶ Smith: 1994.

⁹⁷ For examples, see Smith: 1989.

⁹⁸ Lévi-Strauss: 1963, p. 89.

⁹⁹ Smith: 1994, p. 241.

¹⁰⁰ Smith: 1994, p. 4.

I will come back to the question of classification in the conclusion of this chapter, in § 2.4. Before I proceed with the discussion on the respective terms, however, let me finish this initial section by very briefly answering one of the questions with which I started off this section. Is there a general word for an “animal” in Vedic Sanskrit? Although we can easily infer that Vedic literature knows about sentient non-human beings, it seems to lack a single general, emic category, used as an umbrella for the mass of living creatures, including or excluding humans. The only term partially akin to the English word “animal” might be the term *paśu* in some of its later usages, especially in the Vedic prose texts. As we will see in what follows, different categories of non-human animals have different symbolic characteristics and cannot be easily subsumed under a single heading.

§ 2.1 PAŚU

Paśu is perhaps the most common word describing non-human animals in the Vedic literature. A quick search in the multiple volumes of the *VPAK*, the concordance of Vedic texts, yields hundreds of occurrences of the term. From the sheer volume, we might conclude that *paśu* might be a general term for any non-human living creature, perhaps synonymic with the English “animal”, but as we will see shortly, the situation is more complicated. In this chapter, I will argue that although the oldest meaning of the word *paśu* is “domestic animal, or livestock”, it evolves into a more general term, encompassing other species, in the later strata of Vedic literature. It is, nonetheless, usually applied to mammals only, and never encompasses all non-human animals (such as reptiles or insects).

§ 2.1.1 THE INDO-EUROPEAN PAŚU

There is an abundance of terms for animals in Indo-European: words for creatures small and large, wild and domesticated, quadrupeds and bipeds, names of specific animals and whole groups. *Paśu* is one of these well-attested terms, denoting domestic livestock at its earliest history. In its Indo-European past, the proposed form **peku*, must have had a wider meaning of “movable personal possession” (attested in Latin *pecus*, “cattle”, Old English *feoh*, “livestock, property”, or Lithuanian *pekus*).¹⁰¹ According to Émile Benveniste, the word is irreducible to any PIE verbal root, in particular to **√pek̑*, “to shear”, frequently suggested as the etymology of the word by Benveniste’s predecessors. The secondary literature prior to Benveniste often argued that the **peku* signifies “livestock”. Benveniste, however, convincingly showed that this meaning is only secondary:

“That this [i.e. movable personal] possession may in fact take the form of live-stock, is a separate datum, which concerns social structure and the forms of production. It is only in virtue of this frequent association between the term **peku* [sic]¹⁰² and the material reality of animal husbandry that, by a generalization which took place outside the class of producers **peku* came to mean ‘live-stock’ (the first specialization), and specifically ‘small live-stock’ (the second specialization), and finally ‘sheep’ (the third and last specialization). But intrinsically *peku* [sic] does not designate either the flock or any animal species.”¹⁰³

In Indo-European cosmology, personal possessions are distinguished as either immovable (such as a house, similarly to French *immeubles*), or movable (i.e. smaller, transportable personal possessions,

¹⁰¹ Mallory and Adams: 2006, p. 136.

¹⁰² **peku* without the symbol “*k̑*”, representing the PIE palatovelar, is Benveniste’s spelling. In one case, marked with my “sic”, Benveniste omits the asterisk.

¹⁰³ Benveniste: 1973, p. 50. Cf. Watkins: 1979, p. 270ff.

such as in French *meubles*).¹⁰⁴ Due to the predominantly pastoral forms of production amongst the Indo-Iranians, the general term **peku* underwent an early specialisation to mean “livestock”, attested in Vedic as *paśu*, “livestock” and in Avestan as *pasu* (in the phrase *pasu vīra*, “beast and men”) or *pasuka*, “domestic animal”. In Vedic, the *paśus* are once (RV 3.62.14) said to be twofold, consisting of bipeds, i.e. people, and quadrupeds, i.e. non-human livestock.¹⁰⁵ The division of creatures into bipeds and quadrupeds is relatively common in the RV but it seems that it is associated specifically with the category *paśu* only in this case. In other passages, the governing nouns are different, for example *jīva*, “living thing” (RV 4.51.5), or *bhūman*, “creation” (RV 6.71.2). This twofold distinction is not specific to Vedic but occurs in many other ancient sources, including Avestan (Y. 9.18 *bizaṅgranqm* [...] *caθβarə.zaṅgranqm*; cf. Y. 19.8, Yt. 1.10, etc.), and it becomes very common in Vedic prose, as we will see in the following sections.¹⁰⁶

As seen in the quote above, Benveniste argues that **peku* became a specialised term for “small livestock” (i.e. sheep and goats, Benveniste’s “second specialization”) and further again for “sheep”.¹⁰⁷ Although he does not cite any particular passages to support his assertion, we can assume that he is referring to the specialisation of the word *pasu* in Young Avestan, which started distinguishing between *pasu*, “small livestock” and *staora*, “large livestock” (cattle, horses, camels, and donkeys).¹⁰⁸ Calvert Watkins, building on Benveniste’s work, suggests that the PIE **peku* encompassed multiple meanings: mobile wealth in general, including people; non-human livestock; and small livestock.¹⁰⁹ He argues that this multitude of meanings could be present in Vedic *paśu* as well. As far as the widest possible meaning is concerned, humans are said to be a part of the category from AV onwards.¹¹⁰ The narrowest meaning, Watkins argues, is present when the RV poetry uses merisms to juxtapose cows and small livestock, such as in RV 10.100.12 phrase *paśvá á góh* which Watkins translates “sheep (and) cow”. According to him, this expression suggests that Vedic *paśu* has the specific meaning “small livestock” as well as the general meaning “livestock”. To construct the argument about the opposition between large and smaller livestock, Watkins gathers evidence from Hittite, Avestan, and Latin, on

¹⁰⁴ Watkins: 1979 and 1995. Cf. Benveniste: 1973, p. 38, who argues that in Homeric Greece, the division was between precious metals (*keimélia*) and property on hoof (*tà próbata*).

¹⁰⁵ This passage is quoted in full below, in § 2.1.2.

¹⁰⁶ For other IE comparanda, see West: 2007, p. 100. Note that when quoting Y. 9.18, West, otherwise a good source of various IE poetic figures, has a mistake, omitting the *β* in *caθβarə*. I am quoting the version found in the edition of Kellens: 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Benveniste: 1973, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ Skjaervø: 2012, p. 96. Cf. Digard and Boyce: 1990. (Here, I use the online edition from 2020 [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-iranica-online/cattle-COM_7594, last accessed on 2 September 2021]).

¹⁰⁹ See also Watkins’ schema of “the Indo-European Folk Taxonomy of Wealth”, in Watkins: 1995, p. 210.

¹¹⁰ We will treat this in length in § 3.1.

top of two suggestively translated passages from the AV (8.2.25; 8.7.11).¹¹¹ Yet this theory of *paśu* as “small livestock only” does not seem to be widely accepted or taken up, at least amongst Indologists. The new RV translation of Brereton and Jamison, for example, does not follow this lead and translates the RV 10.100.12 *paśvá á góh* as a hendiadys “bovine stock”.¹¹² Likewise, Mayrhofer omits it both in the *EWA* and *KEWA*.¹¹³ Although Watkins’ comparative data and passages are evocative, I have not found any evidence for this merism in the later prose. I suspect that unlike Young Avestan,¹¹⁴ the meanings “small livestock”, or “sheep” faded in Sanskrit.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, the PIE history of the category *paśu*, and in particular its twofold character, is attested in the Indo-European merism “MEN (and) CATTLE” (**uih₂ro pekū*) which originally expresses the totality of one’s movable possessions.¹¹⁶ As Calvert Watkins has said, “the immigrating Indo-European-speaking people [...] brought with them a semantics which dichotomized ‘moveable wealth’, to be taken or lost in a raid, into ‘men (and) livestock’”.¹¹⁷ MAN (**uih₂ro*) stands for a two-footed human, an enslaved person, a servant or a member of the household personnel, and CATTLE (**pekū*) for its four-footed, non-human equivalent, livestock. As an exact cognate, this phrase is attested in Avestan (e.g. Y.31.15 *pasəuš vīrātcā*, or 45.9 *pasūš vīrəng*)¹¹⁸ and in other IE groups.¹¹⁹ In Iranian, in

¹¹¹ See Watkins’ translations of these AV passages in Watkins: 1979, p. 278: AV 8.2.25 *sárvo vái tátra jīvati/gáur áśvaḥ púruṣaḥ paśúḥ*, “everyone, verily, lives there – cow, horse, man, *paśu*”. AV 8.7.11 *trāyantām asmín grāme/gám áśvaṃ púruṣaṃ paśúm*, “protect (*trā-*) in this village cow, horse, man, [and] *paśu*”. Watkins presumes that in these cases, *paśu* signifies the mass of small livestock, i.e. sheep and goats.

¹¹² Watkins: 1979, p. 278. Consider another example given by Watkins, RV 8.41.1 *yó dhītá mánusāñām paśvó gá iva rákṣati*: Watkins “(Varuṇa) who protects the thoughts of men (as a herdsman his) **sheep (and) cows**”, vs. Brereton and Jamison “(Varuṇa,) who guards the insights of the sons of Manu like **the cows of a herd**”. (The emphasis is mine.)

¹¹³ Mayrhofer: *EWA*, Bd. 2, p. 110; *KEWA*, Bd. 2, p. 239-40.

¹¹⁴ The Avestan meaning “small livestock” is also mentioned by Mayrhofer: *KEWA*, Bd. 2, p. 239.

¹¹⁵ Thanks to Professor John Lowe for useful suggestions on this topic. E-mail communication, 15 September 2020.

¹¹⁶ According to Watkins: 1995, 210-13, the formula is a whole verb phrase “PROTECT MEN (and) CATTLE”, **√pah₂ uih₂ro- pekū-*, documented from Italic and Indo-Iranian. The verb **√pah₂* is, nevertheless, attested in neither of the language groups: in Italic, we find a verbal phrase *salua ser(u)-*, “keep safe”; and in Indo-Iranian the verbal root *√trā* (*√trā* in Iranian), “protect”. Watkins only restores the verb **√pah₂* “as a likely candidate for the Indo-European lexical expression because it is used in both Indic and Iranian in the traditional trifunctional enumeration of the three scourges in the texts adduced by Benveniste.” (Ibid.: p. 213.) Due to the uncertainty of the verb, I work only with the nominal phrase.

¹¹⁷ Watkins: 1979, p. 276.

¹¹⁸ Cf. the oft-quoted passage Y.46.2 where Zoroaster expresses his powerlessness in terms of lack of possessions, having few livestock (*kamna-fšu-*) and few men (*kamna-nar-*). Here, **uih₂ro* was replaced by *nar-*. See Benveniste: 1973, p. 41. Notice the form *fšu-* here, a weak form of *pasu*, which is also attested in the relatively common word *fšuiiant*, “cattle breeder”. Mayrhofer: *KEWA*, Bd. 1, p. 291, argues that this weak form has a cognate in Vedic *kṣu-*, attested for example in *kṣumant* “cattle-rich” (e.g. RV 8.81.1), or *puruṣṣu*, “much livestock” (e.g. RV 6.68.6). Many thanks to Dr Elizabeth Tucker for pointing out the Vedic cognates to me (personal conversation, November 2021).

¹¹⁹ For examples, see e.g. West: 2007, p. 100; Watkins: 1995, 210-13; Watkins: 1979.

particular, it encompasses the totality of living beings. In Vedic, however, the phrase does not have such a potential as in Iranian: **uih₂ro* was replaced by the word *puruṣa* of uncertain etymology (AV 3.28.5, 6; 8.7.11, 9.3.14), perhaps favouring the alliteration with *paśu*. In yet another case, **pekū* was substituted by *go* (RV 5.20.4). It seems that among the Vedic-speaking people, the phrase **uih₂ro pekū* was never as productive as in Iranian, and the totality of beings was described in different ways, as we will see further.

§ 2.1.2 THE ṚGVEDIC PAŚU

The RV, our earliest textual source, is particularly informative in terms of the meaning and history of the word *paśu*. The term occurs altogether 78 times in the RV, with about a third of the instances in *maṇḍalas* 1 and 10, the youngest portions of the Saṃhitā. The majority of the instances are in a singular form but of a mass meaning, with the most accurate translation being “livestock”, as we will see below. Only occasionally, about five or six times, does the word occur in a specifically sacrificial context where we could suggest the meaning “sacrificial animal”, more common in the later Brāhmaṇa literature.

In later Vedic literature, the term *paśu* is often associated with a fixed fivefold list of domestic animals: cow, horse, human, goat, and sheep. In its full form, this list is absent from the RV and occurs earliest in the AV, which will be quoted below. The RV, however, includes the list in a partial form, associating *paśu* with several species, namely cattle, horses, and sheep. We can see an example of this partial list in RV 5.61.5. More often, however, only two members of the group are listed, that is cattle and horses, as is the case in RV 1.83.4:

RV 5.61.5a,b¹²⁰

<i>sānat śá aśviyam paśúm, utá gávyam śatāvayam </i>	She gains livestock in horses and cows and [livestock] consisting of a hundred sheep.
---	--

RV 1.83.4c,d

<i>sárvam pañéh sám avindanta bhójanam, áśvāvantam gómantam á paśúm nárah </i>	They [=the Aṅgirasas] collected together all the sustenance of the niggard, livestock consisting of horses and cows—the superior men.
--	---

Despite the lack of the full list that we know from later Vedic sources, it is more than possible that the RV understands the category of *paśu* to be relatively broad, with the human being a part of the group.

¹²⁰ I am using the metrically restored edition of van Nooten & Holland, see RV ed van Nooten & Holland; and the new English translation of Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton, see RV trl Jamison & Brereton.

Consider this RV passage which distinguishes between two- and four-footed *paśus*, a distinction that is of Indo-European descentance:

RV 3.62.14¹²¹

<i>sómo asmábhyaṃ dvipáde, cátuṣpade ca paśáve,</i> <i>anamīvā́ śśas karat </i>	Soma—for us, for the two-footed, and for the four-footed livestock, he will make refreshments that bring no disease.
--	--

Bar humans, whose pertinence to the later Vedic list will be treated later in chapter § 3, all *paśus* seem to be domesticated ruminants. This is demonstrated in the Rgvedic descriptions and references to their behaviour. First of all, they are said to live in flocks, or herds (*yūtha*):

RV 6.19.3c,d

<i>yūthéva paśváḥ paśupā́ dāmūnā, asmāṃ indrābhí ā</i> <i>vavṛtsuvā́jau¹²² </i>	Like a herdsman to his flocks of livestock, as household master, o Indra, turn here to us in the contest.
---	---

As for their habitat, *paśus* are said to be regularly grazing in pastures (*yavasa*, cf. RV 6.2.9). On the contrary, wild animals, *mṛga*, do not belong there, as we will also see in the following subchapter § 2.2.

RV 5.9.4c,d¹²³

<i>purú yó dágdhāsi vānā, ágne paśúr ná yāvase </i>	You, who are the consumer of much wood, o Agni, like a grazing animal in a pasture [consuming much grass].
---	--

Apart from *yavasa*, the RV also knows the term *gavyūti*, translated by Jamison and Brereton as “pastureland”. This is clearly an Indo-Iranian term, attested in the important Avestan stock epithet of the god Miθra who is frequently described as *vouru.gaoiiaoiti*, “having wide cattle-pastures” (e.g. Yt 10).¹²⁴ We can see the exact Vedic cognate of this phrase in the passage below:¹²⁵

RV 9.74.3a,b

<i>urvī gavyūtir áditer ṛtām yaté </i>	Wide is the pasture-land of Aditi for him who goes to truth.
---	---

¹²¹ Cf. RV 4.51.5, 5.81.2, 6.71.2, etc. See also AV 2.34.1 19.31.5; TS 4.3.4.3, 5.2.9.4-5; ŚBM 6.6.4.7, and many more. The same dichotomy is found in Avestan too, e.g. Y.9.18 and 19.8, Yt.1.10, Vd. 15.19. For more IE comparanda, see West: 2007, p. 100.

¹²² The Padapāṭha analyses this peculiar looking word as *vavṛtasva* (2nd singular imperative of √vṛt, “to turn”) and *ājau* (L m. noun *āji*, “battle, contest”). The -u- is accounted for by the metrical restoration.

¹²³ Cf. RV 6.2.9.

¹²⁴ Gershevitch: 1959, famously translates Miθra’s epithet as “Grass-land magnate”.

¹²⁵ The phrase is attested several times in the RV: 5.66.3; 7.77.4; 9.74.3 (above); 9.78.5; and 9.85.8.

Although etymologically, *gavyūti* is a word for a cattle pasture, the ṚV seems to use it as an abstract, almost soteriological term. As Stephanie Jamison suggests in her commentary to the ṚV translation, that “wide pastureland” seems to be a reward for mortals, such as in ṚV 9.78.5 *urvīm gavyūtim ābhayaṃ ca nas kṛdhi* “[Soma], make wide pasturage and fearlessness for us”.¹²⁶ In the case of ṚV 9.74.3, quoted above, the phrase might be used metaphorically for “the expanse on the ritual ground between the filter and the place where the soma meets the milk”, as Jamison proposes.¹²⁷

Paśus are said to roam widely and since they are an important economic article, they are watched over by a herdsman (*gopā*). Otherwise, they could escape, be stolen in a cattle raid, or be attacked by wolves and other wild beasts, or in the words of ṚV 2.4.7b, just find “their own way”. If lost, cowherds bring livestock back, as we see in the following passage ṚV 10.23:

ṚV 10.23.6d

yád ā paśúm ná gopāḥ karāmahe ||

May we bring him close like cowherds their livestock.

ṚV 2.4.7b

*sá yó ví ásthād abhí dáksad urvīm, paśúr ná eti
suvayúr āgopāḥ |*

He [= Agni] who has spread out, burning the broad [earth], like livestock without a herdsman he goes seeking his own way.

Herding, a fact of everyday life in the pastoral community, has its counterpart in poetic imagery and theology. The originally Indo-European image of a god as a herdsman is very common, and many gods are said to be cowherds in the ṚV: Indra (e.g. ṚV 6.19.3), Agni (e.g. ṚV 1.144.6), Pūṣan (e.g. ṚV 10.17.3), or Varuṇa (e.g. ṚV 8.41.1). The metaphor is also applicable to humans, for example when the poet of the ṚV hymn 6.49.12 describes himself praising Indra in the same way “as a guardian of livestock drives his flocks home”, *ājā yūthéva paśurákṣir ástam*.

Apart from herdsmen, the ṚV mentions other means of livestock protection: *paśu* are bound by ropes and leashes or fenced in in pens (*vrajā*) and enclosures (*gotra*). This does not apply only to the “general livestock”, the ṚV also mentions pens for horses and oxen.

ṚV 2.28.6c

dāmeva vatsād ví mumugdhi āṃho

Like a rope from a calf, untie confining straits [from me].

¹²⁶ See Jamison’s commentary to ṚV 9.74.3 [<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/>], I quote the version from 4 October 2021, accessed on 6 November 2021].

¹²⁷ Ibid.

ṚV 2.38.8c

vísvo mārtaṇḍó vrajám ā pasúr gāt

Every mortal creature, [every] domestic beast has
come to its pen.

ṚV 8.41.6d,e

vrajé gávo ná saṃyúje, yujé ásvāṃ ayukṣata |

Like oxen in a pen to be yoked together, they have
yoked the horses for yoking.

Animal enclosures are mentioned both in a defensive context, as something that prevents livestock from being lost or stolen, and in an offensive one, as a thing that is to be cracked open or destroyed during an attack, so that cattle can be gained. The opening of a cow enclosure is a mythical motif that is frequently alluded to. It is related to the myth about Vala, a story mentioned almost as often as the myth about Vṛtra and complementary to it, although it is considerably more fragmentary. According to this myth, a group called the Paṇis captured the cattle and trapped them in Vala's cave. Indra, in some passages aided by the priestly group of Aṅgirasas or his dog Saramā, released the cows – which are sometimes identified with Dawns. Unlike the Vṛtra myth, Indra overcomes the enemy not using his *vajra* but with the power of truth in his chanting, and is thus called *bṛhaspati*, “the lord of the sacred formulation”.¹²⁸ The following passage is an example of the myth:

ṚV 4.20.6

*girír ná yáḥ svátavāṃ ṛṣvá índraḥ, sanád evá sáhase
jātá ugráh |
ádartā v{raj}ám¹²⁹ stháviraṃ ná bhīmá, udnéva
kósaṃ vásunā nīṣṭam ||*

He who is self-strong like a mountain, lofty and
powerful Indra, born from of old for conquest, he
splits open the cowpen as a fearsome [wild beast]
does a sturdy [pen], [the pen] overflowing with
goods like a bucket with water.

The array of ṚV passages quoted above shows quite clearly that at least in the time of the ṚV, *paśu* did not mean “animal in general” but was used as a specific term for domesticated animals utilised by people for economic purposes, i.e. “livestock”. In one noteworthy case, however, the ṚV uses the term *paśu* in a very broad manner which could suggest a wider meaning:¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Brereton & Jamison, 2020: p. 70.

¹²⁹ Following the translation of Brereton & Jamison and most of their predecessors, I am emending *vājraṃ* to *vrajám* as it fits the sense much better and occurs later in the hymn, in verse 8b. See Jamison's detailed explanation [<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IV-7-15-20.pdf>, version from 15 July 2020, last accessed on 12 July 2021].

¹³⁰ Professor Diwakar N. Acharya (personal communication, 11 February 2020) suggested to me that the term might be used in a general sense in the discussions of the *aśvamedha* in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. Sāyaṇa's commentary on the ṚV passage implies a similar notion: it connects *paśus* with the animals of the air, and hence indicates that the word *paśu* could be understood as a general term. To support this, Sāyaṇa quotes TB 3.2.1.3: “(Driving the calves away from the cows) he says: ‘You are winds.’ Vāyu (the Wind) verily is the overseer of the

RV 10.90.8¹³¹

<i>tāsmād yajñāt sarvahútaḥ sámbhṛtam</i>	From that sacrifice, when it was offered in full, the
<i>pr̥ṣadājiyám </i>	clotted-butter mixture was collected. It [=the
<i>paśún¹³² tāṃś cakre vāyavyān āraṇyān grāmiyāś ca</i>	sacrifice] was made ¹³³ into the animals: those of
<i>yé </i>	the air, those that belong to the wilderness and
	those that belong to the village.

As we can see, the Ṛgvedic poet categorises the *paśus* according to their habitat as animals of the air, wilderness, and village. In light of other RV occurrences, this is an unusual usage of the word *paśu* in this textual layer, which would be otherwise closer to what this very passage calls *grāmya*, “the village animals”, or “livestock”. This anomaly might be accounted for by the fact that RV 10.90 is generally considered to be a late addition to the RV. As we will see shortly, nevertheless, the meaning of the word seems to be evolving by the time of the AV to encompass more than domesticated animals.

§ 2.1.3

PAŚU IN ATHARVAVEDA

We have seen that in its PIE prehistory, **peku* was a word for a specific, non-human movable personal possession. Amongst the Indo-Iranian herding nomads, the word further specialised as a term for “livestock”. In the previous section, we have seen how the Ṛgveda, our earliest Vedic source, describes the members of the category: they are cattle and horses, living in pastures, in the vicinity of human dwellings, and are connected with the domestic sphere of life. The second oldest source at our disposal, the Atharvaveda Saṃhitā, supplies more details regarding the category. Most importantly, it is the first source to enumerate five *paśus* – a list which becomes almost a formula in later Vedic prose:

atmosphere; and cattle [*paśávaḥ*] gave the atmosphere as their deity. He (the *adhvaryu*) gives them (i.e. the calves) to Vāyu, (and) he drives them away.” [Translation by Dumont: 1957, p. 219.] Reading the passage, however, I suspect that it is more about Vāyu as an overseer of *paśu* from the atmosphere than about identification of birds with livestock.

¹³¹ Cf. Y. 71.9 *vīṣpamca gṛm upāpamca upaspmamca fraptarājātāmca ravascarātāmca cangraṇhācasca yazamaide*, “We worship all the animals, those in the water and those in the air, the flying ones, those roaming in freedom [the wilderness], and those attached to the pasture.” I follow the edition and translation used by Schmidt: 1980, p. 214.

¹³² The unchanged final *-n* before *t-* is a Vedic sandhi, as described by Macdonell: 2009r (c1916), p. 32 [40.2].

¹³³ Following the translation of Brereton and Jamison, I understand the verb *cakre* (3rd sg. ātmanepada perfect of *√kr*, *karoti*) in a passive sense here, with the sacrifice (*yajña*) from pāda *a* as an object of the verb. I think it is unlikely that the Puruṣa himself would create the animals from the clotted butter, as is suggested by other translators, such as Geldner or Doniger. Unfortunately, Brereton and Jamison have not supplied this passage with an additional technical commentary.

AVŚ 11.2.9¹³⁴

tāvemé pāñca paśāvo víbhaktā | gāvo áśvāḥ púruṣā ajāváyaḥ {By you} {=o lord of cattle, i.e. Rudra} are shared out these five creatures (*paśu*) – cows, horses, men, sheep, and goats.

In a couple of other instances, the AVŚ provides a shorter list with only four members and the word *paśu* as the last element:¹³⁵

AVŚ 8.2.25

sārvo vái tátā jīvati gāur áśvaḥ púruṣaḥ paśúḥ Every one, verily, lives there – ox (*gaur*), horse, man, beast.

AVŚ 8.7.11

trāyantām asmín grāme gām áśvaṃ púruṣaṃ paśúm [Plants] save in this village cow, horse, man, beast.

The AV also knows the division of creatures between bipeds and quadrupeds that we have seen both in the Indo-European prehistory and the ṚV:

AVŚ 4.2.1¹³⁶

yá ātmadā baladā yásya víśva upāsate praśíṣaṃ yásya devāḥ | He who is soul-giving, strength-giving; of whom all, of whom [even] the gods, wait upon the
yò 'syése dvipádo yás cátuṣpadaḥ kásmāi devāya havíṣā vidhema || instruction; who is lord (*ís*) of these bipeds, who of these quadrupeds – to what god may we pay worship (*√vidh*) with oblation?

Apart from the fivefold list which we have seen just above, the word *paśu* is frequently found in various lists and enumerations in the AV. Particularly, there are two lists which occur repeatedly. The first of them is a list of possessions which are already owned by a person, or which one wishes to obtain through the medium of sacrifice. Livestock is a usual member of this list, together with progeny and

¹³⁴ I am using the standard, albeit more than century-old edition by R. Roth and W. D. Whitney and the translation by W. D. Whitney. See AVŚ ed Roth & Whitney and AVŚ trl Whitney. In this case, I am emending Whitney's translation of the genitive pronoun *tava*, "thine" to "by you".

¹³⁵ As I have summarised above, Watkins (1979, p. 278) argues that the last element of these lists, *paśu*, denotes small livestock ("Kleinvieh"), i.e. sheep and goats. I understand it to be more of a *pars pro toto*, as suggested in the translations.

¹³⁶ This is a modified version of the verse 3 from the famous ṚV hymn 10.121, often called "Ka", "Who?". Compare Whitney's translation to that of Brereton & Jamison: "Who became king of the breathing, blinking, moving world—just he alone by his greatness; who is lord of the two-footed and four-footed creatures here—Who is the god to whom we should do homage with our oblation?"

housing, and it shows the close connection of the word *paśu* with material possessions, just as we expect based on its PIE prehistory. Consider these two examples:

AVŚ 7.81.5c,d

ā vayāṃ pyāsiṣimahi góbhir ásvaiḥ prajāyā paśúbhir May we fill ourselves up with cattle, with horses,
grháir dhánena || with progeny, with livestock, with houses, with riches.

AVŚ 19.71.1c-e

āyuh prāṇāṃ prajāṃ paśúṃ kīrtiṃ dráviṇaṃ Having given to me {life-span} (*āyus*), breath,
brahmavarcasām | progeny, cattle, fame, property, [and] {the
máhyaṃ dattvá vrajata brahmalokám || splendour of *brahma*}, go to the world of
 Brahma.¹³⁷

The second list is an enumeration of nouns in the locative plural, describing places in which something or someone dwells or hides: the mountains, forests, plants, livestock (*paśu*), and waters. Essentially, the list describes the whole cosmos through its most important elements. In the AV, this list is found in connection with descriptions of the gods, worms (*kṛmi/krimi*), and greatness (*mahiman*). The example below shows that the worms (*kṛmi/krimi*) are present in all the listed locations, i.e. in the whole world:

AVŚ 2.31.5¹³⁸

yé krímayah párvateśu váneṣv óṣadhīṣu paśúṣv apsv The worms that are in the mountains, in the
ántāḥ | forests, in the plants, in the {animals}, within the
yé asmákaṃ tanvām āviviśúḥ sárvaṃ tát dhanmi waters, that have entered our selves, that whole
jánima krímīṇām || generation of worms I smite.¹³⁹

This passage reminds us of the widened sense of usage of the word *paśu* in RV 10.90. The mountains, woods, and waters are not associated with the domestic sphere in the Vedas but represent wilderness,

¹³⁷ I deviate from Whitney's translation here in the way I understand *āyus*, "life-span", and *brahmavarcasa*, "the splendour of *brahma*". The latter term is particularly contentious, with every scholar translating it slightly differently – for example, Whitney translates it as "Vedic splendor". I use the translation of Bodewitz: 2019, p. 342.

¹³⁸ Cf. AV 1.30.3 (gods) and AV 19.3.2 (*mahiman*).

¹³⁹ Although I use Whitney's translation, I am changing his translation of *paśu*, "cattle", to "animals" for obvious reasons explained in the main body of text. I also understand the word *óṣadhi* to be a general term for plants, not just a for medicinal herbs. *Óṣadhi* are listed by KB as one of the six kinds of *annādyam*, "food to eat": KB 20.1 *ṣaṭṭayam annādyam grāmyāś ca paśava āraṇyāś cauṣadhiyāś ca vanaspatayaś cāpsucaram ca pariplavam ca |* "There are sixfold foods to eat: domestic animals, wild animals, plants, trees, that which moves in the water and that which swims." [My translation.] It is clear that the category of plants must have been fairly wide, as suggested by TB 3.8.17.4 *dvayyó vá óṣadhayah | púṣpebhyo 'nyāḥ phālaṃ grhṇānti | mūlebhyo 'nyāḥ ||* "There are two kinds of plants; ones that bear a fruit from flowers, the others from roots." [My translation.]

whereas animals and plants can be associated with either nature or culture.¹⁴⁰ The human sphere is represented by the word *tanū* which Whitney translates reflexively but we could understand it literally as “body”. The presence of worms in the various spheres, and the ambivalence of the terms *oṣadhi* and *paśu* could suggest that this list understands *paśu* to be a broader term that does not cover only livestock but perhaps a larger array of animals. Possibly, by the time of the AV (which is, supposedly, relatively close to the tenth *maṇḍala* of the RV in terms of the language and symbolism), the term *paśu* might have been undergoing a change in meaning that would encompass more than just livestock. This is further exemplified by the following AV passage:

AVŚ 11.2.24¹⁴¹

<i>túbhyam āraṇyāḥ paśavo mṛgā vāne hitā haṃsāḥ</i> <i>suparṇāḥ śakunā vāyāṃsi </i> <i>tāva yakṣām paśupate apsv āntās túbhyaṃ kṣaranti</i> <i>divyā āpo vṛdhé </i>	To thee {=Rudra} are assigned (<i>hitā</i>) the {wild} animals (<i>paśu</i>), the wild beasts in the woods, the geese (<i>haṃsa</i>), eagles, {vultures}, {smaller} birds; thine, O lord of cattle, is the monster (<i>yakṣa</i>) within the waters; for thine increase flow the waters of the heaven.
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In this passage, the “wild animals” (*āraṇyāḥ paśavo*) are glossed as “beasts in the woods” (*mṛgā vane*): *paśu* is equated with *mṛga* and *āraṇya* with *vana*.¹⁴² This gloss suggests that by the time of the AV, both *paśu* and *mṛga* could be understood as larger categories which can, or indeed must be specified by an additional adjective, either *grāmya* or *āraṇya*.¹⁴³ We will dedicate the next couple of subchapters to the history and definition of the terms *mṛga*, *grāmya*, and *āraṇya*. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that this generalisation of meaning from the AV occurs not only for *paśu* but influences the term *mṛga* as well.¹⁴⁴

§ 2.1.4

LIVESTOCK IN VEDIC PROSE

Whilst exploring the usage of the word *paśu* in the previous textual layers, I have noted that it is in the AV where we find the first proper enumeration of the members of the category. By the time of Vedic

¹⁴⁰ Rau: 1957, p. 22, argues that in the same way as animals, plants are distinguished between domesticated (*grāmya*) and wild (*āraṇya*).

¹⁴¹ Cf. AVP 16.106.4. I deviate from Whitney in the translation of the term *āraṇya*, where I say “wild”, and in the bird names, in which I follow Dave: 2005r. For the expression *mṛga vane*, cf. AV 12.1.49.

¹⁴² As my examiners suggested in the *viva*, the idea of a gloss is unusual in Vedic poetry. This would suggest that these are two separate things, or only a part of the expression is a gloss (*mṛga* being a gloss of *paśu*). Cf. AVP 16.106.4, and AVP 12.1.49.

¹⁴³ Cf. AV 3.31.3, *grāmyāḥ paśáva*.

¹⁴⁴ Thanks to Dr Victor D'Avella for very useful notes to the previous version of this paragraph, submitted as a part of my Confirmation of Status (Personal and e-mail communication, April 2021).

prose, especially the Black Yajurveda Saṃhitās and the Brāhmaṇas, the fivefold list seems to be fully fixed. The animals are not listed just for the sake of the list itself, however, as we have seen in the AV. The fivefold structure is noted more subtly: either it is said that domestic animals are fivefold, and the exact species are not named, as in the MS passage quoted below, or the five species are named within a longer, more complicated passage, as in the TS:

MS 2.3.6¹⁴⁵

pāṅktāḥ paśávaḥ

Domestic animals are fivefold.

TS 5.5.1.2-3

*sārvāṇi vā eṣā rūpāṇi paśūnām prāty ā labhyate
yāc chmaśruṇas tāt ||*

*pūruṣāṇāṁ rūpām | yāt tūparās tād āśvānām | yād
anyātodan tād gāvām | yād āvyā iva śaphās tād
āvīnām | yād ajās tād ajānām |*

This [animal] is slain to make up all forms of animals; its hairs are the form of a {hu}man, its lack of horns that of horses, the possession of only one set of incisors that of cows, the sheep-like hooves that of sheep, that it is a goat, that is the form of goats.¹⁴⁶

The latter passage is not simply a list of animal species pertaining to the category of *paśu* but also a list of characteristic features of each of the species: human is bearded, horse hornless, cattle have incisors only in the lower jaw, and sheep and goats have specific hooves.¹⁴⁷ These are important characteristics for each of the species and indeed the category as a whole.

The fivefold list seems to be a very productive tool for categorisation in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, which uses it often – both as a plain list, such as the first from the two ŚBM passages below, and in longer, more complicated passages, as we can see in the latter example.¹⁴⁸

ŚBM 6.2.1.2¹⁴⁹

*sā etān pāñca paśūn apaśyat | puruṣam āśvaṁ gāṁ
āvīm ajaṁ yad āpaśyat tasmād ete paśávaḥ*

He saw those five animals – {the human}, the horse, the bull, the ram, and the he-goat.

¹⁴⁵ My translation. This formula is repeated throughout the Vedic prose, for example in TS 5.2.3.6, 5.2.10.1; MS 3.3.3; KS 20.1.9, 21.4, 30.9; AB 5.18, 5.21; KB 13.2, 26.13, 29.8, etc.

¹⁴⁶ I am using the translation of A.B. Keith, see TS trl Keith. Emphasis in the Sanskrit text is mine. I deviate from Keith's translation by using the adjective "human" instead of the gendered expression "man". Cf. TS 2.1.1.5; JB 2.262, 2.371.

¹⁴⁷ Although it is not said explicitly, I presume that the TS means the cloven hooves (*dviśapha*) here, a type of hooves which is a characteristic feature of sheep, goats, and cattle. Horses (together with asses and mules) are called whole-hoofed (*ekaśapha*), a description which occurs in Vedic prose much more often than *dviśapha*. We will discuss both types below in § 2.1.1.5.

¹⁴⁸ For other examples, see ŚBM 6.2.1.4, 7.5.4.6, 10.2.1.1, 10.3.4.4, etc.

¹⁴⁹ Throughout the thesis, I use the edition of Albrecht Weber and translation of Julius Eggeling; see ŚBM ed Weber and trl Eggeling. In this case, I am slightly changing Eggeling's translation, omitting his translation "Purusha" for the human and translating *paśu* as "domestic animals" rather than cattle.

Inasmuch as he saw ($\sqrt{pas}$) them, they are {called} {domestic animals} (*paśu*).

ŚBM 7.5.2.6

[...] *sá prāṇébhya evādhi paśūn nīramimīta mānasaḥ pūruṣa{m}*¹⁵⁰ *cākṣuṣo 'śvam prāṇād gāṃ śrótrād āviṃ vācō 'jaṃ tad yād enān prāṇebhyō 'dhi nīramimīta tasmād āhuḥ prāṇāḥ paśāva iti māno vai prāṇānām prathamam tad yat mānasaḥ pūruṣam nīramimīta tasmād āhuḥ pūruṣaḥ prathamāḥ paśūnām vīryāvattama iti māno vai sārve prāṇā mānasi hi sārve prāṇāḥ prātiṣṭhitāḥ tad yan mānasaḥ pūruṣam nīramimīta tasmād āhuḥ pūruṣaḥ sārve paśāva iti pūruṣasya hy ēva īte sārve bhāvanti* ||¹⁵¹

[...] He {=Prajāpati} fashioned animals from his vital airs, a man from his {mind}, a horse from his eye, a cow from his breath, a sheep from his ear, and a goat from his voice; and inasmuch as he created them from the vital airs, people say that “Animals are vital airs.” The mind is the first of the vital airs: and inasmuch as he fashioned man from his soul, they say that “Man is the first, and the strongest of animals.” The {mind} is all the vital airs, for in the {mind} all the vital airs are established. And inasmuch as he fashioned man from his {mind}, they say that “Man is all animals,” for they all belong to man.

Due to the relative ubiquity of the list in this text – and the fact that the ŚBM with Eggeling’s translation is the most accessible of all Brāhmaṇa texts – it has been long assumed that the fivefold list of *paśus* is a universal feature of the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. Nevertheless, the other Brāhmaṇas do not mention it as often as both of the ŚB recensions, if at all. Without a doubt, the fivefold classification is still in play in other Brāhmaṇas, such as in the following JB and KB passages. The ŚB, nevertheless, seems to favour it much more.

JB 1.8¹⁵²

pāṅkto yajñāḥ, pāṅktāḥ paśavas

The sacrifice is fivefold, the domestic animals [or: the victims] are fivefold.

¹⁵⁰ I am adding the *anusvāra* to reflect the accusative later in the passage. Many thanks for this suggestion to Prof. Jamison (*viva voce* exam, 2nd December 2022).

¹⁵¹ I am correcting the obvious typo *ghrāṇā*, found in all digital editions (TITUS, GREIL, and Vedavid), to *prāṇā* which is found in Weber’s edition of the text. The emphasis is mine. I deviate from Eggeling’s translation in translating *manas* as “mind” instead of his “soul” (he offers the meaning “mind” in brackets).

¹⁵² Throughout the thesis, I use a combination of available JB editions. Most often, I follow the online edition by Gerhard Ehlers, available at TITUS. I compare it with the standard, albeit unreliable edition by Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra, and the partial edition by Caland: see JB ed Vira & Chandra, and JB ed Caland. In terms of the translation, I follow JB trl Bodewitz. Bodewitz has, however, translated only the first book of the JB. Only partial translations exist for the following books, e.g. JB trl Caland, and JB trl Doniger O’Flaherty’s. In certain cases, I provide my own translation.

KB 11.2-3¹⁵³

bṛhatīm anvāha, goaśvam eva bṛhatī |
uṣṇīham anvāha, ajāvikam evoṣṇik | [...]
madhye bārhatās cauṣṇihās ca paśavaḥ |

He recites a Bṛhatī, the Bṛhatī is cows and horses;
he recites a Uṣṇih, the Uṣṇih is sheep and goats.
[...] In the middle are {livestock} connected to
Bṛhatī and Uṣṇih.

This KB passage shows that the fivefold classification might not be such an important feature of the Brāhmaṇa taxonomy: only four species are mentioned here, with the human being left out. Furthermore, the identity of “the paśus in the middle” (*madhye paśavaḥ*) is uncertain; perhaps, this suggests that the list of five might not be exhaustive for the KB.

This brings us to the discussion of new, conflicting lists of *paśus*, introduced in the Vedic prose. Perhaps the most common one is the sevenfold list that is first hinted at in the AVŚ. Further on, the sevenfold list is spelled out in YV prose, and echoed by the Brāhmaṇas, especially the PB, which mentions it multiple times.

AVŚ 3.10.6

yé grāmyāḥ paśāvo viśvárūpās téṣāṃ saptānām
māyi rāntir astu ||

The {livestock} of the village which are of all
forms – {let there be abiding of the seven} with
me.¹⁵⁴

MS 1.5.10¹⁵⁵

tā ātropadhéyā gauś cáśvas cáśvatarás ca gardabhò
jā cáviś ca púruṣas |

They are to be placed here, the cow, the horse, the
mule, the donkey, the goat, the sheep, and the
human.

PB 2.7.8¹⁵⁶

sapta grāmyāḥ paśavo

There are seven kinds of domestic animals.

Another list which occurs a few times is an enumeration of domestic animals and agricultural plants.

The JB calls this a list of “six wish-cows” (*ṣaṭ kāmādughā*):

¹⁵³ The emphasis in the Sanskrit text is mine. Throughout the thesis, I follow the Lindner's edition (comparing it with Sarma's) and Keith's translation of the Kauṣītaki, see KB ed Lindner and KB trl Keith. In this passage, I deviate from Keith's translation by translating *paśu* with the more general word “livestock” rather than “cattle”.

¹⁵⁴ For the sake of consistency, I translate *paśavaḥ* as livestock here, differing from Whitney's “cattle”. Furthermore, Whitney's translation “seven let the willing stay be with me” seems to be a lapse; I am amending his translation to reflect the meaning of *√ram* “to be quiet, rest”. Many thanks for the suggestion to Professor Jamison.

¹⁵⁵ My own translation. Cf. the parallel passage in KS 7.7. Cf. also MS 4.8.8, a longer passage which names five domestic animals (*aśva, go, puruṣa, avi, ajā*) and then concludes with *saptá chāndāṃsi saptá hótrāḥ saptá grāmyāḥ paśāvas*, “seven [are] meters, seven [are] sacrifices, seven [are] domestic animals”.

¹⁵⁶ Throughout the thesis, I use Lokesh Chandra's edition and Caland's translation of the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa: see PB ed Chandra (cf. PB ed Cinnasvāmiśāstrī), and PB trl Caland. Cf. PB 2.14.2, 3.3.2, 22.4.4; BŚS 24.5.

JB 1.181¹⁵⁷

te taṣ ṣaṭ kāmāduḡhā udāharan gāṃ cāśvaṃ cājāṃ They [the gods] took away the six wish-cows
cāviṇ ca vṛhiṇ ca yavaṃ ca | [from the Asuras]: the cow, the horse, the goat,
the sheep, the rice and the barley.

In the preceding sections, we have noted that following the Indo-European trend, the poetic layers of Vedic literature distinguish between bipeds and quadrupeds. This classification continues in the Vedic prose where it remains a productive and oft-used dichotomy. Below are listed two examples, with the first being representative of the YV prose and the second of the Brāhmaṇa literature. The AB passage is particularly worthy of our attention, as it notices the difference in breeding habits of four-footed and two-footed beings.

TS 4.2.6.5

dvipāc cātuṣpad asmākaṃ sārvaṃ astv anāturām || May all our bipeds and quadrupeds be free from
disease.

AB 2.38

parāñcaṃ cātuṣpady āsīnam abhyāhvayate, tasmāt To him he {= *hotṛ*} calls as he {= *adhvaryu*} {sits}¹⁵⁸
parāñco bhūtvā cātuṣpādo retaḥ siñcanti samyañ on all fours with averted face; therefore turning
dvipād bhavati, tasmāt samyañco bhūtvā dvipādo their backs quadrupeds pour seed; when he faces
retaḥ siñcanti him who faces him he becomes two-footed;
therefore bipeds facing [each other] emit seed.

When talking about *paśu* in the RV, we have seen many characteristic features which help us identify what *paśus* are and are not. I have noted, for example, that they live in pastures and are guarded by herdsmen. The prose sections of Vedic literature continue in drip-feeding useful characteristics of the *paśu* category. For instance, *paśus* are repeatedly said to eat grass which shows that even at the time of Vedic prose they were mainly considered to be (domesticated) ruminants. The prose texts also mention the dependence of cattle on salt, perhaps noticing that ruminants often look for places where they can lick naturally occurring deposits of various minerals, including salt.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. PB 16.1.10 which lists sesame and beans instead of rice: “Cow, horse, mule, ass, goat, sheep, barley, sesamum, and beans.”

¹⁵⁸ I am modifying Keith’s translation of *āsīnam* from “lies” to “sits”, the usual meaning of *√ās*. I am not convinced that either of the translations fits the context as well. I am equally unsure about the force of the locative *cātuṣpady*. It almost seems as if *cātuṣpady āsīnam* was a locative absolute but since the participle is in accusative, this is most likely not the case. Cf. Lévi: 1898, p. 107, comments on this passage saying that “the Brāhmaṇas pave the way for obscenities of the Tantras”.

PB 6.7.19¹⁵⁹

*prajāpatiḥ paśūn asṛjata te 'smāt sṛṣṭā aśanāyanto
'pākrāmaṃs tebhyaḥ prastaram annaṃ prāyacchat
enam upāvantanta tasmād adhvaryuṇā prastara
īṣad iva vidhūyo vidhūtim iva hi tṛṇaṃ paśava
upāvantante*

Prajāpati created the domestic animals; these, after being created, being hungry, went away from him. He presented them a bunch of grass as food; they turned toward him. Therefore, the *adhvaryu* must wave slightly the bunch of grass, for the animals turn toward a [stalk of] grass that is being waved [in front] of them.

AB 4.27

*tad dhāpi turah kāvaṣeya uvācoṣaḥ poṣo
janamejayaketi | tasmād dhāpy etarhi gavyam
mīmāṃsamānāḥ pṛchanti santi tatroṣāḥ iti | ūṣo hi
poṣaḥ ||*

[...] as to this Tura Kāvaṣeya said 'Salt is nutriment, O my dear Janamejaya.' Therefore here also men considering a place for cattle ask 'Are there salts there?' for salt is nutriment.

Details on the bodily composition of *paśus* are also present in Vedic prose. Above, we have seen that, when breeding, *paśus* are said to face away from each other. In other passages, the Vedic prose specifies their behaviour, shape, or style of movement. As is the convention in the Vedic prose, these details are not scientific or zoological descriptions but elucidations of ritual actions. The following two TS passages explain the way bricks are put down to create the *vedi*, "altar" and the direction of butter libation. Yet these little details are not only ritual points; they also show that their authors knew domestic animals well and closely observed their bodies, movements, and habits.

TS 5.3.1.5

*pāñca dākṣiṇāyāṃ śróṇyām úpa dadhāti
pāñcōttarasyaṃ tasmāt paścād vārṣīyān purástāt
pravaṇaḥ paśús |*

Five he puts down in the right hip, five in the left; therefore the animal is broader behind and receding in front.¹⁶⁰

TS 5.4.5.1

*akṣṇayá vyāghārayati, tasmād akṣṇayá paśávó
'ngāni prá haranti prātiṣṭhityai*

He pours on butter transversely; therefore animals move their limbs transversely, for support.

A similar level of detail is known to the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. These provide us with an array of information, from animal nutrition during the cold months, to the length of gestation.

AB 4.26

¹⁵⁹ Compare this passage with TS 5.2.8.2 *paśúḥ vā eṣá yád agnís ná khálu vái paśáva áyavase ramante* | "The fire is an animal; animals do not find pleasure in want of grass."

¹⁶⁰ From the context, it is obvious that "the animal" is actually the *vedi*, an association that is fairly common in the Vedic prose.

*tasmād etayor eva śaiśirayor māsayor āgatayor ye
caiva grāmyāḥ paśavo ye cāraṇyā aṇimānam eva tat
paruṣimānaṃ niyanti*

Therefore {when} these {two} months of the cool
season {have come}, the cattle of the village and
of the wild become thin and shaggy.¹⁶¹

JB 1.106

*tasmād grāmyāḥ paśavo 'ntar grāme nyokasaḥ [...]
tasmād grāmyāḥ paśavaḥ parāñcaḥ prātaḥ prerate
te sāyaṃ samāvartante [...]
tasmād grāmyāḥ paśavo nānārūpā [...]
tasmād grāmyāḥ paśavo nānānaṃ yathāyatham
sāyaṃ grhān abhyupāyanti ||*

[...] Therefore the domesticated animals have
their abodes inside the village.¹⁶²
[...] Therefore the domesticated animals go out
[for food] in the morning and return in the
evening.¹⁶³
[...] Therefore the domesticated animals have
different forms [or: colours].
[...] Therefore the domesticated animals go
separately each to their own houses at night.

JB 1.67

*tasmāt paśavo daśa māso garbhān bibhrati,
ta ekādaśam anuprajāyante,
na kā cana dvādaśam atiharati parigrhītā hi tena*

Therefore the {livestock}¹⁶⁴ bear their foetuses
during ten months. They bring forth in the course
of the eleventh. No female passes the twelfth
month [of pregnancy], for she is enclosed [i.e.
limited in the duration of her pregnancy] by this.

The last passage in particular shows a great deal of knowledge of animal biology, even though it masks it behind ritual details, in this case the number of *agniṣṭoma* lauds, corresponding with the number of months. Using the general term *paśu*, I believe that the JB points out the fact that the longest gestation period of livestock is twelve months long. The gestation period of the *paśus* varies: on average, mares give birth within eleven months, cattle and humans in nine, and goat and sheep in about five. Using the general term for livestock here, *paśavaḥ*, the JB suggests that all livestock species give birth within a year – “no female passes the twelfth month”.¹⁶⁵ Since the passage follows up with a story about a he-mule, *aśvatara*, which escapes from an enclosure and smears his seed on a female ass and a mare, it would be tempting to assume that the maximum of twelve months applies to the mule which bears

¹⁶¹ I am modifying Keith's translation here to show the force of the construction in G/L du.

¹⁶² Cf. PB 6.8.14.

¹⁶³ PB 6.8.9, 13, 7.2.6; TS 5.2.5.4.

¹⁶⁴ I deviate here from Bodewitz' translation “mammals” for *paśu*. Although all the five domestic animals which are grouped as *paśu* are essentially mammals, the term is a much wider etic term than *paśu*. Furthermore, it is defined on a different basis: a mammal is any vertebrate animal which is nourished with milk of its mother in its infancy.

¹⁶⁵ The JB argues that both female ass and mare are since then “doubly impregnated”. Bodewitz understands this as the fact that these animals can bear twins, whereas I would argue that they can bear young of two types – either “pure”, i.e. when having an intercourse with a donkey/horse, or “unpure”, when impregnated by the other species. Cf. PB 6.1.5.

its young within twelve months, a record among domesticated livestock. Rau, however, argues that the Vedic sources erroneously assume that she-mules are barren.¹⁶⁶

In the tenth *maṇḍala* of the ṚV and in the AV, I have noted that the word *paśu* is sometimes used as a general term for a non-human animal. By the time of the Vedic prose, this usage increases, especially with the expansion of the dichotomy *āraṇya* and *grāmya*, “wild” and “domestic”. In these texts, *paśu* applies to both categories, as we will see in the subchapter § 2.3 in more detail. Curiously, however, the word *paśu* applies also to animals we would not expect; those which are neither wild nor domesticated but stand in between. This is the case of the gayal:

TS 2.1.10.2

<i>nāiṣá grāmyáh paśúr nāraṇyó yád gomṛgás </i>	The {g}ayal is neither a domestic nor a wild
<i>nēvaiṣá grāme nāraṇye yám ājaghnivāṃsam</i>	animal; he is neither in the village nor the forest
<i>abhiśāṃsanti</i>	whom men calumniate though he has slain no
	one.

The gayal (*gomṛga*), a cattle species indigenous to South Asia, is described here. The animal is believed to be the semi-domesticated form of the gaur (*gaura*), and the TS description fits this idea, calling it *nāiṣá grāmyáh paśúr nāraṇyó*, “an animal (*paśu*) neither domestic nor wild”. This description suggests that the term *paśu* points at a larger group of beings than just livestock. We could infer that here, it is applicable both to domesticated and wild animals such as was the case in the AVŚ, and to the animals that are located somewhere in between.

This is the case with another TS passage, this time about a frog (*maṇḍūka*) which is said to be neither domesticated (*grāmya*) nor wild (*āraṇya*).¹⁶⁷ Perhaps, this could mean that people lived in the vicinity of smaller, non-mammalian creatures like frogs whom they understood to belong among animals (notice that they are said to be *paśūnām*) but knew that they were not like all the other village or wild animals.

TS 5.4.4.3

<i>yó vā agnīm citám prathamáh paśúr</i>	The {animal} that first steps over the fire when
<i>adhikrāmatiśvaró vāi táñ śucá pradāhas,</i>	piled, it is liable to burn it up with its heat. He
<i>maṇḍūkena ví karṣati, eṣá vāi paśūnām</i>	draws over [it] with a frog; this of animals is the
<i>anupajīvanīyás, ná vā eṣá grāmyéṣu paśúṣu hitó</i>	one on which one does not subsist, for neither
<i>nāraṇyéṣu</i>	

¹⁶⁶ Rau: 1980/1, p. 188, quotes AB 4.9.1, PB 6.1.1-4, and SB 5.(6).7.2.

¹⁶⁷ Frogs and their place in Vedic literature (especially in the famous hymn ṚV 7.103) have been an object of scholarly interest for a long time. The best interpretation has been provided by Jamison: 1991-2.

among the domesticated nor the wild {animals}
has it a place.¹⁶⁸

Although in the previous instances, the TS might serve as a witness to the generalising of the word *paśu*, there are plenty of other passages where *paśu* is still understood to mean primarily livestock. Consider this long passage from the section on the *āprīś*, fore-offerings for the *aśvamedha*:

TS 5.2.9.4-6

<i>āpaśavo vā anyé goaśvébhyaḥ paśávas [...] etávanto vái paśávaḥ 4</i> <i>dvipádaś ca cātuṣpádaś ca, tán vā etád agnáu prá dadhāti yát paśuśīrṣāṇy upadádadhāti amúm āraṇyám ánu te díśāmítý āha, grāmyébhya evá paśubhya āraṇyán paśún chúcām ánúť sṛjati, tásmāt samávat paśūnám prajāyamānānām āraṇyáḥ paśávaḥ kánīyāmsaḥ, śucá hy ṛtáḥ, sarpaśīrṣám úpa dadhāti, yáivá sarpé tvíṣis tám eváva runddhe 5</i> <i>yát samícínām paśuśīrṣáir upadadhyád grāmyán paśún dáṃśukāḥ syus yád viśúcínām āraṇyán, yájur evá vadet áva tám tvíṣim runddhe yá sarpé, ná grāmyán paśún hinásti náraṇyán</i>	The {animals} other than the oxen and the horses are not {animals} at all; [...]. So many are the animals [4], bipeds and quadrupeds; them indeed he puts down in the fire, in that he puts down the heads of the animals. 'I appoint for thee N.N. (amum) of the forest', he says; verily from the cattle of the village he sends pain to those of the wild; therefore of animals born at one time the animals of the wild are the smaller, for they are afflicted with pain. He puts down the head of the snake; verily he wins the brilliance that is in the snake [5]. If he were to put it down looking [in the same direction as the heads of the animals] with the heads of the animals, [the snakes] would bite the animals of the village; if turned away, those of the wild; he should speak a <i>yajus</i>, he wins the brilliance that is in the snake, he injures not the animals of the village, nor those of the wild.¹⁶⁹
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This is a fairly long and complicated passage, describing a multitude of ritual actions preceding the horse sacrifice.¹⁷⁰ Most interesting for our purposes here is the initial statement: *āpaśavo vā anyé goaśvébhyaḥ paśávas*, “no other animals than cattle and horses are animals”. This is, almost instantly, followed by a statement ambiguous to the previous one: *etávanto vái paśávaḥ || dvipádaś ca cātuṣpádaś ca*, “so many are the animals, two-footed and four-footed”. On one hand, the TS states that *paśus* are only cattle and horses, and on the other, that there are many of them, two-footed and four-footed. This seems to summarise the tension present in the history of the word *paśu*: in the RV, the category really encompasses only cattle and horses but in later Vedic literature, the category grows

¹⁶⁸ I amend Keith's inconsistent translation of *paśu*.

¹⁶⁹ The emphasis in Sanskrit is mine. As in the previous passage, I change Keith's translation “beast” for the sake of consistency.

¹⁷⁰ Note that the passage also distinguishes between animals of the village (*grāmyán paśún*) and of the wilderness (*āraṇyán*); we will treat this dichotomy further on, in § 2.3.

and covers all kinds of creatures. As the TS itself states further on, “the domestic animals have various purposes and various customs.”¹⁷¹

The word *apaśavo*, introducing this passage, is a term which offers a further evidence for the broadening of the category of *paśu* in the prose layers of Vedic literature. It is a relatively rarely used alpha privative compound which can be interpreted in two ways, based on its accent. With the accent on the first member, *ápaśu*, as it is used in our passage, it is a masculine noun with the meaning “not livestock”.¹⁷² When it has the accent on the last syllable, *apaśú*, it is interpreted to be an adjective meaning “poor in/deprived of livestock”, usually describing the sacrificer. The accentuation on the prefix *a-* is the rarer of the two options, and occurs only five times, including the aforementioned passage.¹⁷³ The other passages are witnesses of the ambivalence of the category of *paśu* which we have noted in the previous paragraph. Consider these two examples from the Brāhmaṇa literature:

ŚBM 13.2.4.3

<i>tád āhuḥ apaśur vá eṣa yád āraṇyo naitásya hotáryaṃ</i>	As to this they say, ‘Surely that—to wit, the {wild animal} is not {an animal/livestock} (<i>ápaśu</i>), and offering should not be made thereof.’ ¹⁷⁴
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TB 3.9.9.2

<i>tád āhuḥ apaśavo vá eté yád ajāváyaś cāraṇyáś ca eté vái sárve paśávaḥ yád gavyā íti</i>	They say, whichever are sheep and goats and wild animals, these are indeed not livestock (<i>ápaśu</i>); whichever are consisting of cattle, all of these are livestock.
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Both passages make clear that only some species are counted among the *paśu*: the ŚBM argues that only domestic animals are *paśu*, whereas the TB disqualifies even the small livestock. The ŚBM passage, moreover, includes the effect that this brings to the ritual activity, which is that no animal other than *paśu* can be sacrificed. In this light, *ápaśu* effectively signifies a creature which cannot be used in a sacrifice. We will treat the sacrificability of *paśus* in detail in one of the two following subchapters: in § 2.1.6, we will discuss the sacrificability of the group as a whole, and in § 3.3.1 we will explore whether one of them, the human being, can be sacrificed as well.

¹⁷¹ TS 5.3.1.3 *nānāmanasaḥ khálu vái paśávo nānāvatās* |

¹⁷² Monier-Williams’ translation “cattle not fit for the sacrifice” does not seem to be accurate.

¹⁷³ Aside from the TS passage quoted above, it is attested in AV 14.1.62 (there, in compound with *-ghnī-*, the feminine form of the verbal root *√han-*; although this could be equally analysed as *a+paśughnī-*, meaning “not slaying animals”), ŚBM 13.2.4.3, and TB 3.9.1.3, 9.2. Incidentally, the Brāhmaṇa instances are parallel passages. To compare, the forms of *apaśú-* are found over fifty times in the Saṃhitās and fourteen times in the Brāhmaṇas.

¹⁷⁴ I am modifying Eggeling’s translation slightly, translating *āraṇya paśu* as “wild animal” rather than “forest beast”.

The Vedic prose offers a number of strategies for categorizing the group of *paśu* even further. These strategies are based on “empirical” criteria, that is, on certain anatomical characteristic features: mainly the shape and number of teeth and feet. The late Vedic texts, especially some of the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads, include yet another system of categorisation: that which is based on the mode of procreation. Since this is only found relatively late, I am not including it in this discussion.¹⁷⁵

We have already encountered some of these above, in TS 5.5.1.2-3. Although these criteria are, in a rudimentary form, first attested in the ṚV, they are developed later, especially by the post-Vedic legal literature. Owing to Brian Smith and Patrick Olivelle, this aspect of ancient Indian animal study is well researched and therefore, I am not going to deal with it in much detail.¹⁷⁶

Let us start with the categorisation of *paśus* on the basis of their feet, as we have already encountered one of its forms: the dichotomy between bipeds and quadrupeds. Being of Indo-European origin (see a short discussion in § 2.1.1), the distinction is attested since the ṚV and remains a productive classificatory tool throughout Vedic literature. Most often, it is used as merism indicating the totality of all domestic animals, such as in the following AVŚ passage.

AVŚ 2.34.1

<i>yá íše paśupátih paśūnām cátuṣpadām utá yó dvipádām </i>	The lord of cattle, who rules over (<i>íś</i>) the cattle, the four-footed, and who also over the two-footed [...].
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The distinction between two- and four-footed creatures shows an important ontological difference: no domestic animal but a man is ever a biped and all other *paśus* are quadrupeds.¹⁷⁷ The Vedic literature even includes maxims about not harming bipeds: “Do not harm the two-footed domestic animal” (*imāṇ mā hiṃsīr dvipádaṃ paśúṃ*).¹⁷⁸

Although not strictly an example of bi- and quadrupedality, the following ṚV passage attests the importance of foot-counting for the Vedic cosmology. Note that in this case, the four-footed

¹⁷⁵ For details, see Smith: 1994, p. 245-7, and Moreau: 2007, p. 55-7.

¹⁷⁶ Smith: 1989; 1991; 1990. Doniger and Smith: 1989. Olivelle: 2002a.

¹⁷⁷ The situation is complicated by beings called *kiṃpuruṣa*, literally “what-sort-of-a-man”, discussed in § 2.1.6.

¹⁷⁸ This is mantra for Agni from VS 13.47, used also in ŚBM 7.5.2.32.

creature is probably a herding dog but in the majority of the Vedic literature, the expression is applied to herd animals.¹⁷⁹

RV 10.117.8

*ékapād bhūyo dvipádo ví cakrame,
dvipāt tripādam abhí eti paścāt |
cātuṣpād eti dvipádām abhisvaré,
sampáśyan pañktūr upatíṣṭhamānaḥ ||*

The one-footed [=sun?] has stridden farther than the two-footed [=man?]; the two-footed overtakes the three-footed [=old man?] from behind. The four-footed [=dog?] comes at the call of the two-footed ones as it watches over the fivefold ones [=herds?], staying by them.

The number of legs is not, however, the only taxonomical strategy pertaining to lower limbs; the structure of the feet themselves is equally important as a characteristic feature. Most often, certain animals are said to be *ekaśapha*, “whole-hoofed”. As we can see in the following ŚBM passage, these are the three equines: horse, ass, and mule.

ŚBM 12.7.1.5¹⁸⁰

*śrótrād evāśya yáśo 'srauat |
tád ékaśapham abhavad áśvo 'śvataró gardabháh ||*

From his {= Indra's} ear his glory flowed, and become the one-hoofed {=whole-hoofed} animals, the horse, mule, and ass.

Its counterpart, the cloven-hoofed (*dviśapha*) animals are mentioned considerably less often than the whole-hoofed ones. In fact, according to the VPAK, there is not a single occurrence of the word in Vedic Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas. This is peculiar, when one considers that both Smith and Olivelle presume the word occurs in Vedic since it is found in the Dharmaśāstra corpus.

The idea that cattle, sheep, and goats have a different type of hoof than the equines is, nevertheless, present, even if we do not find specialised terminology. Above, we have already seen that the TS 5.5.1.3 points out a specific sheep-like hoof: *yád ávyā iva śaphás tád ávīnām*, “the sheep-like hooves [are the characteristic mark] of sheep”. The following PB passage might be interpreted in a similar vein. There is no *paśu* which could have eight hooves. If, however, we understand the hooves to be cloven, i.e. split into two toes, it yields more sense.

PB 3.8.2

¹⁷⁹ For more details on dogs in ancient India see Bollée: 2006; esp. passage on the use of dogs, p. 64-69. The following RV hymn reminds me of a riddle told by Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*: “No-legs lay on one-leg, two-legs sat near on three-legs, four-legs got some.”

¹⁸⁰ Cf. TS 4.3.10.21; VS 14.29-30; PB 6.9.8; ŚBM 8.4.3.11-15.

aṣṭāśaphāḥ paśavaḥ śaphaśas tat paśūn āpnoti

Cattle being eight-hoofed, he gains cattle hoof by hoof.

Aside from feet, Vedic literature uses the dental structure to establish the subgroups of domestic animals. We find two categories: animals which have incisor teeth in both jaws (*ubhayādat*), and those which have incisors only in the lower jaw (*anyatodat* or *ekatodat*). We have encountered the latter category in the previous subchapter, in TS 5.5.1.3, which identified cattle as members of the group: *yād anyátodan tād gāvām*, “the possession of one set of incisors {is a characteristic feature} of cows”. The former group is attested much earlier, already in the ṚV. This passage identifies horses as representatives of the category, born from Puruṣa, the primordial anthropomorphous being. The members of the other group, i.e. cattle, sheep, and goats are born from the same source but after the horse, which situates them lower in the hierarchy. The other passage quoted below then names the *paśus* with the incisors in both jaws: horse (including other equines) and human.

ṚV 10.90.10¹⁸¹

*tásmād áśvā ajāyanta yé ké ca ubhayádataḥ |
gávo ha jajñire tásmāt tásmāj jātā ajāváyah ||*

From it {=Puruṣa} horses were born and whatever animals have {incisor} teeth in both jaws. Cows were born from it. From it were born goats and sheep.

TS 2.2.6.3-4¹⁸²

*ātmāno vā eṣā mātrām āpnoti yá ubhayádat
pratigrhñāty áśvaṃ vā púruṣaṃ vā, vaiśvānarāṃ
dvādaśakapālaṃ nír vaped ubhayádat ||*

A measure of himself he obtains who accepts [an animal] with teeth in both jaws, whether horse or man. He should offer {an animal with incisor teeth} in both jaws on twelve potsherds to Vaiśvānara.

The distinction between *anyatodat* and *ubhayādat* animals is used by the later legal literature to state which of the domestic animals are fit to be eaten (e.g. MDŚ 5.18): people and horses, that is *paśus* with the incisor teeth in both jaws, are prohibited to be eaten.¹⁸³

Only rarely does the categorisation pertaining to feet and teeth occur in a neat, structured list. More often than not, they are mixed together, as we have seen above in TS 5.5.1.3. The situation is similar in the following passage, also from the TS:

¹⁸¹ The emphasis is mine. I am adding the word “incisor” for the sake of explanation that it is a specific type of tooth.

¹⁸² Cf. BŚS 13.9. The emphasis in the Sanskrit text is mine. I am deviating from Keith’s translation of the second sentence, where he says, “he should offer who has accepted [an animal] with teeth in both jaws should offer on twelve potsherds to Vaiśvānara.”

¹⁸³ For the dietary rules in the later legal texts and medical treatises, see Olivelle: 2002a.

TS 4.3.10.2¹⁸⁴

<i>saptadaśābhir astuvata paśávo 'srjyanta bṛhaspátir ádhipatir āsīt [...]</i>	They praised with seventeen, domestic animals were created; Bṛhaspati was the overlord.
<i>ékaviṁśatyāstuvatáikaśaphāḥ paśávo 'srjyanta váruṇó 'dhipatir āsīt </i>	They praised with twenty one, the whole-hoofed animals were created; Varuṇa was the overlord.
<i>tráyoviṁśatyāstuvata kṣudráḥ paśávo 'srjyanta púṣádhipatir āsīt </i>	They praised with twenty three, the small animals were created; Pūṣan was the overlord.
<i>pāñcaviṁśatyāstuvatāraṇyáḥ paśávo 'srjyanta vāyúr ádhipatir āsīt </i>	They praised with twenty five, the wild animals were created; Vāyu was the overlord.

The TS uses a mix of categories here: habitat (unmarked word *paśu*¹⁸⁵ versus *āraṇya paśu*), size (*kṣudra*) and structure of feet (*ekaśapha*). The TS does not tell us which animals belong to each group but based on other texts we can conclude that the category *ekaśapha* pertains to horses and other equids, and that “small” (*kṣudra*) most likely signifies the smaller livestock, i.e. sheep and goats.

§ 2.1.6 PAŚU, FOOD, AND SACRIFICE

In the middle Vedic period, ritual was elevated into a prime position in the Vedic cosmology and became a sphere through which the whole world could be controlled, provided one knew the relative correspondences between phenomena.¹⁸⁶ The detailed, anatomically-based classification of animals and its increasing importance in the prose corpus that we discussed in the previous subchapter are clearly a part of this evolution: if a ritual can influence the whole world, it must be performed properly, and to perform it properly, one must make sure that the animal about to be sacrificed is pure and fit enough for the act.

I have noted several times that the Vedic literature views the world through the lens of ritual. Although the texts include kernels of information about animals, their bodies and behaviour, these descriptions are there to support the ritual: either to explicate a particular ritual act or to ensure the sacrificial fitness of an animal. The previous sections of this subchapter dealt predominantly with the explication of ritual acts by using animal symbolism; now we will turn to the latter question, the sacrificability of animals.

Whilst sacrificial fitness is a tool of classification, it is not the only one. Since the Vedic sacrifice is modelled on “a formal meal given to a visiting dignitary”,¹⁸⁷ the sacrificability of an animal

¹⁸⁴ Cf. VS 14.29-30. This passage is interpreted in ŚBM 8.4.3.11-15.

¹⁸⁵ In the parallel passage in VS 14.28, *paśu* is not left unmarked as it is here but it is further modified with the word *grāmya* (*grāmyáḥ paśávo srjyanta*).

¹⁸⁶ Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 36-8. On the correspondences between phenomena, see Smith: 1989.

¹⁸⁷ Jamison: 1991, p. 18.

is also closely intertwined with its edibility, as we will see shortly. By and large, it is impossible to offer the gods something one would not eat himself, and one largely eats domestic animals in ancient India, or at least that is what comes across from the textual record.¹⁸⁸

Which animals can be sacrificed? For many Vedic texts, the answer would be straightforward: an animal which is called *paśu* is fit for a sacrifice, others (sometimes called *apaśu*, cf. ŚBM 13.2.4.3 discussed in § 2.3.2) are not. The following passage enumerates the particular animals fit to be sacrificed and shows the interconnectedness of the concepts of sacrificability and edibility:

ŚBM 6.2.1.15

<i>pūruṣó 'śvo gaur ávir ajó bhavanti etávanto vai sárve paśavó 'nnam paśávas tad yávad ánnam tád etát purástān nídadhāti tád enam páśyann agnúr upávartate</i>	There are a man, a horse, a bull, a ram, and a he-goat; for such are all the animals [used for sacrifice]. Animals are food; he thus lays down in front whatever food there is; and seeing that, Agni turns unto him.
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Animals are, first and foremost, food, as the ŚBM says. On an everyday basis, they feed humans; in the ritual context, gods partake on them. The categories of sacrificability and edibility are almost indistinguishable in Vedic ritual. Generally speaking, food has an important role in Vedic cosmos, to establish the order of things. In the words of Francis Zimmermann: “What Europeans called ‘the great chain of being’ was in India a sequence of foods.”¹⁸⁹ On top of this nutritional chain are the gods, sustained by the sacrificial oblations from humans. These, meanwhile, feed on animals; animals eat plants; and plants, in turn, feed on the waters or rain. As Brian Smith has shown, this imagery does not concern only dietary choices of the Vedic people but is used as a figurative way to explain hierarchic relations between the respective social classes: “The higher orders ‘live on’ the lower.”¹⁹⁰

If one would sacrifice (or eat) animals which are not fit for the purpose, it would have far-reaching consequences. In the doctrine of sacrifice of the middle Vedic period, the ritual has the power to influence the whole cosmos, both positively and negatively. A famous passage on the *aśvamedha*, included in a few Brāhmaṇas, says that if wild animals (*āraṇya paśu*) were sacrificed instead of the domestic ones, “the roads would run asunder, the village-boundaries of two villages would be far

¹⁸⁸ See Yājñavalkya’s famous statement ‘*śnāmy evāhām aṃsalaṃ ced bhávati*’, “I eat it [=meat], provided it is tender”, ŚBM 3.1.2.21. I discuss this in § 4.3 in more detail. In practice, some animals that were sacrificed might not have been eaten, as is suggested by the later legal corpus. An example is the horse, here discussed by Patrick Olivelle: “The horse, for example, is *medhya* [sacrificable] but *abhakṣya* [inedible], whereas a deer is *bhakṣya* but *amedhya*.” Olivelle: 2002a, p. 14, n. 14. Cf. § 2.3.2 where I briefly discuss the eating of *āraṇya paśus*, and § 4.3 with its short commentary on the history of vegetarianism in ancient India.

¹⁸⁹ Zimmermann: 1988, p. 197.

¹⁹⁰ Smith: 1990, p. 178.

asunder; and there would come to be ogres, man-tigers, thieves, murderers, and robbers in the forests” (ŚBM 13.2.4.2).¹⁹¹ In short, the world order would collapse.

The animals that are fit to be sacrificed are said to be themselves created from the primordial sacrifice.¹⁹² This is an idea present already in the RV 10.90.8, 10 (discussed above), and it continues throughout the corpus until the prose texts, such as the TB:

TB 2.1.2.4

<i>tāsyā āhutyai pūruṣam asṛjata dvitīyam ajuhot só 'śvam asṛjata tṛtīyam ajuhot sá gām asṛjata caturthām ajuhot só 'vim asṛjata pañcamām ajuhot sò 'jām asṛjata </i>	From that [first] oblation, he {=Prajāpati} created man. He offered oblation a second time; he created the horse. He offered oblation a third time; he created the cow. He offered oblation a fourth time; he created the sheep. He offered oblation a fifth time; he created the goat¹⁹³
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The creation from the sacrifice predisposes the animals: from sacrifice they are, and to sacrifice they will return.¹⁹⁴ They are endowed with what the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa calls *medha*, a word that is usually understood to be a term for the animal sacrifice but here, it seems to be a sacrificial “essence”, or “quality”.

ŚBM 1.2.3.6-7

<i>pūruṣam ha vai devāḥ āgre paśum ālebhire tasyālabdhasya medhó 'pacakrāma só 'śva{m} praviveśa té 'śvam ālabhanta tasyālabdhasya medhó 'pacakrāma sa gām praviveśa te gāmā [...] só 'vim praviveśa té 'vim ā°-ma só 'jam praviveśa té 'jam ālabhanta tasyālabdhasya medhó 'pacakrāma 6¹⁹⁵ sá imām pṛthivīm praviveśa tam khánantaivānviṣus tam ānvavindaṃs tāv imaú vrīhiyavau tasmād āpy etāv etārhi khánanta [...] 7</i>	6. At first, namely, the gods offered up a man as the victim. When he was offered up, the sacrificial essence went out of him. It entered into the horse. They offered up the horse. When it was offered up, the sacrificial essence went out of it. It entered into the ox. They offered up the ox. When it was offered up, the sacrificial essence went out of it. It entered into the sheep. They offered up the sheep. When it was offered up, the sacrificial essence went out of it. It entered into the goat. They offered up the goat. When it was offered up, the sacrificial essence went out of it. 7. It entered into this earth. They searched for it, by digging. They found it [in the shape of] those
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¹⁹¹ Cf. TB 3.9.1.1-4 (quoted, translated, and discussed in § 2.3.2), and JB 2.266.

¹⁹² Smith: 1994, p. 251, calls this “a typically tautological mythological statement”.

¹⁹³ I am using the translation of Dumont: 1964, p. 341, but I am omitting the majority of his explanations in brackets, as they do not add much to the translation.

¹⁹⁴ I am nodding towards the famous passage from Genesis 3: 19, *ā-pār at-tāh wə-el ā-pār tā-šūb*.

¹⁹⁵ I am correcting the mistake in the ending of *aśva-* in the digital version of the ŚBM to reflect Weber’s edition. The omission in *ā°-ma* is present across the editions, digital and printed alike; I believe it is a repetition of the whole phrase, from *ālabhanta* to *'pacakrāma*.

two [substances], the rice and barley: therefore even now they obtain those two by digging [...]

The sacrificial essence jumps from one species of *paśu* to another until it eventually hides in the ground where it enters rice and barley, two common non-animal sacrificial offerings. This is not the end of the myth, however; the Śatapatha continues explaining that once the *medha*, the sacrificial essence, jumped from one species to another, the animal that was left behind became wild and unfit to be sacrificed (*amedha*). The sacrificed human became a wild human (*kinpuruṣa*, literally “what-sort-of-a-man”),¹⁹⁶ the horse a gaur, the cow a gayal, the sheep a camel, and the goat became a *śarabha*.¹⁹⁷

ŚBM 1.2.3.9¹⁹⁸

*sa yam pūruṣam ālabhanta | sā kinpuruṣo 'bhavad
yān āśvaṃ ca gām ca taū gaurās ca gavayās
cābhavatām yam āvim ālabhanta sa ūṣtro 'bhavad
yam ājam ālabhanta sā śarabhó 'bhavat tasmād
etēśām paśūnām nāśitāvyam āpakrāntamedhā
haite paśávaḥ ||*

9. The man (*puruṣa*) whom they had offered up became a {wild} man (*kinpuruṣa*). Those two, the horse and the {cow}, which they had sacrificed, became a {gaur} and gayal {...} respectively. The sheep which they had sacrificed, became a camel. The goat which they had sacrificed, became a *śarabha*. For this reason, one should not eat [the flesh] of these animals, for these animals are deprived of the sacrificial essence (*amedha*) [are impure].

A parallel passage in the seventh book of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa concludes: “[Since] their sacrificial essence abandoned them, they are without the sacrificial essence (*amedhyā*), not sacrificable (*ayajñiyā*). Brahmins should not eat them.”¹⁹⁹ Again, we see the complementarity of the categories: if

¹⁹⁶ Literally “what-sort-of-a-man”, *kinpuruṣa* is sometimes said to be an ape, monkey, or a wild human. Due to the brevity of our sources, it is hard to tell what exactly the Vedic people designated with the term. I discuss this and other terms for non-Vedic people in more detail in § 3.1.

¹⁹⁷ The animal name *śarabha* is an ambiguous term, usually understood as a type of a deer. In Vedic context, it seems to be a wild animal which is further undefined. It is found usually as a wild counterpart of a goat and seems to be very agile: AVŚ 9.5.9 says that it is able to move across difficult places (*ati durgāny eṣaḥ*). Monier-Williams takes it as “a kind of deer or (in later times) a fabulous animal (supposed to have eight legs and to inhabit the snowy mountains; it is represented as stronger than the lion and the elephant)”, which is, I believe, the MBh notion of this animal (e.g. MBh 3.134.14). Mayrhofer, *KEWA*, Bd. 3, p. 305, compares it with related words for mountain goat (e.g. Sindh *sarahu*). Likewise, Witzel: 2006, p. 180, n. 51 notes Kalash *śāra*, “markhor, mountain goat”. This suggests that rather than a deer, *śarabha* is some sort of wild goat. Slaje: 2017, argued that this is the markhor.

¹⁹⁸ I am modifying Eggeling’s translation in a few cases, mostly to reflect my preferred translations noted elsewhere in the discussion. I am omitting the Latin names for gayal and gaur. Cf. parallel passages in AB 2.8, MS 3.10.2; cf. ŚB 7.5.2.28-37, TS 4.2.10.1-4.

¹⁹⁹ ŚBM 7.5.2.37 *tā eta ūtkrāntamedhā amedhyā ayajñiyās tēśām brāhmaṇo nāśnīyāt ||*.

these animals are not to be sacrificed, they should not be eaten either, albeit only by the highest social class.

These passages very well indicate that there is a specific set of animals that can be sacrificed, and if one does not have access to them, rice and barley can be used (in form of sacrificial cakes), as they are endowed with the same *medha* essence, with the same potency (*vīryavat*; ŚBM 1.2.3.7). Equally, these passages define wild counterparts of the sacrificable species. These are in a way similar – the gayal resembles cattle, the *śarabha* a goat, etc. – but since they do not partake on the same essence, they are not the same. One must be wary of the difference not to cause any ritual trouble.

When commenting on this episode, Brian Smith and Wendy Doniger argue that when the sacrificial essence leaves the animals, it creates “new but defective forms of each”.²⁰⁰ Neither the ŚBM nor any of the parallel passages, nevertheless, frame the episode in a language of defect but rather in a language of “rewilding”. It seems that implicitly, the animals created by Prajāpati were all domestic, and only later they became feral due to the lack of the sacrificial potency.

As we will see in the following subchapters (especially § 2.3.2 on the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āraṇya* in Vedic prose) there are rituals that playfully push the border between the two categories. In particular, I am thinking of the *aśvamedha* which employs a multitude of wild animals, otherwise deemed unsacrificable, most likely to show off the wealth and power of the royal *yajamāna*, the patron of the ritual. The boundary is, nevertheless, never crossed, and the wild animals are let free; only the true *paśu* can be killed at the sacrificial ground.

Judging from the sources, the idea of sacrificability of certain animals started gaining traction in the middle Vedic period, especially in the prose texts. With its interest in categorisation and classification, these texts developed a multiplicity of overlapping categories, namely the dichotomies of domestic/wild, sacrificable/non-sacrificable, and edible/inedible. In many cases, these characteristics complement, reinforce, and readjust each other, as we have seen above and as has been succinctly argued by Brian Smith.²⁰¹ As we will see in chapter § 3, the notions of sacrificability and edibility are particularly useful for the internal differentiation of the *paśu* category: although all *paśu* are theoretically fit to be sacrificed and eaten, humans seem to be the constitutive exceptions of the group and are, in fact, sacrificed only under very specific circumstances (see § 3.3.1 for the discussion on *puruṣamedha*) and never eaten. The later Dharmaśāstra corpus expanded on these dichotomies

²⁰⁰ Smith & Doniger: 1989, p. 201.

²⁰¹ Smith: 1991, p. 528.

even further to provide dietary and ritual guidance to the particular classes of the ancient Indian society; these intricate rules are, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.²⁰²

§ 2.1. 7

PAŚU: A CONCLUSION

This subchapter aimed to explore the most ubiquitous of animal categories, the so-called *paśu*, namely the evolution of the term in the various strata and genres of the Vedic literature. In Classical Sanskrit, *paśu* is usually a term for cattle; alternatively, all animals can be described with it. In this subchapter, I aimed to show that these meanings evolved in the Vedic corpus. Inherited from the Indo-European, the word seemed to be originally a term for moveable wealth, including human beings. In Indo-Iranian and early Vedic, it developed into a term for the most used domesticated species: cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and humans, sometimes supplemented by donkeys and mules in the middle period Vedic texts. The fivefold (or sevenfold) classification is one of its key aspects: although a single group, it is internally differentiated. Moreover, the Vedic literature incorporates anatomically-based criteria which enable one to distinguish between the individual *paśus* even further, as we have seen in § 2.1.5. Some translators tend to apply a narrower term “cattle” to the word *paśu*; I would argue, nevertheless, that the omnipresent *topos* which describes *paśus*’ “fivefold (or sevenfold) nature” and the internal differentiation according to feet and teeth are strong arguments for the translation “livestock” which can encompass all the domestic species.

I have observed that the term seems to undergo a process of generalisation in the later Vedic strata, especially the Yajurvedic Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇa prose. There, the term seems to apply to a larger array of animals, especially due to the introduction of yet another internal categorisation, that is the dichotomy of *grāmya*, domestic, and *āranya paśu*. I have only touched on this dichotomy in this subchapter; its proper treatment is found in subchapter § 2.3. The previous meaning “livestock” is, however, still present – this makes translation and interpretation of some of the passages challenging

²⁰² In the Dharmaśāstra corpus, we find an intricate classification of food prescriptions: food can either be *bhakṣya/abhakṣya*, *bhojya/abhojya*, *āḍya/anāḍya*, or *peya* and *apeya*. The last pair, “drinkable/undrinkable”, is restricted to liquids. The penultimate pair meaning “edible/inedible” is the most frequent one in Vedic literature, occurring altogether nine times, including both things that should not be eaten (cows) and inedible substances (stone, clay). Of the first two pairs, the positives are not prescriptions but simply types of food, whereas the negatives have a strong prescriptive meaning. In the dharmaśāstric language, *abhakṣya* means “forbidden food” (e.g. carnivorous animals, garlic, or red resins of trees), whereas *abhojya* stands for food (or a person) that is “unfit” (for instance touched by an impure person, or that which turned sour or stale). See especially Olivelle: 2002a, 2002b.

(for example, it is often difficult to decide whether *sarvān paśūn*, an ever-present formula in the prose texts, signifies “all livestock”, or “all beings in general”).

In the last section of the subchapter, I have argued that the term *paśu* underwent an evolution in meaning in the Vedic sources. It was never a zoological concept: from a socio-economic term, signifying movable wealth, it evolved into a ritual term in the Vedic prose. *Sensu stricto*, an animal that is categorised as *paśu* is fit to be sacrificed in a Vedic ritual. If it is fit to be sacrificed, it is theoretically edible as well. In chapter § 3.3.1, we will explore the constitutive exception of this rule: the human being which, despite being *paśu*, can be neither eaten nor sacrificed.

§ 2.2 MṚGA

After *paśu*, *mṛga* is perhaps the second most often used term for non-human animals in the Vedic literature. They seem to be counterparts, or at least that is how they are usually treated in the secondary literature: if *paśu* signifies the domesticated species which live close to human dwellings, *mṛgas* are the animals populating the “uncivilised nature”. In our earliest source, the Ṛgveda, *mṛga* is used as a generic term for any wild animal, usually dangerous and fearful, as we will explain in more detail shortly. By the time of Classical Sanskrit literature, however, it acquires the meaning “deer” or an “antelope” (cf. Modern Hindi *mṛg*) – a wild ruminant.²⁰³ Since this striking evolution of the term has not been fully explained in the secondary literature, the aim of this chapter is to do exactly that.

§ 2.2.1 THE INDO-IRANIAN AND ṚGVEDIC MṚGA

Unlike *paśu*, a word with a clear Indo-European history, *mṛga* seems to be a more cryptic term, with an uncertain origin that does not have many Indo-European parallels.²⁰⁴ It is, nevertheless, a well-attested word in the Indo-Iranian languages and therefore, we could speculate that it is limited to this branch only and reconstruct it as **mṛga*.

Aside from *mṛga*, a few words derived from the same root occur in Vedic Sanskrit: a denominative verb $\sqrt{mṛg}$, *mṛgayati*, “to hunt” which occurs once in the ṚV and twice in the AVŚ,²⁰⁵ and the nouns *mṛgaṇyu*, “hunter”, and *mārga*, “track, path, way”. In the following discussion, I will not deal with *mārga*, as its semantics covers animals only rarely.

The Iranian branch offers many witnesses of the term, for example YAv *mərəya*, Sogdian *mrg*, Middle Persian *murw*, or Parthian *mwr̥g*, all with the meaning “bird” (cf. Modern Persian *morğ*, “hen”).²⁰⁶ Benveniste argues that “Iranian has [...] limited the sense of *mərəya*- to the winged species”.²⁰⁷ Since the *Yasna Haptan̥hāiti*, Avestan replaced the inherited Indo-Iranian word for a wild animal with the term *daitika* (Y. 39.1-2, cf. Yt. 13.74; in both passages, it is a counterpart of *pasuka*, “livestock”). Many scholars understand *daitika* to come from the Indo-Iranian **dant*, “tooth” (compare

²⁰³ A similar process happened in English: the word “deer” (OE *deor*, ultimately based on PIE **dheusóm*, “a breathing being”) was originally a term for any wild animal and only later, between 15th and 16th century, replaced the word “hart” (OE *heor̥t*, from PIE **k̑erw*, “horn”) as a specific term for a hoofed antlered ruminant.

²⁰⁴ Mayrhofer, *EWA* Bd. 2, p. 370-1, *KEWA*, Bd. 2, p. 239-40. Mayrhofer has a few suggestions, such as the possible origin in a colour word (cf. Lithuanian *mārgas*, “bright”, or OE *mirce*, “dark”), but does not offer a conclusive solution.

²⁰⁵ Jamison: 1983, p. 88. In AVP, the verb occurs only once, in a parallel passage to the AVŚ.

²⁰⁶ See the lemma *mərəya* in the *AIW*, or Mayrhofer, *EWA* Bd. 2, p. 370-1.

²⁰⁷ Benveniste: 1960, p. 193.

Sanskrit m. *dán* and Avestan m. *dantan*) and the suffix *-ika*; this results in a meaning “provided with teeth, fangs”.²⁰⁸

In the following *Yasna Haptanhāiti* passage, the term *daitika* is further qualified by the adjective *aidiū*, a hapax legomenon with a possible meaning “harmless”.²⁰⁹ This suggests that in early Iranian, wild animals would usually be conceived as harmful, at least some of them; if harmless, however, their souls are worshipped in liturgy just as the souls of people and livestock. Furthermore, the passage is not only a witness of the inherited Indo-European dichotomy of wild and domesticated but also suggests the Zoroastrian dualistic partition of animals as ahuric, beneficial, and daevic, malevolent, especially so-called *xrafstars*, “evil animals”.²¹⁰

Y. 39.1-2²¹¹

1. *iθā āt yazamaidē [...]*
ahmākəṅg āaṭ urunō
pasukanqmcā
yōi nā jjišənti [...]
 2. *daitikanqmcā*
aidiūnqm hūaṭ
urunō yazamaidē [...]

1. In this way we now worship [...] our own souls as well as those of the domestic animals which desire to gain our support, [...].
 2. And we worship the souls of the wild animals, insofar as they are harmless. [...].

Unlike the Iranian languages, where the word *mṛga* underwent the early specialisation described above, the Ṛgvedic language retained the general meaning “wild”. In certain cases, this is an adjective specifying an array of different species; in others, it is used as a noun. Let us start with ṚV passages close to the Iranian meaning “bird”. Here, *mṛga* signifies a bird of prey, hard to catch:

ṚV 1.182.7a-c

kāḥ svid vṛkṣó nīṣṭhito mādhye árṇaso, yāṃ taugriyó
nādhitāḥ paryáśasvajat |
parṇá mṛgásya patáror ivārábha, [...] ||

What tree emerged in the midst of the flood to which the son of Tugra clung in his distress, to grab hold of its leaves as if to the feathers of a wild bird in flight?

²⁰⁸ Hintze: 2007, p. 337. Cf. Bartholomae’s explanation in *AIW* (lemma *daitika*) where he compares the word to Vedic animal terms such as an expression from AVŚ 4.3.4. *vyāghráṇ datvátām ... prathámam*, “to tiger, the first [of creatures] with teeth”, or *daṃṣṭrin*, “an animal with tusks” (and its Avestan counterpart *tiži.dqstra* respectively). Note that the term *pasuka* is constructed with the *-ka* rather than *-ika* suffix, which has a different semantic meaning, as suggested e.g. by Jamison: 2009. Cf. Ciancaglini: 2012.

²⁰⁹ Hintze: *ibid.*, p. 330, argues that this comes from Indo-Iranian **a-di(H)-u*, and could be connected to Vedic *ádyu* (e.g. ṚV 7.34.12). The meaning harmless would also make sense in other passages, such as Y. 40.3. Cf. Schmidt: 1980, p. 214-5.

²¹⁰ On the dualistic nature of Avestan language, see Kellens: 1989, p. 54. On the category of *xrafstars*, see Moazami: 2005.

²¹¹ I am using the edition and translation of Hintze: 2007.

RV 9.32.4a,b

ubhé somāvacākaśan, mṛgó ná taktó arṣasi [...] ||

O Soma, looking down on both [worlds?], like a great wild bird launched in flight you rush.

The former passage uses the word in an adjectival sense, qualifying the genitive of the word *pataru*, “flying, bird”. The latter is, however, harder to understand, as *mṛga* is used as a substantive without a distinctive epithet and therefore, it could mean just “wild beast”.²¹² Stephanie Jamison argues, however, that the participle *takta*, a derivative from $\sqrt{tak}$, “to rush”, is found to describe birds of prey elsewhere (cf. RV 9.67.15), and that the participle *avacākaśat*, qualifying the god Soma, “fits a bird better than an earth-bound beast”.²¹³

Furthermore, the word *mṛga* describes other wild species, such as wild water buffaloes, *mṛga mahiṣa*, and elephants, *mṛga hastin* or *mṛga vāraṇa*.²¹⁴ Both of these are large, perceptibly wild species which are hard to domesticate; furthermore, they dwell far enough from human dwellings but close enough to be perceived and spoken about.²¹⁵ Notice, furthermore, the lion (*siṃha*) in the second example: animals known as *mṛga* are clearly the wildest and most dangerous species one can encounter.

RV 10.123.4b,c²¹⁶

mṛgāsya ghōṣam mahiṣāsya hí gmán |
ṛténa yánto ádhi síndhum asthur, [...] ||

Because they came toward the cry of the wild buffalo, approaching with truth they mounted onto the stream.

RV 4.16.14c,d

mṛgó ná hastí táviṣīm uṣāṇáh, siṃhó ná bhīmá
áyudhāni bíbhṛat ||

Like a wild elephant, clothing yourself in might, and fearsome like a lion when you bear your weapons.

RV 1.64.7c,d

mṛgá iva hastínaḥ khādathā vānā, yád áruṇiṣu
táviṣīr áyugdhuvam ||

Like wild elephants you [o Maruts] chew up the woods, when you have yoked your own powers to those of your ruddy [horses].

²¹² Cf. a similar case in the passage RV 10.136.6.

²¹³ See Jamison’s commentary to RV 9.32.4 [<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/>, version from 4 October 2021, accessed on 1 February 2022].

²¹⁴ *Mṛga hastin* and *mṛga vāraṇa* seem to be the only terms that the RV uses for elephants. Bose: 2020 follows Geldner’s translation and argues that *ibha* (1.84.17, 9.57.3) is yet another term for this animal. This etymology has been conclusively dismissed by Mayrhofer in *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 194, and Jamison in her commentary to 1.84 argues likewise, translating *ibha* as “retinue”. For instances of the usage *mṛga vāraṇa*, see below RV 10.40.4, or RV 8.33.8.

²¹⁵ On theoretical background of this, see Leach: 1989, p. 158, and Leach: 1965.

²¹⁶ Cf. other passages on wild buffaloes: RV 8.69.15, 9.92.6.

Many of the passages quoted above use *mṛga* adjectivally. When used as a substantive, it seems to signify an unspecified “wild animal” and it is often translated as a “beast” as we have already noted above, in the discussion on RV 9.32.7.

The word itself is often further qualified by an adjective which stresses its otherness and dangerousness. *Mṛga* is said to be ravenous (*aśna*), terrifying (*bhīma*), powerful (*tuviṣmat*), frenzied (*bhūrṇi*), or large (*mahat*), and is known to live in the mountains and roam wherever it pleases. Consider a few examples of some of these characteristics:

RV 1.173.2a,b

<i>ārcad vṛṣā vṛṣabhiḥ svéduhavyair, mṛgó ná áśno áti yáj juguryát </i>	The bull chants along with the bulls whose sweat is an oblation, like a ravenous wild beast, when he would out-sing [them].
--	---

RV 2.33.11b²¹⁷

<i>mṛgám ná bhīmám upahatnúm ugrám </i>	The mighty one [Rudra], pouncing like a terrifying wild beast.
--	--

RV 8.1.20a-c

<i>má tvā sómasya gáldayā, sádā yácanm ahám girá bhūrṇim mṛgám ná sávaneṣu cukrudham, [...] </i>	I, always begging you with my song – with the gush [?] of soma let me not anger you, frenzied like a wild beast, at the soma-pressing. [...]
--	--

RV 1.154.2b²¹⁸

<i>mṛgó ná bhūmah kucaró giriṣṭháh </i>	[Viṣṇu who is] like a fearsome wild beast, living in the mountains and roaming wherever it wants.
--	---

These examples make clear that for the R̥gveda, *mṛga* is clearly not a timid deer or an antelope but a fearful wild creature. The last example from RV 1.154.2 shows that *mṛgas* are localised to mountainous areas; certainly, they are not welcomed to pastures, as we have seen in the previous subchapter:

RV 1.38.5a,b

<i>má vo mṛgó ná yávase, jaritá bhūd ájoṣiyah</i>	Let your singer not be displeasing to you, like a wild animal in a pasture.
---	---

²¹⁷ Cf. RV 2.34.1, 10.182.2.

²¹⁸ The same simile is used to describe Indra in RV 10.180.2. Cf. a similar thought in Yt. 8.36 *aurunaca gairiṣācō* “the wild animals following [trails] in the mountains” (translation by Skjaervø: 2007, p. 88). Note here the term *auruna*, “wild beast”, according to *AIW* and *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 108, a cognate of Vedic *araṇa*.

Nevertheless, however fearsome any *mṛga* is, the ṚV suggests that it can be killed, either by people and their weapons, such as a javelin, or by wolves. The latter passage suggests that wolves are not classified as *mṛga*.

ṚV 4.58.6c,d

eté arṣanti ūrmáyo ghṛtásya, mṛgá iva kṣipañór These waves of ghee rush, like wild beasts
śamānāḥ || retreating from a javelin.

ṚV 1.105.7c,d

tām mā viyanti ādhíyo, vṛko ná tṛṣṇájam mṛgám But cares [now] pursue this same me, like a wolf
a thirsting wild beast.

These passages, and especially the *mṛga* “retreating from a javelin”, brings us to the matter of hunting.²¹⁹ As noted above, the denominative verb $\sqrt{mrg}$ occurs only once in the ṚV (albeit in a cryptic passage), and so does *mṛgaṇyu*, the word for a “hunter”.²²⁰

ṚV 8.2.6

góbhir yád īm anyé asmán, When those other than us go hunting him with
mṛgáṇ ná vrá mṛgáyante, cows, like [self-]choosing women hunting
*abhítsáranti dhenúbhiḥ |*²²¹ [husbands], and creep up on him with their milk-
cows.

ṚV 10.40.4a,b

yuvám mṛgéva vāraṇá mṛgaṇyávo, doṣá vástor Like hunters on the track of wild elephants, we
*haviṣā ní hvayāmahe |*²²² call you down in the evening and at dawn with
our oblation.

²¹⁹ Cf. ṚV 1.190.4 *mṛgāṇāṃ ná hetáyo*, “the charges of wild beasts”, which Geldner understand as “missiles/weapons for wild beasts”. In the commentary to ṚV 1.190.4, Jamison does not see this as plausible [<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/>, version from 4 October 2021, accessed on 2 February 2022].

²²⁰ Some, especially Geldner, have argued that the peculiar form *mṛgayásah* in ṚV 2.38.7 also means a “hunter”. Jamison’s detailed discussion in her commentary refutes this and translates the form as “the wild beasts”. [ibid., accessed on 2 February 2022].

²²¹ This is an obscure verse, and especially the *pāda* b, where our verb $\sqrt{mrg}$ occurs. I follow Jamison who translates *mṛgáṇ* [...] *mṛgáyante* “a phrasal verb with a cognate accusative, so meaning simply ‘go hunting’” [ibid., accessed on 3 February 2022]. Jamison: 2003, argues that *vrā* is a reduced form of **varā* (cf. a self-choosing bride at the *svayaṇvarā* wedding); in her interpretation, the line is a metaphorical expression of girls aggressively seeking husbands. The metaphorical meaning aside, the verse also brings a possible insight into hunting strategies in the Ṛgvedic times, that is hunting wild ruminants in presence of domesticated cows, possibly on cow pastures which provide perfect conditions for the hunt. Though this practice is known from the British period as well as from today (it is often recommended by hunters in the USA), there is not much data on its historical usage bar its documentation in visual arts.

²²² Another instance of the term *mṛga vāraṇa* is found in ṚV 8.33.8 where Indra is being likened to an elephant which establishes a large territory in which it wanders. Jamison in her commentary argues that “the simile *mṛgéva vāraṇá* has been attracted into the dual to match the Ásvins in the frame”. See [<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/>, version from 4 October 2021, accessed on 2 February 2022].

The term *mṛganyu* aside, the latter passage conveys an impression of elephant hunting, supposedly carried out at dusk and dawn in Vedic India. As Stephanie Jamison argues, however, the simile is attached to the frame only loosely and therefore, we cannot deduce too much information about hunting from it, such as Geldner did when he translated *ní hvayāmahe* as “locken” (to lure, entice), suggesting that ancient hunters perhaps lured elephants vocally.²²³

Not much is known about hunting in Vedic times in general and especially in the ṚV, although the evidence accumulates in the later textual layers as we will see towards the end of this subchapter.²²⁴ From the ṚV, it seems that wild animals were captured by means of javelins (as mentioned above), pitfalls,²²⁵ snares,²²⁶ or dogs.²²⁷ There are, however, not many details at our disposal, such as what social layers utilised hunting, how often, which animals they hunted (apart from elephants, boars, and antelopes, specifically mentioned by the ṚV), and for what reasons (perhaps for additional food, perhaps to protect their stock from danger, or combination of both). We will come back to the question of hunting in § 2.2.4, when we explore the usage of the word in Brāhmaṇa literature.

§ 2. 2. 2 MṚGA IN ATHARVAVEDA

Although a text of a very different spirit than the Ṛgveda, the Atharvaveda uses the word *mṛga* in a similar manner. By and large, the word still retains its original sense “wild animal”: a formidable and dangerous creature. Only one passage, quoted below, suggests that the word might have begun acquiring its Classical meaning “deer” or “antelope”.

The term *mṛga* occurs sixty-five times altogether across its two recensions, with many of the instances being parallel passages.²²⁸ The mere number of the occurrences shows that the idea of a wild animal is important for the AV. I would argue that this is to a certain extent motivated by the genre. The Atharvaveda is a text which is deeply concerned not with the divine but with the human world: with prosperity, relationships, power, kingship, and health. Animals, a major preoccupation of the semi-pastoral Vedic people, are naturally featured in a text so concerned with the sphere of the everyday.

²²³ Jamison, commentary on ṚV 10.40.4, [ibid., accessed on 2 February 2022].

²²⁴ In secondary literature, this has been treated almost solely by Rau: 1957, 23-4, as far as I know.

²²⁵ ṚV 10.39.8; cf. Bodewitz: 1999, p. 211.

²²⁶ ṚV 3.45.1.

²²⁷ ṚV 10.86.4. On dogs used in hunting, especially in the Classical literature, see Bollée: 2006, p. 65-6. In Iran, the attitudes towards dogs were largely different, e.g. Skjaervø: 2012, p. 96-7, Andrés-Toledo: 2013.

²²⁸ To gather this data, I consulted the indispensable *Atharvaveda Index Verborum*, Kim: 2021.

Following the previous subchapter where I started with the early Iranian specialisation that *mṛga* underwent to mean a bird, let us start with an AVŚ passage which we have already seen in § 2.1.3. Not only does it contain an echo of the Iranian association, I think, but also a remarkable gloss, unique to the AV: the expression *āraṇyāḥ paśavo*, “forest animals” is glossed with the term *mṛgā vane*, “wild beasts in the woods”.

AVŚ 11.2.24

<i>túbhyam āraṇyāḥ paśavo mṛgā vāne hitā haṃsāḥ suparṇāḥ śakunā vāyāṃsi </i>	To thee [Rudra] are assigned (<i>hitā</i>) the forest animals (<i>paśu</i>), the wild beasts in the woods: the geese (<i>haṃsa</i>), eagles, {vultures}, {smaller} birds. ²²⁹
---	--

The “forest animals” are followed by a list of birds in this verse, although there is another version (AVŚ 12.1.49 = AVP 17.5.7), which contains a list of mammals: a lion, tiger, jackal, wolf, and demon *ṛkṣikā*.²³⁰ This could suggest that for the AV, *paśu* as well as *mṛga* might have been considered as general, umbrella terms, applicable to birds as well as the mammalian species with which they are associated traditionally. Evidence from the Paippalāda version of the hymn (AVP 16.106.4), however, renders the association with birds rather unlikely.²³¹

In the ṚV, the most common usage of *mṛga* was as a general adjective meaning “wild”, qualifying certain species such as the buffalo or the elephant. This usage dwindles in the AV, although there are a couple of passages that refer to elephants. We see, however, an evolution of the expression; consider the following passage:

AVŚ 3.22.6

<i>hastī mṛgāṇāṃ suśādām atiṣṭhāvān babhūva hí tāsya bhāgena vārcasābhī śiñcāmi mām ahām </i>	Since the elephant has become the superior (<i>atiṣṭhāvān</i>) of the comfortable (<i>suśad</i>) wild beasts, with his fortune [and] splendour do I pour upon myself.
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²²⁹ As above, I deviate from Whitney’s translation in the bird terminology, in which I follow Dave: 2005r.

²³⁰ I discuss the identity of *ṛkṣikā* below, in connection with the verse AVŚ 12.1.49 = AVP 17.5.7.

²³¹ The Paippalāda version of the same hymn in AVP 16.106.4 reads *tubhyam āraṇyāḥ paśavo mṛgā vane hitās, tubhyam vāyāṃsi śakunāḥ patatrinaḥ |*, “To you are assigned wild animals, wild beasts in the forest; to you [are assigned] small birds, the winged [?] vultures” [Edition by Kim: 2019, translation by me]. This parallel suggests that the terms *āraṇyāḥ paśavo* and *mṛgā vane* do not apply to the list of birds but are a separate group. Furthermore, there has been some discussion on the meaning of *patatrīn* which is usually taken as a term for “bird”. Alternatively, it is translated as “winged”, or “flying”. Griffiths (2009, p. 70) suggests that in the AVP 20.56.11, it might be taken as a term for insect.

Note, however, that unlike the RV, the AV treats the words *mṛga* and *hastin* as two words, not one expression: the form of *hastin* is N sg. m., whereas *mṛga* is G pl. m. This division of the expression also seems to be the case in AVŚ 12.1.25 which I quote below. In this passage, *mṛga* and *hastin* are in the same case and number but they are divided by the conjunction *uta* which leads Whitney to translate them as two separate beings. This translation is further supported by the fact that *mṛga* and *hastin* are preceded by another pair, *ásveṣu vīreṣu*, clearly signifying two separate entities.²³²

AVŚ 12.1.25

<i>yás te gandháḥ púruṣeṣu strīṣu puṃsú bhágo rúciḥ </i> <i>yó áśveṣu vīreṣu yó mṛgeṣútá hastíṣu </i> <i>kanyāyāṃ vārco yád bhūme ténāsmām ápi sám srja</i> <i>má no dvikṣata kás caná </i>	What odor of thine is in human beings; in women, in men, [what] portion, [what] pleasure; what in horses, in heroes, what in wild animals and in elephants; what splendor, o earth, in a maiden, with that do thou unite us also; let no one soever hate us.
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Both passages imply that by the time of the AV, *hastin* might have been already recognised as an independent term for an elephant, and the word *mṛga* might be no longer needed to specify it.²³³ The reason for this evolution is unclear. Perhaps it could be coupled with the usual explanation of the evolution of animal terminology, that is, with the movement of the Vedic people further south and east from their entry point in the Punjab.²³⁴ As they grew accustomed to elephants, the terminology crystallised, and there was less need to use the adjectival expression.

Perhaps another bit of evidence that could explain this evolution of elephant terminology – and animal terminology in general – could be the passage AVŚ 5.14.1 and its Paippalāda parallel in AVP 7.1.9. I quote this below, including the two existing translations. This passage uses the word *vāraṇī* close to the term *mṛgī*; an expression which appears to be akin to the Rgvedic term *mṛga vāraṇa*, “elephant” (RV 8.33.8, 10.40.4) which I discussed in the previous section:

AVŚ 12.1.25 = AVP 7.1.9²³⁵

<i>úd eṇíva vāraṇy {AVP vārīny} ābhiskāndaṃ mṛgíva </i> <i>kṛtyā kartāram ṛchatu </i>	[Whitney, AVŚ:] Up, like a she-antelope (<i>eṇí</i>), a she-elephant (? <i>vāraṇī</i>), with leaping on, like a hind, let the witchcraft go to its maker.
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²³² The parallel passage in AVP 17.3.5 includes yet another pair, *vadhūṣu vadhūyūṣu*, “brides and grooms”, supporting this point even further.

²³³ According to Mayrhofer (*EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 458), the oft-used Classical Sanskrit term *gaja* does not occur until the Śaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa, a relatively late and derivative appendix to the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa.

²³⁴ Witzel: 1987.

²³⁵ Edition and translation of the Paippalāda version are from AVP trl Griffiths: 2009, p. 265-6.

[Griffiths, AVP:] Like a she-antelope (*eṇī*) with raised tail, jumping forward like a doe (*mṛgī*), let the witchcraft hit upon its maker.

Whilst Whitney understand *mṛgī* as a “hind”, he doubtfully translates *vāraṇī* as she-elephant, perhaps inspired by the Ṛgvedic *mṛga vāraṇa*. The parallel passage in AVP 7.1.9, however, reads *vāriṇī*.²³⁶ Arlo Griffiths derives *vāriṇī* from *vāra*, “tail” and connects it with the preverb *ud*, which results in a largely different translation to Whitney’s that disregards the female elephant.

Rather than a passage explaining elephant terminology, this might well be the first evidence of the process of specialisation of the term *mṛga* as a specific term for a wild ruminant, known from Classical Sanskrit. Both translators understand *mṛgī* not to be just a female of any wild animal but as a word for a doe or hind. Since this is the only instance of the word in the AV (and in fact, in the Vedic literature in general),²³⁷ I suspect that the translation is motivated by the word *eṇī* which is believed to be a term for a female antelope.²³⁸

Despite this sole association of *mṛgī* and *eṇī* which might point towards the specialisation as a term for a ruminant, the word keeps the semantic breadth that we observed in the ṚV; namely, its association with the notions of wildness and danger. In the ṚV, this was expressed by adjectives such as *bhīma*, “terrifying”, or by the association with mountainous areas. The AV expresses a similar sentiment, expressed by the mantra *mṛgó na bhīmáḥ kucaró giriṣṭháḥ*, “like a fearsome wild beast, living in the mountains and roaming wherever it wants”, first found in the late Ṛgvedic verse, ṚV 10.180.2.²³⁹

AVŚ 7.84.3

<i>mṛgó na bhīmáḥ kucaró giriṣṭháḥ parāvāta á jagamyāt párasyaḥ </i> <i>sṛkám saṁśáya pavím indra tigmám ví śátrūn tāḍhi</i> <i>ví mṛdho nudasva </i>	Like a fearful wild beast, wandering, mountain-staying, from distant distance may he come hither; sharpening, O Indra, [thy] missile, [thy] keen rim, smite away the foes, push away the scorners.
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²³⁶ Griffiths: 2009, p. 265-6, bases this reading on the evidence of the Orissan mss.

²³⁷ I base this assertion on the data in the *VPK*.

²³⁸ Mayrhofer (*EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 265) notes that the AV is the earliest instance of the word *eṇī*, presumably referring to this very passage.

²³⁹ The translation of the formula in the body of the text is Jamison’s and Brereton’s. The same formula is found in AVŚ 7.26.2; AVP 1.77.2, 20.7.10; VSM 18.71; KS 2.10, 8.16; KKS 2.4; TS 1.6.12.4; and MS 1.2.9, 4.12.3.

Often, the AV associates the notion of danger with something that the older scholars of the AV labelled as “magic”, “witchcraft”, or “sorcery”.²⁴⁰ Recent scholarship argues, however, that the application of the Western analytical categories such as “magic” to the Vedic texts, including the AV, is problematic and completely unproductive, since the systems of thought underlying the supposedly “magical rites” are virtually identical to the “religious”, or solemn rituals.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, as Jamison and Witzel argue, a certain degree of distinction can serve as a convenient tool of interpretation: for example the division between the rituals done publicly and those done for the sake of a private goal, benevolent (to win love or cure an illness) and malevolent (to harm an enemy) alike.²⁴² Following these suggestions, I will be talking about malevolent ritual practices instead of “magic” or “sorcery”.

It is these private ritual practices with malevolent aims that are associated with wild animals, as we have seen above in AVŚ 12.1.25 and its Paippalāda version, AVP 7.1.9. There, the poet wishes that *kṛtyā*, standardly translated as “witchcraft”, attacks its creator, *kartṛ*, perhaps a malevolent ritualist or a sorcerer, in the same way that a wild antelope jumps forward. Although the etymology of *kṛtyā* is straightforward, the word acquired a specific meaning in the Atharvavedic context: it signifies either a powerful material object, created by a malevolent ritualist (*kartṛ*, also a word of clear etymology used very specifically in the AV, sometimes meaning almost a “sorcerer”), or a personalised power which often takes on a feminine form, as seen in the RV and AV.²⁴³ Either way, it is a danger that has to be counter-attacked. The AV frequently uses hunting metaphors to describe the counter attack, such as in the following verse. Although it seems cryptic at a first sight, the context suggests that the poet wants the witchcraft to turn against its instigator (in the hymn termed both *kartṛ* and *kṛtyākṛt*) in the same way that a hunter, *mṛgayu*, kills a wild animal.

²⁴⁰ E.g. Bloomfield: 1897, p. 61.

²⁴¹ Whilst some, such as Goudriaan: 1986; or Glucklich: 1997, still use the term “magic” for South Asian texts and practices, others argue that the distinction of “religion” and “magic” is meaningless when applied to Sanskrit texts, e.g. Cohen: 2020; Whitaker: 2011; or Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 49. Compare with the interpretation of magic in the AV by Spiers: 2020.

²⁴² Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 49-50.

²⁴³ According to Goudriaan (1986, p. 452), this term has two aspects: “[a] an impersonal one, a material object produced by a sorcerer and handled by him according to more or less technical prescriptions; and [b] a more personally conceived power which in a way is thought to be connected with this material substratum, sometimes in the form of a highly effective and dangerous being which threatens to destroy somebody's life or property”. The sole instance of *kṛtyā* in the RV is in the wedding hymn 10.85.28-29 where it takes possession of the bride (here in the translation of Jamison & Brereton): “28. It [=bride's garment] becomes dark red. [She=bride] becomes witchcraft (*kṛtyā*), a noose. She is smeared [with blood]. Her relatives are elated; her husband is bound in bonds. 29. Hand over the stained garment; to the brahmins parcel out the goods. She herself has become walking witchcraft (*kṛtyā*): the wife enters her husband.” A similar association of a bride with witchcraft is found in AVŚ 10.1.1.

AVŚ 10.1.26

pārehi kṛtye mā tiṣṭho viddhāsyeva padām naya | Go away, o witchcraft, stand not, lead, as it were,
mṛgāḥ sā mṛgayús tvám ná tvā níkartum arhati || {the footsteps} of one pierced; it is a {wild
 animal}, thou a {hunter}; it is unable to put thee
 down.²⁴⁴

In the AV, there seems to be a certain semantic overlap between hunting and counter-attacking malevolent ritual action. Wild animals are by and large seen as fearful or as obstacles (*paripanthin*, AVŚ 3.15.1, AVP 19.49.1) and must be hunted down; the same applies to the rituals with evil intentions and their instigators. The following hymn AVŚ 4.3.6, introducing a ritual action against wild animals and malicious people, can serve as an example of this:

AVŚ 4.3.4,6²⁴⁵

<i>vyāghráṇ datvátām vayám prathamám</i> <i>jambhayāmasi </i> <i>ád u ṣṭenám átho áhiṃ yātudhānam átho vṛkam 4</i> <i>mūrṇā mṛgāsya dántā ápiśīrṇā u prṣṭáyah </i> <i>nimrúk te godhā bhavatu nīcāyac chaśayúr</i> <i>mṛgāḥ 6</i>	4. The tiger first of [creatures] with teeth do we grind up, {after} that also the thief, then the snake, the sorcerer, then the wolf. 6. Ruined (<i>mūrṇā</i>) [are] the teeth of the beast (<i>mṛga</i>); crushed in also [are its] ribs; disappearing be for thee the {monitor lizard} (<i>godhā</i>); ²⁴⁶ downward go{es} the beast {pursuing hares} (<i>śaśayu</i>). ²⁴⁷
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This hymn associates *mṛga* with specific wild animals, namely a tiger (*vyāghra*), called the foremost among the wild creatures, but also a snake (*ahi*) or a lizard (*godhā*), and a wolf (*vṛka*). These dangerous

²⁴⁴ Verbatim parallel in AVP 16.37.6. Whitney translates ... *padām naya* as “lead a track” which does not make much sense to me in English, and so I modify it to “lead the footsteps”, perhaps equally elusive. I suppose it means “to lead the way”. I also modify Whitney’s translation for *mṛga* and *mṛgayu* to fit my argument. Even within its context, the verse is challenging to understand. I suggest that the “pierced one” (*viddhasya*) is the instigator of the witchcraft that the poet wants to get rid of.

²⁴⁵ Cf. AVP 2.8.

²⁴⁶ Whitney leaves the term *godhā* untranslated, possibly following the commentary which, according to his note, states that “*godhā* is [...] ‘the animal of that name’.” AVŚ trl Whitney, vol. 1, p. 149. My translation “monitor lizard” follows Lüders: 1942, p. 23-50, and Zysk: 1985, p. 88. Zysk, inspired by the identifications of Meulenbeld: 1974, translates the word as “varan”. As far as I am aware, this is not a common English term and I suppose Zysk uses it under the influence of either the Latin word *Varanus*, or the German term Waran. In any case, I am confident that it signifies a sort of snake or a lizard, as suggested by the term *ahi* in verse 4, and by the expression *datvāti rájjuh*, “a rope with teeth”, found in verse 2. The common Indian monitor (*Varanus bengalensis*) is widely distributed in the subcontinent, as discussed by Lüders: 1942.

²⁴⁷ In his note, Whitney admits that this is an enigmatic term and translates it as “lurking (?)”. Other scholars, including Monier-Williams, take the word quite literally as “pursuing hares” but Whitney (AVŚ trl, vol. 1, p. 149) suggests that it is unlikely that “a ‘hare-hunting’ animal would be worth guarding against”. Since the hymn is about wild beasts of all kinds which might hunt hares as well as be dangerous to people, I take the expression literally.

creatures are on a par with malicious people, specifically a thief (*stena*, here retroflexed as *ṣṭena*)²⁴⁸ and a sorcerer (*yātudhāna*). The hymn does not mention the act of hunting, only the defeated animal, with ribcage and teeth shattered. The image of smashed teeth is repeated throughout the hymn and is mentioned even in conjunction with the reptile, making it clear that the poet considers teeth to be the main weapon of the *mṛga* that needs to be destroyed.

Before turning to tracing the term *mṛga* in the Vedic prose, let me briefly conclude this section by talking about one last Atharvavedic passage, again found in both recensions. It is a short hymn from the nineteenth book, describing the removal of *yakṣma*, an internal disease-demon which is characterised by possessing the whole body, by using the *gulgulu*, possibly the fragrant resin called bdellium.²⁴⁹ This medicine causes the disease to disperse in all directions:

AVŚ 19.38.2-3²⁵⁰

<i>vīṣvañcas tāsmād yāḁsmā mṛgā āśvā iverate </i> <i>yād gulgulū saindhavaṁ yād vāpy āsi</i> <i>samudrīyam 2</i> <i>ubhāyor agraḁhaṁ nāmāsmā ariṣṭātātaye 3</i>	From him [who is permeated with its scent], the <i>yakṣmas</i> disperse in all directions, like {wild horses}. Whether, o <i>gulgulu</i> , you are from the Sindhu or whether [you are] from the ocean, I have taken the name of both [kinds], so that this man may be unharmed.
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The dispersal of the disease is likened to the movement of wild horses (*mṛgā āśvā*) here. To my eye, *mṛga* plus *āśva* is an unusual combination of terms, not found anywhere else in the corpus, as far as I am aware. There are no native wild horses in India, and since the climate of the Indian subcontinent is unfavourable to their wellbeing, feral horses do not breed well enough to establish a solid population.²⁵¹ The unlikely simile is, however, easily explained if we follow the reading *iṣvā*, retained in the Paippalāda version:

²⁴⁸ The particle *u* triggers the change from *s* to *ṣ* due to the rules of retroflexion, which then carries over to *t*; hence **u stena* > *u ṣṭena*. See Macdonell: 1916, § 67c.

²⁴⁹ Zysk: 1985, p. 12-17. On the identification of *gulgulu*, see *ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁵⁰ I am using the translation of Zysk (*ibid.*, p. 17), because I find it overall smoother than Whitney's, although I have made some changes, detailed below. I think that Whitney's translation is unlikely: he notes that he emends the passage in his edition and translates it as "From him the *yakṣma* scatter away, like antelopes from a wild beast." (AVŚ trl Whitney, vol. 2, p. 958.) All additions in square brackets are Zysk's, apart from the translation of the expression *mṛgā āśvā*. Zysk translates it as "deer [or] horses" but there is no conjunction which would suggest the meaning "or". Furthermore, I argue in this chapter that the AV still understands *mṛga* largely as "wild animal"; therefore, I think the meaning "deer" is unlikely.

²⁵¹ Doniger: 2021, p. 1-20. Cf. my review of Doniger's book in Sojtková: 2022.

AVP 19.24.2

viṣvañcas tasmād yakṣmā mṛgā iṣvā iverate

From him the yakṣmas disperse in all directions,
like wild animals from an arrow (*iṣu*).²⁵²

This provides smoother meaning, I think, and keeps in line with the idea that wild animals fear people and their weapons – a notion that we find elsewhere in the AV. Again, the imagery of hunted animals is used to describe the notion of danger, only this time, it is applied to enemies in the war:

AVŚ 5.21.4

yáthā mṛgáḥ saṁvijánta āraṇyáḥ púruṣād ádhi | As the wild beasts of the forest are all in a tremble
evá tvám dundubhe 'mítrān abhí kranda prá at man, so do thou, o drum, roar at and alarm our
trāsayátho cittāni mohaya || enemies, then confound their intents.

Unlike the ṚV where wild animals are almost unanimously dangerous and fearful, the AV shows the other side: animals can be hunted down and killed. Again, I suggest that this is to do with the genre of the text. The ṚV shows a predominant interest with the divine and in many cases, wild animals are mentioned either as metaphors for gods, or when the gods are pleaded to destroy them. The AV, with its attention directed to the human life, gives more agency to the humans, and shows them that they can deal with animals themselves, as they are able to deal with the witchcraft.

To conclude this section, let me observe again that the Atharvavedic treatment of *mṛga* is unique. Apart from the ṚV mantra quotations, similar passages are not found anywhere else in the corpus. I believe that this is due to the genre of the text. Since it is primarily concerned with the sphere of the everyday, it includes many references to domestic and wild animals whose lives were intertwined with the human. The text reflects that the relationship with wild animals was not romantic in ancient India: they were feared greatly and considered an “obstacle”. A large portion of the Atharvaveda is dedicated to the fight against witchcraft, ill-meaning ritual activity, or illness. Due to their fearful character, wild animals are frequently used to symbolise the opponent in the fight: one can eradicate illness or witchcraft in the same manner as one can eradicate a wild animal.

§ 2. 2. 3

TRACING MṚGA IN THE YAJURVEDIC CORPUS

The Yajurvedic Saṁhitās, the textual layer following the AV, does not offer much new information that would enrich our understanding of the term *mṛga*. This, I believe, has to do with the limitations of the

²⁵² Translation is mine; I understand *iṣvā* to be an abblative sg. f.

genre of the Yajurvedic texts.²⁵³ The YV is preoccupied with the questions of ritual and its performance; in most of Vedic rituals, wild animals play no role whatsoever. It is domestic livestock species that are the focus of the ritualists. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, most famously the grandiose ritual of the *aśvamedha* which utilises wild species to a certain extent – but even these passages do not talk about *mṛga*; it is always *āraṇya paśu*. The myopic concentration on the solemn ritual also explains why the YV Saṃhitās do not provide more information about the practices associated with wild animals in the AV, that is, hunting and malevolent ritual practices.

When the YV poetry and prose deal with *mṛga* animals, for the most part, they borrow the ṚV mantras (and in one case, an AVŚ verse). Out of the 21 YV occurrences, listed in the VPAK, only three are *not* borrowed ṚV verses. The rest is a recycled Ṛgvedic poetry, used without variation.

Such an example is the oft-repeated formula *mṛgó na bhīmáḥ kucaró giriṣṭhāḥ*, “like a fearsome wild beast, living in the mountains and roaming wherever it wants,” which I mentioned in the previous section. This formula, first found in the ṚV and repeated in the AV, is used by the YV Saṃhitās during the *puronuvākyās*, the “invitational” verses to the *darśapūrṇamāsa*.²⁵⁴ There are other examples, however. The famous ṚV hymn 6.75 about weapons is almost fully used in the *aśvamedha* ritual, during the preparation of the royal armour and chariot. This hymn, recited here, includes a passage describing an arrow which “wears the fine-feathered [eagle]; the wild [beast] is her tooth”, *suparṇāṃ vaste mṛgó asyā dānto*.²⁵⁵ Another verse, used in the optional offerings following the Soma sacrifice, borrows a ṚV verse that compares Soma to the most significant examples of certain groups of beings. Soma, it says, is like the “formulator (*brahman*) of the gods, [...], buffalo of the wild beasts,

²⁵³ For a comparison, consider how Stephanie Jamison (1991, p. 51) generally describes the BYV passages that contain the story of Indra and the Yatis: “Each account is short, almost telegraphic. [...] The telling of myth is subordinated to the ritual preoccupations of the text. In the YV the myth is introduced to account for particular actions or implements employed at that moment in the ritual performance. [...] The YV in general knows nothing but the act, relates nothing but it and its immediate consequences, rather in the manner of the Vṛtra-slaying myth.” Although Jamison’s summary is obviously based on a particular mythical episode from the Indra’s cycle, it is to a certain extent applicable to many other YV passages. Certainly, in terms of wild animals, the YV is interested in them only in so far as they relate to ritual actions.

²⁵⁴ ṚV 10.180.2; AVŚ 7.26.2; AVP 1.77.2, 20.7.10; VSM 18.71; KS 2.10, 8.16; KKS 2.4; TS 1.6.12.4; and MS 1.2.9, 4.12.3. Compare also a variant of this mantra from ṚV 2.33.11 *mṛgāṇ ná bhīmám upahatnám ugrám*, “the mighty one [Rudra], pouncing like a terrifying wild beast” (ṚV trl Jamison & Brereton), which is repeated in TS 4.5.10.4. There are also other variants found throughout the Brāhmaṇa corpus, see § 2.1.2.4.

²⁵⁵ ṚV 6.75.11, VSM 29.48, TS 4.6.6.4, MS 3.16.3. As Jamison suggests in her online ṚV commentary [<http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/> version from 4 October 2021, accessed on 6 April 2022], the eagle is the fletching, whilst the *mṛga* is the arrowhead. The idea of a bone arrowhead is supported by the significant finds of Bronze and Iron Age bone arrowheads in the Upper Gangetic Plains (e.g. Vinayak: 2021). Jamison translates *mṛga* as “deer” here but since the archaeological findings note bone of more species than just ruminants, I am changing it to “wild beast”, to express my argument that at the time of the ṚV, *mṛga* was a general term for a wild animal. It is possible, as I argue further, that by the time of the YV Saṃhitās, the understanding of the term has evolved – but this is, after all, a verbatim ṚV quotation.

falcon of the birds of prey [...]", *brahmá devānām [...]* *mahiṣó mṛgāṇām śyenó gṛdhrāṇām*.²⁵⁶ In another example, the passage from RV 4.58.6 used in preparatory rites for the *agnicayana* likens waves of ghee to wild animals retreating from a javelin, *eté arṣanti ūrmáyo ghṛtásya, mṛgá iva kṣipañór íṣamāñāḥ*.²⁵⁷

In one of the few YV passages that does not borrow a RV verse, we learn about the origin of the horn (*viṣāṇa*) of the blackbuck (*kṛṣṇa*).²⁵⁸ The horn is employed as a ritual instrument during the *agniṣṭoma*: it is held by the *adhvaryu* until the *dakṣiṇā* is distributed among the ritualists and then disposed of in the *cātvāla*, the pit created during the construction of the *uttaravedi*. According to the mythical contextualisation of this ritual tool, the blackbuck's horn was created when the sacrifice (*yajña*) had intercourse with the *dakṣiṇā*. Indra was born from this relationship. After the intercourse, the sacrifice was said to stroke *dakṣiṇā*'s womb (*yoni*) and it split in two. One part became a barren cow (*sūtavaśā*), whilst the other one was placed amongst wild animals and became the blackbuck's horn:

TS 6.1.3.7

<i>tām háste ny āveṣṭayata tām mṛgēṣu ny ādadhāt sá</i> <i>kṛṣṇaviṣāṇābhavad</i>	He wrapped it [the <i>yoni</i>] in his hand; he deposited it among the wild beasts; it became the horn of the {blackbuck}.
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As far as I know, there is neither any discussion about the origin of the blackbuck itself nor does the TS mention that it was originally hornless. The meaning / referent of *mṛga* is also uncertain: is it still a general term for all wild animals, as it was in the RV, or is it becoming a term for wild ruminants? Perhaps, by this time, a wild ungulate begins to become the prime example of a wild animal; a process which accelerates in the Brāhmaṇas.

Before moving onto the exposition of *mṛga* in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas, let me summarise their presence in the YV Saṃhitās. The difference between them and *paśu* is stark. The YV texts tell us a lot about *paśus*' bodies and behaviour but are mostly silent about *mṛgas*. If they are mentioned, they do not have any agency, a presence of their own; they are used only as a material for comparison. The close attention to ritual actions that for the most part do not employ wild animals is probably the primary reason.

²⁵⁶ RV 9.96.6, TS 3.4.11.1, MS 4.12.6, KS 23.12.

²⁵⁷ VSM 17.94, KS 40.7. In the VS, this verse is used during the preparatory rites of the *agnicayana*, following the *śatarudrīya* litanies.

²⁵⁸ Although in Classical Sanskrit, the compounded term *kṛṣṇamṛga* is used for a blackbuck, Vedic texts since the RV 10.94.5 call it simply *kṛṣṇa*.

Moreover, I wonder whether at this stage of the Vedic language, the category *mṛga* stops being a productive general term for wild animals. This is signified by the fact that the term *āraṇya paśu* becomes much more widely used. I will explore this expression in more detail in the next subchapter § 2.3 but just to illustrate my point, consider that *āraṇya paśu* occurs only once in the ṚV but about twenty times in the TS, clearly showing that by the time of the TS (the latest of all the core BYV texts), it has become a productive phrase.²⁵⁹

Furthermore, individual wild species are mentioned by their specific name in the YV Saṃhitās, a practice that is less common in the earlier poetry. Whilst the ṚV speaks about some wild animals – elephant, water buffalo, wolf, lion, several bird species, to name a few examples – the difference in sheer quantity of species in the YV Saṃhitās is striking.²⁶⁰ The description of the *aśvamedha* sacrificial “offerings”²⁶¹ is a good example of this:

TS 5.5.11²⁶²

<i>indrāya rājñe sūkarās, varuṇāya rājñe kṛṣṇas, yamāya rājña īśyas, ṛṣabhāya rājñe gavayāḥ, śārdūlāya rājñe gaurāḥ, puruṣarājāya markāṭaḥ, kṣipraśyenāśya vārtikā, nīlaṃgoḥ kṛmīḥ, sōmasya rājñāḥ kulumaṅgāḥ, śindhoḥ śimśumāras, himāvato hastī</i>	To Indra, the king, a boar; to Varuṇa, the king, {a blackbuck}; to Yama, the king, a deer; to the bull, the king, a {g}ayal; to the tiger, the king, {a gaur}; to the king of men a monkey; for the swift falcon a quail; for the Nīlaṃgu [=snake] a worm; for Soma, the king, a gazelle; for the ocean a crocodile; for the snowy mountain an elephant.
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Lengthy lists of animal offerings, like this one from the TS, occur in all the major YV Saṃhitās as all have a section on the *aśvamedha*. None, as far as I know, uses the word *mṛga* to describe these offerings as a collective single whole.

§ 2. 2. 4 MṚGA IN THE BRĀHMAṆAS

A clear shift in the understanding of wild animals is apparent when we compare the number of instances of the word *mṛga* in the ṚV (thirty-nine) and AV (sixty-five across both editions) with the

²⁵⁹ On TS as the youngest Black Yajurveda Saṃhitā, see Jamison & Witzel: 1991, p. 9. The number of TS occurrences is based on the data from the Digital Corpus of Sanskrit [<http://www.sanskrit-linguistics.org/dcs/index.php>, last accessed 7 April 2022].

²⁶⁰ Cf. Jamison: 2009, on wild species in the ṚV.

²⁶¹ It is worth pointing out that the wild animals are never actually offered but are set free, which is why I use the quotation marks.

²⁶² This list of offerings continues to TS 5.5.24; wild animals are detailed in 5.5.11-21, domestic in 22-24. Cf. VSM 24.30 and MS 3.14.11 (both with variations) and KSV 7.1 (no variation). The translation is Keith's, but I took the liberty to translate *kṛṣṇa* as “blackbuck” instead of “black antelope” and *gaura* as “gaur” instead of “Bos Gavaeus”. The note “snake” explaining the word *nīlaṃgu* is Keith's.

Brāhmaṇa corpus. Here, the word occurs altogether about twenty-five times, including the late texts such as the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa.²⁶³ Just as it is in the YV Saṃhitās, *mṛga* is a scarce word in the Brāhmaṇas, and its semantic field seems to be narrowing down.

Like the Yajurvedic Saṃhitās, the Brāhmaṇas quote earlier mantras which mention the word *mṛga*. This is a well-known phenomenon: as Timothy Lubin argues, the Brāhmaṇas function as commentaries of Vedic ritual and one of their purposes is to clarify the meaning and purpose of the mantras used.²⁶⁴ The scale on which the Brāhmaṇas quote the mantras related to *mṛgas* is, however, much smaller than in the YV. In fact, I have found only two mantras altogether.²⁶⁵ “Like a fearsome wild beast”, *mṛgó ná bhūmáḥ*, is the ṚV mantra that we have seen several times in the YV, and it makes its appearance in ŚB and TB.²⁶⁶ The KB employs the mantra *dānā mṛgó ná vāraṇāḥ*, “like a wild elephant he [Indra] has established”.²⁶⁷ It is hard to know why the Brāhmaṇas do not include more verses about *mṛgas*, even though we find them in their respective Saṃhitās. Perhaps the sense in which *mṛga* was originally used in the ṚV and AV might have shifted by the time of the Brāhmaṇas, and the mantras stopped being used in rituals.

The evolution in meaning is further noticeable in the surge in the usage of the expression *āraṇya paśu*, noted above. Since this phrase will be treated in the following subchapter § 2.3, I will not dwell on this topic much here. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that animals which would be called *mṛga* in the earlier texts are labelled *āraṇya paśu* in the Brāhmaṇas, such as the tiger in the following AB passage:

AB 8.6

<i>vyāghracarmanā stṛṇāty uttaralomnā</i> <i>prācīnagrīveṇa kṣatram vā etad āraṇyānām</i> <i>paśūnām yad vyāghraḥ kṣatram rājanyaḥ,</i> <i>kṣatreṇaiva tat kṣatram samardhayati </i>	He covers {the altar} with a tiger skin, {fur} uppermost, neck in front. The tiger is the lordly power of the wild animals, the Rājanya is the lordly power; thus he makes the lordly power prosper with the lordly power. ²⁶⁸
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²⁶³ I am basing this on the VPAK. It is, however, important to note that Viśvabandhu Śāstrī did not have access to the full edition of the JB, only to Caland's *Auswahl* (Caland: 1919), and it is thus missing four or five occurrences.

²⁶⁴ Lubin: 2019.

²⁶⁵ I am not including mantras which talk about the *nakṣatra* Mṛgaśīrṣa and gayal (*gomṛga*), as I consider these to be separate terms.

²⁶⁶ ŚBM 3.5.3.23; 9.5.2.5 and TB 2.4.3.4. A plural variant of this mantra which is applied to Maruts in ṚV 2.34.1 (*mṛgā ná bhūmās táviṣibhir arcīnaḥ*, “like wild beasts fearsome through their forces”) is found in TB 2.5.5.4. Another variant in the AB 6.18-19 which uses a bull instead of a generic wild animal (*vṛṣabho na bhūma*).

²⁶⁷ Originally from ṚV 8.33.8, found in KB 24.8.

²⁶⁸ I am modifying Keith's translation, identifying the altar as the locus and translating *-lomnā* as “fur” rather than “skin.”

As noted above, the RV repeatedly defines *mṛga* as a dangerous animal living in the wilderness. There is no word for a tiger in the RV, and it is thus impossible to assess whether a tiger would be called *mṛga* or not. All the definitions would, however, fit it: it is fearful, dangerous, and lives in the wilderness.²⁶⁹ This passage and others like it show that in the Brāhmaṇas, wild animals are known predominantly as *āranya paśu* and are distinguished against their domestic counterparts, *grāmya paśu*. Unlike the AV, nevertheless, the Brāhmaṇas do not include any passages which would gloss *āranya paśu* as *mṛga vane*.²⁷⁰ This might suggest that the word *mṛga* is no longer viewed as a synonym of the expression.

What does *mṛga* mean for the Brāhmaṇas then, if it is not a collective term for wild animals? Importantly, *mṛgas* are still seen as separate species, distinguished from domesticated animals. In this example from the PB, it is differentiated from cow, horse, and man. Caland translates the word as “deer” but “wild animal” would be, I think, equally applicable.

PB 24.11.2

<i>prajāpatiḥ prajā asṛjata tā avidhṛtā asaṅjānānā anyonyām ādaṃs tena prajāpatir aśocat sa etā apaśyat tato vā idaṃ vyāvartata gāvo 'bhavann aśvā aśvāḥ puruṣāḥ puruṣā mṛgā mṛgāḥ</i>	Prajāpati created the creatures; these, not being kept apart [and] not agreeing together, devoured each other. This pained Prajāpati. He saw these days [i.e. this forty-nine-day-rite]. Thereupon, this became separated [i.e., all the kinds of beings kept apart]: cows became [cows]; horses [became] horses; men [became] men; deer [became] deer.
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One of the primary contexts of the word *mṛga* in the Brāhmaṇas is an explanation of the usage of an important ritual implement, a skin of a blackbuck (*kṛṣṇājina*). The blackbuck is a medium-sized antelope with prominent spiralled horns. Nowadays, it is near-threatened (in Pakistan, it is practically extinct), but in the premodern time, its enormous herds used to roam the open land of the subcontinent. Famously, the Manusmṛti defines the habitat of the Vedic people, the *āryavarta*, on the basis of the habitat of the blackbuck: the land where the blackbuck lives is fit for a Vedic sacrifice, says the MDŚ 2.23. We have, indeed, already seen the importance of the blackbuck for the Vedic ritual in the previous chapter, when we discussed a TS story of the origin of a blackbuck horn. The skin is, however, an even more crucial ritual implement. The following passage from the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa,

²⁶⁹ An argument for including tigers into the category of *mṛga* might be their symbolic closeness to lions. In the RV, lion is sometimes implicitly categorised as *mṛga*, such as in RV 4.16.14, discussed above in § 2.2.1. In later strata of Vedic literature, lions and tigers often occur together, for example in AVŚ 4.8.7, 4.22.7, 4.36.6, 8.5.12, 19.49.4; TS 4.3.5.1; TB 2.6.4, 2.6.1.5; ŚBM 5.5.4.10, 18; etc.

²⁷⁰ The only roughly similar passage is JB 2.14.2 *yathā ha vā ima āranyāḥ paśavo mṛgā evam ete 'gra ekaśaphāḥ paśava āsus*.

featured in the section on the full and new moon sacrifices, is an example of the connection of *mṛga* and the blackbuck:

TB 3.2.5.6²⁷¹

*asyá evá enat tvācam karoti | prāti tvā pṛthiví vettv
 ity āha prātiṣṭhityai | purástāt prācīnagrīvam
 úttaraloma úpastṛñāti medhyatváya | tásmāt
 purástāt pratyāñcaḥ paśávo médham úpatiṣṭhante |
 tásmāt prajā mṛgām gráhukāḥ | yajñó devébhyo
 nílāyata | kṛṣṇo rūpām kṛtvā |*

He makes it the skin of this [earth]. [He says]: “Let the Earth acknowledge thee,” in order to give [the skin] a firm stand. He spreads it in the east with its neck turned to the west, and with the hairy side upwards, to make it {=the ritual ground} fit for the sacrifice. Therefore, it is in the east, and turned to the west that the domestic animals attend upon the sacrifice. And therefore, people seize a wild animal [in order to use its skin for the sacrifice]. The sacrifice, having assumed the form of a {blackbuck (*kṛṣṇa*)}, hid itself from the gods.

Since the passage details the position of the blackbuck skin (here *tvac*, but elsewhere usually *ajina*) on the altar, it is obvious that the word *mṛga* cannot stand for a dangerous wild animal, but rather applies to the blackbuck. Moreover, the passage nods to the connection of *mṛga* and sacrifice: the TB says that in the past, the sacrifice assumed a form of the blackbuck, *yajñó [...] kṛṣṇo rūpām kṛtvā*.²⁷² Other passages suggest the same connection between the two, for instance the following PB passage, which compares the nature of a sacrifice to a *mṛga*. Just like a *mṛga*, the sacrifice must be approached silently, not to be terrified.

PB 6.7.10

*prakvāṇā iva sarpanti pratikūlam iva hītaḥ svargo
 lokaḥ tsaranta iva sarpanti mṛgadharṃ vai yajñó
 yajñasya śāntyā apratrāsāya ||*

Somewhat stooping they move, for up-stream from here [from the earth], as it were, is the world of heaven. Stealing along as it were,²⁷³ they move; the sacrifice, indeed, is of the same nature as the deer – in order to soothe, to not terrify the sacrifice.

The idea of walking stealthily towards a *mṛga* brings us to the question of hunting. I have discussed the association of *mṛga* and hunting in the AV, where it had rather violent undertones due to its connection to malevolent ritual practices. This is absent from the Brāhmaṇas, most likely due to the

²⁷¹ Cf. TB 3.2.6.1, ŚBM 6.4.1.9. The translation is a slightly shortened and revised version of Dumont’s.

²⁷² The ŚB uses a similar image often, such as in ŚBM 3.2.1.28 *yajñó hi kṛṣṇaḥ*, “for the blackbuck is the sacrifice”.

²⁷³ Caland notes that *tsaranta iva* means “not making any noise with their feet”.

genre differences: the Brāhmaṇas are, by and large, commentaries of the solemn rituals, and are thus less likely to discuss malicious rituals and their practitioners.

Hunting is, however, present in a different form. Its mythological example is the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa version of the well-known story of Prajāpati's incest. In many variants across the Vedic corpus, we find a story narrating how the god Prajāpati falls in love with his own daughter, Uṣas, the Dawn.²⁷⁴ In the AB version, we are told that Prajāpati turns into a buck (*ṛśya*) to chase the Dawn in the form of a red doe (*rohita*). The incestuous relationship is viewed as immoral and has to be punished. No one of the gods is strong enough to do that and therefore they jointly create a composite being, Bhūta, most likely the god Rudra, who shoots Prajāpati:

AB 3.33²⁷⁵

*prajāpatir vai svām duhitaram abhyadhyāyad, divam ity anya āhur uṣasam ity anye | tām ṛśyo bhūtā rohitam bhūtām abhyait | tam devā apaśyann akṛtam vai prajāpatiḥ karotīti | te tam aichan ya enam āriṣyaty, etam anyonyasmin nāvindams | teṣāṃ yā eva ghoratamās tanva āsaṃs, tā ekadhā samabharams | tāḥ sambhṛtā eṣa devo 'bhavat | [...] tam devā abruvann ayaṃ vai prajāpatir akṛtam akar, imaṃ vidhyeti | [...] tam abhyāyatyāvidhyat sa viddha ūrdhva udaprapatat*²⁷⁶ | *tam etam mṛga ity ācakṣate [...] sa yā rohit sā rohiṇī*

Prajāpati longed for his own daughter – some say “Heaven”, others “Dawn”. Having become a buck (*ṛśya*), he “approached” her, who had become a red doe (*rohita*).²⁷⁷ The gods saw, “Prajāpati does [something] not to be done.” They sought one who would harm him. They did not find anyone among themselves. They collected together into one of their own most dreadful bodies.²⁷⁸ Thus collected, they became this god [= Rudra]. [...] The gods said to him, “This Prajāpati has done [something] not to be done. Pierce him!” [...] Having taken aim, he pierced him; Pierced, he flew straight up. They call him the deer (*mṛga*). [...] The red doe is Rohiṇī.

²⁷⁴ The multiple versions of the story are fully quoted and translated by Jamison: 1991, p. 289-299. They are found in MS 4.2.12; ŚBM 1.7.4.1 = ŚBK 2.7.2.1-2; AB 3.33; JB 3.262. An early version is found in RV 10.61.5-9 but it does not name Prajāpati who, albeit occasionally found in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the RV, is probably not an independent deity yet.

²⁷⁵ I am using the translation of Jamison: 1991, p. 291, apart from the last three sentences which are mine. I find Jamison's translation is much smoother than Keith's.

²⁷⁶ Although understandable, this is a peculiar form; we would expect the augment between the preverbs and the main verb, i.e. *ud+pra+a+√pat*. As Professor Jamison suggested to me (cf. Jamison: 1991, p. 290), the AB form might be a reworking of the MS parallel *parāpatat*.

²⁷⁷ *Rohita* is a colour word used for animals and therefore, the English name “red deer” seems quite fitting. It is worth noting, however, that I am not suggesting that the passage talks about the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) *per se*. Although its original, early post-glacial habitat ranged as far as Korea and until today, it survives in forested parts of northern Iran (see Gilbert: 2001, p. 25), a colour term is not enough to identify a whole species. The colour word might be also used as a word-play, perhaps signifying the early morning red sky, which is suggested by its association with the *nakṣatra* Rohiṇī in the last sentence.

²⁷⁸ I find Jamison's translation slightly confusing here. The meaning is that each of the gods provides their most dreadful quality. Combined, these qualities create the god Rudra.

The AB first labels Prajāpati as a male antelope (*rśya*);²⁷⁹ a male animal possibly compatible to breed with the female red doe or an antelope, *rohita*.²⁸⁰ When Rudra shoots Prajāpati, however, he jumps up, as if trying to escape like a deer. Due to his action, he is to be called *mṛga*: *etam mṛga ity ācakṣate*. It seems to me that it is the act of hunting that causes the name *mṛga* which was not mentioned in the story until the moment of shooting. The association with hunting is, after all, what later Classical commentators tease out from the word, such as Kṣīrasvāmin in his commentary on the Amarakośa, when he states that *mṛga* is an animal which is pursued by hunters.²⁸¹ Perhaps from the Brāhmaṇas onwards, “game” would be a much more fitting translation of *mṛga*. Rather than a generic name for a wild animal, it seems to be specifically an animal which is hunted, regardless of the exact species.

Other Brāhmaṇa passages support the connection of the word with hunting, for example the JB story about Śāktya Gaurivīti who goes hunting to provide meat for *tarasapuroḍāśa*, the offering of “meat cakes”. Gaurivīti kills a deer when he is joined by Tārksya, an eagle (*suparṇa*), at whom he aims with his bow and arrow.

JB 3.18²⁸²

*śāktyās tarasapuroḍāśasattram āsata | sa gaurivītiś
śāktyo mṛgam ahaṃs | taṃ tārksyas suparṇa
upariṣṭād abhyavāpatat | tasmā upapratyadhatta |
tam abravīd ṛṣe mā me 'sthas'²⁸³ |*

The Śāktyas held a *sattra*, offering sacrificial meat cakes (*tarasapuroḍāśa*). Gaurivīti Śāktya had shot a deer. The eagle Tārksya came flying down from above to him {=the deer}. He knocked²⁸⁴ his arrow to shoot him. Then he {=Tārksya} said to him {=Gaurivīti}: “Seer, don't shoot me.”

²⁷⁹ The word *rśya* is found in the corpus since the ṚV and is usually understood to mean a male antelope, a buck. See for example ṚV 8.4.10 or 10.39.8, where we find a mention of a *rśyada*, “an antelope snare”. Note that in the AVŚ 5.14.3, *rśya* is associated with witchcraft, just as we saw in the case of *mṛga*. According to Mayrhofer, *EWA* Bd. 1, p. 260, it is an Indo-Iranian term, found for example in Khotanese *rūś*, a term for the endemic Central-Asian wild sheep, the so-called Marco Polo sheep.

²⁸⁰ According to the JB version in 3.262, the Dawn becomes a red doe, *rohit* (note that it is treated as a consonant stem, just as in the last sentence of the AB passage above), and Prajāpati a speckled deer, *prṣata*. The ŚBM version of the story, narrated in 1.7.4, mentions neither Prajāpati's shapeshifting nor the creation of the composite being Bhūta. Instead, Rudra is assigned to punish Prajāpati. In ŚBM 1.7.4.3, Rudra is, however, said to be “this god who rules over the beasts”, [*a*]yāṃ devāḥ paśūnām iṣṭe, which corresponds with the AB where Bhūta chooses the boon of “the overlordship of cattle”, *paśūnām ādhipatyam*. The earliest version of the story in ṚV 10.61.5-9 does not mention any animals at all.

²⁸¹ Amarakośa 2.5.8. Kṣīrasvāmin's commentary states *mṛgyate vyādhair mṛgaḥ*. Many thanks to Dr Victor D'Avella for this suggestion during my Confirmation of Status viva, April 2021. In the secondary literature, this argument is used by Wendy Doniger, e.g. Doniger O'Flaherty: 1988, p. 83.

²⁸² The translation is my own, based on Willem Caland's German translation from the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa in Auswahl*, § 170, and his English translation of a variant of the myth from JB 3.197, included in footnote n.2 in his PB translation, p. 257. Cf. PB 25.7 where Gaurivīti is also said to sacrifice a meat *puroḍāśa*.

²⁸³ A peculiar form. Professor Jamison suggested to me (e-mail communication, December 2022) that it might be an error for *śyas*, injunctive to *vas-*, *asyati*, “throw, shoot”.

²⁸⁴ This is Caland's interpretation of the imperfect *upapratyadhatta*, mentioned in both of his translations in PB and JB.

Although the *mṛga* is not connected with any other word for an antelope or a deer as was the case in the AB passage above, there is a strong argument for this association, as it is supposed to be a species that people would hunt for food, specifically a ritual offering. I have not been able to find another passage which would associate the practice of sacrificing *mṛgas* in the form of meat cakes. It might be a ritual innovation or substitution connected primarily with the Śāktayas; but there is not enough evidence to support this assertion. The following ŚBM passage, however, could attest that at the time of the Brāhmaṇas, *mṛgas* were at least cooked, although this passage is concerned with their skin, *ajina*, rather than with their meat:

ŚBM 11.8.4.3

<i>tām ha pratikhyāyovāca yan nv étāny evājīnāni</i>	When he [Khaṇḍika Audbhāri] saw him, he said,
<i>mṛgeṣu bhāvanti āthaiṣām prṣṭīr apiśūrya</i>	“Seeing that there are those skins on deer, we
<i>pacāmahe kṣṇājīnām me grīvāsv ābaddham ity</i>	break their ribs and cook them: the skin of the
	black antelope is attached to my neck.”

In § 2.2.1, I have noted that the ṚV does not contain much information about hunting. By the time of the Brāhmaṇas, this is changing, and there are many other stories which involve men going into the wilderness armed with a bow and arrows to hunt. In many cases, they are known to us by their first name and a patronymic, such as the ṛṣi Gaurivīti Śāktya, or Keśin Dārbhya, the king of the Pañcālas who hunts *mṛga* after his close friend, the king of Kurus Uccaiśśravas Kauvayeya dies,²⁸⁵ or the king of the Ikṣvākus, Hariścandra Vaidhasa, who lives in the forest for several years.²⁸⁶ The fact that these “secular” stories made their way to the Brāhmaṇa literature, the primary aim of which is to explicate ritual acts, signifies an important societal shift. As the Vedic society turns from the semi-nomadic lifestyle to a more sedentary lifestyle focused on the bi-annual crop²⁸⁷ and the power of Kṣatriyas grows, hunting, which previously might have been necessary to supply extra food to the pastoralists, becomes a marker of a specific lifestyle, a sport of nobility.²⁸⁸ This lifestyle is not hugely important to the ritualistically-oriented Brāhmaṇa expositions and thus the information we get about *mṛgas* from

²⁸⁵ JUB 3.29.1. Many thanks for this reference are due to Finnian Gerety who read this passage at the SOAS Sanskrit Reading Room on 27 March 2019 and provided excellent notes to the participants. On the whole story of Keśin Dārbhya and Uccaiśśravas Kauvayeya and its implications for the history of the mantra *om*, see his doctoral thesis in Gerety: 2015, p. 279-80, 420-3. On the figure of Keśin Dārbhya, see Kulkarni: 2016.

²⁸⁶ AB 7.15.

²⁸⁷ Michael Jones explored this process in his excellent doctoral thesis submitted at the University of Texas, Austin; see Jones: 2017.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Rau: 1957, p. 23.

them is only limited. The hunting lifestyle is, however, still very much present in the texts, and the fact that we have stories of men whom we know by name makes it stand out even more.

§ 2. 2. 5

MRGA: A CONCLUSION

In her 2009 study *The Function of Animals in the R̥g Veda*, Stephanie Jamison discusses the relative absence of wild animals from the R̥V and notes that only certain species of animals are included in the text – lion, elephant, bear, boar, wolf, or wild buffalo – whereas others, such as tiger or leopard, are left out. Whilst she notices that “the word *mṛgá-* alone does duty for a variety of animals, some fierce (*mṛgó ná bhīmáḥ* R̥V I.154.2, etc.)”, she argues that in general, the R̥V keeps “the perilous wilderness and its ferocious denizens [...] out of mind” and “refuses to conceptualize wild animals as a class”.²⁸⁹ Furthermore, Jamison notes that wild animals are more palpably present in the text of AV which uses both individual names of particular species and the general term *mṛga*. Jamison ascribes this to the growing power of the Kṣatriya class and its increasing interest in the costly Vedic rituals, especially the *aśvamedha* and *rājasūya*.

It is complicated to tease out the details of the story of the relationship between humans and wild animals from texts that are mostly preoccupied with ritual. I would argue, however, that a subtle pattern is obvious if we read all the genres and strata of Vedic literature together: a shift from a semi-pastoralist lifestyle which is concerned with herding livestock and views wild animals as a danger, to a sedentary lifestyle where hunting becomes a status symbol of nobility.

The R̥V is our earliest source, and the most complicated one to interpret due to its complexity. On the one hand, it stands witness to the pastoral Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Indo-Iranian past when people’s livelihood depended on cattle breeding and therefore, they greatly feared the wild animals that jeopardized their herds.²⁹⁰ The wolf, an animal inherited from the Indo-European imagery, is the prime example of this.²⁹¹ On the other hand, the R̥V poetry gives us an idea about the time of the semi-pastoral lifestyle in the North-West of Indian subcontinent, and references specifically South Asian wild species such as the buffalo or the elephant. Unlike Jamison, however, I would not claim that the R̥V does not conceptualise wild animals as a class. In comparison with the Yajurvedic texts, the R̥V does not ignore wild animals. It surely fears them and their effect on the domestic animals, but it notes their presence. What is more, it takes precautions against them, in a

²⁸⁹ Jamison: 2009, p. 202, 203, and 204. I have discussed this paper in § 1.5.

²⁹⁰ As argued by many anthropologists, almost no pastoral society depends fully on herding but usually supplements their food from other sources as well. E.g. Patel: 2009, p. 174.

²⁹¹ An outstanding treatment of the symbolism of the wolf in the R̥V is found in Jamison: 2009, p. 206-9. For the IE background, see Blažek: 1992, p. 176ff.

way related to its genre: the hymns plead with gods to protect the herds from the usual dangers. Since it is a collection of hymns to particular gods, we cannot expect it to do much more than that.

In contrast, the Atharvaveda is clearly interested in wild species due to its attention to the sphere of the everyday. As much of the text is concerned with malevolent ritual practice and its eradication, wild animals feature in it often. Sorcery must be eradicated in the same way as the dangerous animal. When Jamison speculates about why later Vedic texts include more wild animals than the earliest poetry, she often compares the RV only with the AV. I would argue, however, that this comparison provides a skewed point of view, as the AV notices wild animals the most of all the Vedic texts due to the ritualistic goals of the text.

As suggested, the YV poetry and prose do not provide much new information, owing to their preoccupation with the ritual practice of the *adhvaryu*. Although not detailed enough, the evolution of the understanding of the class of wild animals is underway, signified by the increased usage of the expression *āraṇya paśu*. This transition is finished in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas where, despite the ritualistic and commentarial nature of the texts, we find stories about important men, known to us by names, who go hunting for game.

Each genre has a specific understanding and usage of the word *mṛga*. Yet when read all together, a pattern comes up: the originally generic term for any wild animal becomes a specific term for a hunted ungulate. This pattern, I believe, correlates with the evolution of the word *paśu* from a specific term for a domesticated livestock to a more generic term, used for any animal.

Time and again in previous sections, I have alluded to a categorisation of animals complementary (and perhaps even synonymic) to the division between *paśu* and *mṛga*. This is the twofold classification of the term *paśu* into *grāmya*, “domestic”, and *āraṇya*, “wild”. Although this dichotomy is found for the first time in the tenth book of the ṚV, it is the later Vedic prose that uses it most commonly. In this subchapter, I will explore this dichotomy in the Vedic poetry and its evolution in the later prose. I will argue that although it initially occurs as a complementary classificatory system, it partially replaces the “original” dichotomy *paśu* – *mṛga* as the meaning of *mṛga* slowly shifts to the narrower meaning “game”.

Before I discuss some of the passages that will help us understand the classificatory system in context, it is worth noting the wider background of the categories. The dichotomy of the village and wilderness (or nature versus culture, using the vocabulary of 20th century social anthropology), *grāma* and *araṇya*, is an important feature of the Vedic cosmos, influencing not only animal terminology but also the rest of the Vedic conceptual world.²⁹² The difference between the two is not merely spatial. They are distinguished from one another “less on the basis of their material features than on that of the religious and social significance attributed to each of them”, says Charles Malamoud.²⁹³ The term *grāma*, a word which lies beneath the adjective *grāmya*, does not mean just “a village”, a static settlement, but rather an “‘aggregate of people living in a village’, and earlier ‘a crowd’, ‘mass’, ‘heap’, with the idea of gathering together,” as Tatiana Elizarenkova defines it.²⁹⁴ Wilhelm Rau, moreover, argued, that *grāma*- means in the first instance “a train of herdsmen roaming about with cattle” and secondly “a temporary camp of such a train”.²⁹⁵ A settlement, albeit temporary, symbolises culture; it is safe and pure, the locus of Vedic ritual.²⁹⁶ *Aranya*, the noun behind the adjective *āraṇya*, stands in opposition to that: it is a land that is unsettled and uncultivated.²⁹⁷ The word is sometimes translated with the English word “forest” or “jungle”.²⁹⁸ Since it is derived from the adjective *araṇa*, “distant” or “foreign” (it is a cognate of Latin *alius*, among others), however, it is likely to encompass all types of

²⁹² As an example, consider the dichotomy of food in TS 5.4.5.2, “curds is a food of the village, honey of the wild”.

²⁹³ Malamoud: 1996, p. 75.

²⁹⁴ Elizarenkova: 1995, p. 6. Note especially the idea of “mass” or “heap” which is found in many Iranian and Slavic languages, such as Middle Persian *grāmag* or Sogdian *gr’m’k*, “wealth”; cf. Russian *gromáda* or Czech *hromada*, both “mass [of things/people]”. Cf. Mayrhofer: EWA, Bd. 1, p. 507.

²⁹⁵ Rau: 2012r.

²⁹⁶ Olivelle: 2011, p. 48.

²⁹⁷ On the question of cultivation and the wilderness, see e.g. RV 10.146.6a,b in translation of Jamison & Brereton: “[The Lady of the Wilderness...], providing much food though she does no plowing”.

²⁹⁸ As an example of the former, see Whitney’s translation of AVŚ 12.1.11; for the latter, Smith: 1994, chapter 8.

environments, not only wooded areas.²⁹⁹ As is clear from its usage, *araṇya* denotes places distant and dangerous to people; places which are not home (RV 6.24.10) or which are alien (RV 6.61.14).

By extension, the distinction between these categories applies to all beings and plants which exist in the respective domains.³⁰⁰ When applied to animals, the dichotomy is based on habitat; in the Vedic corpus, however, an animal's habitat has an intrinsic meaning.³⁰¹ Domestic animals are not only those who live in the village but also the ones that are pure, safe, and thus fit for a sacrifice; the wild ones, on the other hand, live beyond the village limits and are, therefore, considered to be dangerous and unfit for ritual practice.

Nonetheless, not all animals belong to one group or the other. The Vedic prose recognises that some animals are between the categories, or “liminal”, to use a term favoured by 20th century social anthropologists and scholars of religion.³⁰² These animals are of two kinds, or at least that is what it seems like from the limited data we possess: a) animals that are not domesticated but live in the proximity of human homes, such as frogs (*maṇḍūka*),³⁰³ and b) animals that look like domesticated species but are not, such as the gayal, a wild cattle species that lives in South Asia.³⁰⁴ Consider

²⁹⁹ Mayrhofer, *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 107-8; *KEWA*, Bd. 1, p. 46-7. A similar interpretation is also found in Thapar: 2001, p. 1. As Malamoud: 1996, p. 76, says: “More exactly, the *vana* is a particular case of *araṇya*, and however great the differences between desert and forest may appear to us, it is nonetheless certain that, as far as their religious values are concerned, *araṇya* and *vana* are overlapping terms.”

³⁰⁰ The application of the dichotomy to plants is not as common but occurs; see e.g. passages on *grāmya* plants, see TS 5.2.5.5, ŚBM 14.9.3.22. Cf. Witzel: 2009.

³⁰¹ This is obviously not only the case for the Vedic corpus alone; it is applicable to all thinking about nature, including the contemporary Western understanding of what do the categories of “wilderness” and “wild animal” signify: purity, authenticity, etc. To quote the anthropologist Tim Ingold as an example: “[...] we tend to think that the only environments that still exist in a genuinely natural condition are those that remain beyond the bounds of human civilization, as in the dictionary definition of a wilderness: ‘A tract of land or a region...uncultivated or uninhabited by human beings’. Likewise *the wild animal is one that lives an authentically natural life*, untainted by human contact. It will, of course, have contacts with animals of many other, non-human species, but whereas these latter contacts are supposed to reveal its true nature, any contact with human beings is supposed to render the animal ‘unnatural’, and therefore unfit as an object of properly scientific inquiry. [...] *Domestic animals, it seems, are to be exploited but not studied; wild animals to be studied but not exploited.*” Ingold: 2000, p. 67-8; italics are mine.

³⁰² Turner: 1997, ch. 3.

³⁰³ On frogs, see also RV 7.103, and commentary by Jamison: 1991-92. Mice, rats, and other small rodents such as Indian bandicoots would be, I think, perfect examples of the first category, but the dichotomy *grāmya* – *araṇya* never applies to them as far as I know. For mice in the Veda, see RV 1.105.8, AVŚ 6.50. Similarly, insects are said to live close to people but never called *paśu*; see RV 1.191.

³⁰⁴ Compare also the plants that are both cultivated (*grāmya*) and wild (*araṇya*), namely sesame. The ŚBM 9.1.1.3 calls sesame both domesticated and wild: *ubhāyam vetad ānnaṃ yāj jartīlā yāc ca grāmyaṃ yāc cāraṇyaṃ yad āha tilās téna grāmyaṃ yad ākrṣṭe pacyānte tēnāraṇyām* | “And wild sesamum seeds represent both kinds of food, the cultivated as well as the wild-growing inasmuch as they are sesamum seeds they are a cultivated [kind of food], and inasmuch as they ripen on unploughed land they are wild-growing.” *Vetad* probably stands for *vā + etad*. Further to the categories I identify, Jamison: 2009, convincingly argues that wolves are also liminal.

examples of both categories below (we have seen both passages in full in § 2.1.4 when we were discussing the process of “widening” of the term *paśu* to species which are not livestock):

TS 5.4.4.3

<i>maṇḍūkena ví karṣati eṣá vái paśūnām anupajīvanīyās ná vá eṣá grāmyeṣu paśúṣu hitó nāraṇyeṣu </i>	He draws over [it] with a frog; this of animals is the one on which one does not subsist, for neither among the domesticated nor the wild beasts has it a place [...].
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TS 2.1.10.2

<i>nāiṣá grāmyāḥ paśúr nāraṇyo yád gomrgás névaiṣá³⁰⁵ grāme nāraṇye</i>	The [g]ayal is neither a domestic nor a wild animal; he is neither in the village nor the forest [...].
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These two passages, and indeed the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āraṇya paśu* is crucial for our understanding of the status of domestic and wild animals in ancient India. The secondary literature tends to distinguish the two categories completely. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, for example, argues that “[p]ashus are the animals that get sacrificed, whatever their origins; *mrigas* [sic] are the animals that get hunted. In both cases the ancient Indians defined animals according to the manner in which they killed them.”³⁰⁶ In the Vedic corpus, the situation is clearly not as simple as Doniger, following Classical commentators, makes it sound. Some animals are said to be *paśu*, be it the whole category of *āraṇya paśu* or specifically the two species mentioned above, but they are clearly not fit to be sacrificed. There are even animals which are said to be *grāmya paśu* but cannot be sacrificed, or indeed even cross the sacrificial ground!³⁰⁷ If we understand the term *paśu* to be defined by the fitness to be sacrificed, as it is often done, what makes an *āraṇya paśu* a *paśu*? Clearly, the category must be broader than Doniger makes us believe. In this subchapter, our goal will be to establish how broad exactly.

§ 2.3.1

GRĀMYA AND ĀRAṆYA IN EARLY VEDIC POETRY: ṚV AND AV

Unlike the previous subchapters, I will not begin this chapter with the discussion of a shared Indo-Iranian substrate, as there does not seem to be any. The dichotomy of domestic and wild seems to be a common Indo-European trope and presumably, it might be found in Indo-Iranian as well. As far as I know, however, the Avestan corpus does not include a similar dichotomy, excluding the pairing of

³⁰⁵ The *padapāṭha* treats this as *na + īva + eṣaḥ*.

³⁰⁶ Doniger O’Flaherty: 1988, p. 83. As suggested above, Doniger follows the commentarial tradition that can be traced to Kṣīrasvāmin’s commentary to the Amarakośa 2.5.8. Again, many thanks to Dr Victor D’Avella for the reference.

³⁰⁷ JB 1.51. I will quote and discuss this passage below in § 2.3.2.

pasuka and *daitika* which I discussed in subchapter § 2.2.1. There are, furthermore, Avestan cognates of neither *grāmya* nor *āranya*.³⁰⁸

The classification of animals into *grāmya* and *āranya* occurs for the first time in the famous Puruṣasūkta of the Ṛgveda, in a passage that we have discussed above as the only example of an early general usage of the word *paśu*. Although in the later layers of Vedic literature, the classification is always twofold (apart from the verbatim quotations of this very passage), the ṚV distinguishes between three types of animals created from the sacrificial ghee: birds, domestic livestock, and wild animals:

ṚV 10.90.8c,d³⁰⁹

<i>paśún tāmś cakre vāyavyān āraṇyān grāmiyās ca</i> <i>yé </i>	It [=the sacrifice] was made into the animals: those of the air, those that belong to the wilderness and those that belong to the village.
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Since this is the only occurrence of the terms *grāmya* and *āranya* in the ṚV, it is not obvious which animals belong to each group. Some domestic animals are mentioned in one of the following verses, ṚV 10.90.10: horses, animals with incisors in both jaws, cows, goats, and sheep. Although these are clearly domesticated species, the ṚV poet does not associate them with any of the preceding categories.

A suggestion of the identity of the animals known as *āranya* could be made on the basis of another hymn from the tenth *maṇḍala*: ṚV 10.146, the oft-cited hymn to Aranyāni, the female spirit of the wilderness. As Jamison and Brereton note in their introduction, this hymn is dedicated to “the contrast between the wild place and the settled one, an opposition that runs throughout Indian literature”.³¹⁰ The hymn is written in evocative language, stressing particularly various sounds that distinguish the two domains. In the village, the cows are quietly grazing, when one of them is called on by its cowherd. Furthermore, a cart is creaking, and a villager is chopping wood. The wilderness, on the other hand, is defined by sounds made by two onomatopoeically named but obscure animals: the

³⁰⁸ The noun *grāma* seems to have Iranian but not Avestan cognates (Middle Persian *grāmag*, Parthian *gr'mg*, Sogdian *gr'm'k*, “wealth”; cf. Mayrhofer: *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 507). As far as *araṇa/āranya* is concerned, some speculate whether Avestan *auruna* could be an Avestan counterpart, such as Bartholomae in *AIW* (lemma *auruna*). Mayrhofer: *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 108, is doubtful. The word seems to be a term for a “wild animal”, e.g. in Yt 8.36 *aurunaca gairiṣācō siṣṭdraca rauuascarātō*, “and the wild animals following [trails] in the mountains” (translation by Skjærvø: 2007). Semantically, it might therefore be close to *āranya*, but not etymologically.

³⁰⁹ For notes on the grammatical particularities, see § 2.1.1. Verbatim quotes of this verse are found in AVŚ 19.6.14, AVP 9.5.12, VS 31.6, and TĀ 3.12.4.

³¹⁰ ṚV trl Jamison & Brereton, p. 1631. For further discussion, see also Jamison: 2009. Many thanks are due to Professor John Lowe and Professor Christopher Minkowski for reading the hymn with me during the Vedic class at the University of Oxford, Michaelmas Term 2019.

ciccika and the *vr̥ṣārava*, “bull-roarer”.³¹¹ Moreover, sudden shrieks and fear are mentioned. The wilderness, it seems, is much louder than the settled domain. The danger associated with the area beyond the limits of the village is almost palpable; but the poet assures the audience that Aranyāni does not attack unless she is endangered. In the final line of the hymn, the poet celebrates the Lady of the Wilderness as a “mother of wild beasts”:

RV 10.146.6c,d

práhám mṛgāṇām mātáram aranyānīm The Mother of wild beasts, the Lady of the
aśaṃsiṣam || Wilderness have I proclaimed.

These associations give a clear impression: whilst the R̥gvedic poet pictures the village as an idyllic place with the cows grazing around, the wilderness is terrifying and loud, and the animals that live there are known as *mṛga*. Based on this passage, we could conclude that at least for the RV, the terms signify what we would expect: animals of the village are the domesticated species, animals of the wilderness the wild beasts, *mṛga*.

As we have seen in the previous subchapter, the Atharvaveda is well populated with animals due to its attention to the sphere of the everyday. Relative to other Vedic texts, there is a considerable focus on wild animals in the text. The terms *grāmya* and *āranya* occur separately as well as in a twofold dichotomy in the Atharvaveda. When separate, *āranya* is slightly more common than the *grāmya*. As a dedicated twofold dichotomy, they are used a handful of times across the two AV recensions.

There seems to be an implicit value judgement within the two categories, especially regarding the *āranya* animals, which are associated with negative phenomena of the world. Consider, for example, the following passage:

AVŚ 3.31.3³¹²

ví grāmyāḥ paśáva āraṇyáir vy ápas tṛṣṇayāsaran | The animals (*paśu*) of the village [have turned]
vy áháṇ sárveṇa pāpmánā víyákṣmeṇa sám áyuṣā || away from those of the forest; the waters have
gone (*√sr̥*) away from the thirst; I [have turned]
away from all evil (*pāpman*), away from *yakṣma*,
to union (*√sam*) with {life-span} (*āyus*).

Throughout the hymn, the poet uses a relatively simple, formulaic structure to explain a healing process: the transition from evil and an internal disease, *yakṣma*, to a full-length life, *āyus*. To explicate

³¹¹ Jamison: 2005, p. 205, suggest that the *ciccika* might be a bird or a bug, and the “bull-roarer” a frog or a bird. Their function, she says, “is clearly just to make noise to accompany the formal progress of Aranyāni, and as most commentators have concluded, they are probably birds or noisy insects.”

³¹² There is no Paippalāda counterpart.

the change from the state of illness to wellbeing, repeated in the refrain *vy āhām sārveṇa pāpmānā ví yákṣmeṇa sám āyuṣā*, the poet uses a series of metaphors: in this verse, the turn to health is likened to domestic animals turning away from their wild counterparts and to water turning away from its absence, thirst. In other verses of this hymn, gods are said to turn away from old age or qualities such as pain (*ārti*) and evil-doing (*pāpakṛtya*). The association is clear here: domestic animals are considered to be on the neutral/positive side of the spectrum, whereas the wild are the ones to be abandoned, together with negative qualities such as evil or pain. As we will see shortly, the animals of the wild are, at least in this layer of literature, known to be deadly; their association with other negative phenomena is thus not unexpected.

Three times, the dichotomy *grāmya* and *āraṇya* is included in a list that seems to be a broader classification of species. The following example is a verse from a hymn extolling the *brahmacārin*, which is said to be the origin of many worldly phenomena, including animals:

AVŚ 11.5.21 = AVP 16.155.1

*pārthivā divyāḥ paśáva āraṇyá grāmyás ca yé |
apakṣāḥ pakṣiṇas ca yé té jātá brahmacārīṇaḥ ||*

The earthly, the heavenly {animals} (*paśu*), they of the forest, and they that are of the village, the wingless and they that are winged — they are born of the Vedic student.³³

The structure of the sentence suggests that these are six separate categories of beings, structured as three pairs of opposites: earthly (*pārthiva*), heavenly (*divya*), wild (*āraṇya*), domestic (*grāmya*), wingless (*apakṣa*), and winged (*pakṣin*). This list seems to be unique to the Atharvaveda, and there is no suggestion of how it fits with the other taxonomies found in Vedic literature. The text does not note any species pertaining to the categories, and we can only guess what is meant by them. The “earthly and divine” animals remain particularly obscure. My initial idea was that they might be a gloss of *āraṇya* and *grāmya*: the domestic animals are pure and fit to be sacrificed, and therefore divine; whilst the wild animals could be earthy, that is associated with this world. A variant of the same list, found in the following hymn in the Śaunakīya recension, however, suggests otherwise:

AVŚ 11.6.8 = AVP 15.13.9³⁴

pārthivā divyāḥ paśáva āraṇyá utá yé mṛgāḥ |

The earthly, the heavenly {animals} (*paśu*), also the beasts (*mṛga*) that are of the {wilderness}; we

³³ I am deviating from Whitney in the translation of *paśu* which must have a much broader meaning than just cattle in this passage, as well as in the following one. Note that pāda b of this verse is identical to pāda d in RV 10.90.8.

³⁴ Note that the Paippalāda version has a different pāda a that reads *ye grāmyāḥ sapta paśava*, “the seven domestic animals”.

śakúntān pakṣīno brūmas té no muñcantv address the {vultures} (*śakunta*), the birds
āṇhasaḥ || (*pakṣi*): let them free us from distress.³¹⁵

At first sight, the list seems familiar in its structure and first two members. There are, however, noticeable differences: a complete absence of the terms for domesticated, wingless, and winged animals, although the latter are represented in the hymn by the vulture and other birds. This modified list with its complete lack of *grāmya* suggests, I think, that *pārthiva* and *divya* is a separate classificatory system and does not correspond to the dichotomy that is the focus of this subchapter.

As far as the separate instances of *grāmya* and *āraṇya* are concerned, these do not occur very often. In particular, the passages pertaining to *grāmya* are not very informative, almost as if the knowledge of domestic livestock was so self-evident that they did not have to be described in much detail. The only general information we get is that domestic animals are said to be “all-formed, being of various forms, manifoldly of one form”, *viśvárūpā vírūpāḥ sānto bahudhāikarūpā* (AVŚ 2.34.4).³¹⁶ This is to say that even though the group is considered to be a homogenous category, it actually consists of seven (or more often, five) separate species: *ye grāmyāḥ sapta paśava* (AVP 15.13.9).

Comparably more attention is given to the term *āraṇya* in the AV. Particularly notable is its association with the term *mṛga*. Without a doubt, for the AV, these terms are synonyms (this, however, cannot be said about the later Vedic literature, as we will see). This association was discussed a couple of times before, regarding hymn AVŚ 11.2.24, where *āraṇya paśu* is glossed as *mṛgā vane*, “wild beasts in the forest”. This gloss occurs two more times in the AV; one instance includes a very valuable, yet cryptic list of animals:

AVŚ 12.1.49 = AVP 17.5.7

<i>yé ta āraṇyāḥ paśávo mṛgá váne hitáḥ siṃhá</i> <i>vyāghráḥ puruṣádaś cáranti</i> <i>ulāṇ vṛkaṃ pṛthivī du{c}chúnām</i> ³¹⁷ <i>itá ṛkṣíkām</i> <i>rákṣo ápa bādhayāsmát</i>	What forest animals of thine, wild beasts set in the {wilderness}, lions, tigers, go about man- eating — the jackal (<i>ula</i>), ³¹⁸ the wolf, O earth, misfortune, the <i>ṛkṣikā</i> , the <i>rakṣa</i> , do thou force (√ <i>badh</i>) away from us here.
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³¹⁵ As in passages above, I translate the terms *paśu* and *āraṇya* with more general terms, and I follow Dave: 2005r, in translating *śakunta* as vulture.

³¹⁶ The mantra *ye grāmyāḥ paśavo viśvarūpāḥ* is relatively common, and is found in AVŚ 3.10.6, AVP 1.105.2, TS 3.1.4, and KS 30.8.

³¹⁷ I am following the reading of the GRETIL version [last accessed 27 April 2022] which adopts the AVP edition of Bhattacharya: 1997-2016, vol. 3 (2011).

³¹⁸ There is no generally accepted etymology of the word *ula*. Mayrhofer, *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 230, considers it to be a “kind of a wild animal” and states that the meaning “jackal” is purely Whitney’s fabrication.

What lives in the wilderness? Not only wild animals but also all sorts of demons and abstract powers: the misfortune (*ducchunā*),³¹⁹ *rakṣa* (a term for demon, as well as “damage”),³²⁰ or the mysterious feminine demon *ṛkṣikā*.³²¹ Even the animals have a demonic touch: being described as man-eating (*puruṣād*), while the lions and tigers of this list could be summed up under the term “crooked cats”, coined by the anthropologist Nayanika Mathur.³²² Another Atharvaveda hymn, AVŚ 6.50.3, calls the creatures of the wilderness *vyadvāra*, “devourers”, or “gnawers”. Fear and danger are implicit in these epithets, making it seem almost inevitable that a human who wanders into the wilderness will end up badly.

Altogether, it seems that an *āranya* creature is a dangerous and fearful creature for the AV, whereas a *grāmya* one is safe and docile. This understanding, supposedly influenced by the general understanding of the world treated in the beginning of this subchapter, continues well into the prose literature.

³¹⁹ According to *MW*, the misfortune is often personalised as demon. This probably influences Smith’s translation “the demoness of calamity”, in Smith: 1991, p. 545, n. 8.

³²⁰ Cf. *OAv raśah*, “damage”, or *rāśaieñhē*, “to damage”.

³²¹ *Ṛkṣikā* is a rather rare term, occurring in Vedic texts only nine times: five times in a passage on *aśvamedha*, i.e. TB 3.9.1.1-4, ŚB 13.2.4.1-4 and JB 2.266; twice in a parallel passage on the *puruṣamedha*, TB 3.4.5.1 and VS 30.8, and once in this peculiar AV hymn AVŚ 12.1.49 = AVP 17.5.7. Each translator treats the term slightly differently: for example, Dumont calls it an “evil spirit”, Brian Smith a “ravenous beast”, and Eggeling an “ogre”. Morphologically, it seems to be a suffixed form of a feminine noun *ṛkṣī-*, a female bear, with the low-register suffix *-ka*. According to Jamison: 2009a, p. 318, “animal names regularly show otherwise unmotivated *-ka* suffixes, especially the names of small or noxious ones”. Jamison lists a lot of examples such as the *Ṛgvedic kuśumbhaka*, “little bug” or Atharvavedic *maśaka*, “stinging insect”. She, however, does not cite any examples of demonic names. Despite that, it is clear from her analysis that the *-ka* suffix is predominantly associated with negative or lower-class features. I am wondering whether the translation of *ṛkṣikā* could in any way convey the meaning of the “bear”, as the word always occurs in association with the sphere of wilderness, the *Niṣādas*, people living outside of the Vedic culture, and wild animals such as lions and tigers (or in the case of TB 3.9.1.1-4, a man-tiger, *puruṣavyāghra*). All bear species native to India (sloth bear, Malayan sun bear, brown bear, and Himalayan black bear) live in forested areas, feed during the night, and are of rather terrifying appearance, and so they might be “mistaken” for an evil spirit, to use Dumont’s translation. Considering the usual association of the word with the *puruṣavyāghra*, I am tempted to suggest that it might be some sort of a composite being, “a bear-like creature”, “something bearish”. Another possible line of interpretation is prompted by the interpretation of Goldman: 1989, who suggests that *ṛkṣa*, at least in the Epic language, could mean an aggressive and dangerous species of a monkey rather than a bear. Based on the textual descriptions, Goldman argues that it could be a term for either a lion-tailed macaque or Nilgiri langur. The interpretation of *ṛkṣa* as a dangerous monkey fits the context similarly well, as it could be likewise associated with jungle, wilderness, and the otherness of the para-Vedic realm.

³²² Mathur: 2021, p. 2. Note that these two “big cats” occur together relatively commonly in the Atharvaveda, cf. AVŚ 4.8.7, 4.22.7, 6.38.1, 8.5.12, 12.1.49, or AVP 4.2.4.

§ 2. 3. 2 GRĀMYA AND ĀRANYA IN VEDIC PROSE

Although Brian Smith and Stephanie Jamison call the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āranya* “straightforward” and “standard,” respectively,³²³ we have seen that it is not particularly common in Vedic poetry. It occurs relatively late, only in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the Ṛgveda. Its usage steadily increases, and by the time of the Yajurvedic Saṃhitās, it seems to replace, more or less, the dichotomy *paśu* – *mṛga*.

One of the focal points of this whole chapter is the evolution of animal terminology in the diverse genres of Vedic literature. In previous sections, I have argued that when the Vedic sources are read together, broader semantic changes become apparent. For example, the meaning of *mṛga* in the ṚV is hardly the same as in the relatively late narrative Brāhmaṇas, even though it is still the same word. A similar thing can be said about the word *paśu*, which, although seemingly more stable than *mṛga*, endures a process of generalisation. The split between *grāmya* and *āranya* and the increase in the usage of this dichotomy in the prosaic texts of the Vedic tradition is yet another witness of the evolution in thinking about animals and, more broadly, the environment.

The terms *grāmya* and *āranya* occur separately, but more often they are found together, forming a dichotomy which functions almost as a merism, an emphatic expression of totality. As in the previous section, I will treat their separate occurrences before turning to the passages which use the dichotomy.

Grāmya is a relatively straightforward and oft-used term in the Vedic prose. It occurs frequently and signifies whatever pertains to the sphere of the village, not only animals but also foodstuff or agricultural plants.³²⁴ For our discussion, it is crucial that it invariably describes a group of domesticated animals, usually consisting of either five or seven members. These are the species that we discussed in § 2.1.1 as belonging to the category of *paśu*, that is, human, horse, cattle, sheep, and goat. As an example, consider the following passages. The former passage lists five domestic animals and the starkest characteristic features; the latter mentions that there are seven domestic animals.

TS 2.1.1.5

<i>yác chmaśruṇás</i> ³²⁵ <i>tát púruṣāṇām rūpām yát</i> <i>tūparás tát áśvānām yád anyátodan tát gávām yád</i> <i>ávyā iva śaphás tát ávinām yád ajás tát ajánām,</i> <i>etávanto vái grāmyáh paśávas tán </i>	The beard is the characteristic of man, the lack of horns of the horse, having incisors on one side only that of cattle, having sheep-like hooves that of sheep, the goat-nature that of goats; so many
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³²³ Smith: 1991, p. 534; and Jamison: 2005, p. 203.

³²⁴ On the seven domesticated plants, see TS 5.2.5.5. Cf. Witzel: 1995.

³²⁵ Although here, the word is a characteristic feature of the human, the *MW* lists the *lemma* as “bearded (as of a goat)”.

are the domesticated animals, verily by their characteristics he wins them.

MS 1.8.1.57³²⁶

ete sapta grāmyāḥ paśavo 'srjyanta ||

These seven domestic animals were created.

The trope “domestic animals are seven” – or five, respectively – occurs throughout the prose literature. The majority of cases are found in a ritual setting, as in the two following passages:

AB 2.17

*saptośasyāni chandāṃsy anvāha sapta vai grāmyāḥ
paśavaḥ | ava grāmyān paśūn runddhe ya evaṃ veda*

In seven metres he recites for Uṣas, seven are {domestic} animals; he wins the {domestic} animals who knows thus.³²⁷

PB 2.14.2³²⁸

*sapta grāmyāḥ paśavas tān etayā sprṇoti sapta
śirasi prāṇāḥ prāṇā indriyāṇindriyāny
evaitayāpnoti ||*

There are seven kinds of domestic animals, these he gains by this [*viṣṭuti*], there are seven breaths in the head, the organs of sense are the breaths, these he obtains by this [*viṣṭuti*].

The structure of these passages is highly formulaic: a certain element of the ritual action (metres, breaths) is sevenfold, just as the domestic animals are sevenfold. In this manner, the Brāhmaṇa commentarial genre makes sense not only of the ritual but also of the world, establishing an order on the microcosmical and macrocosmical level at the same time, as was shown by Brian Smith.³²⁹

Although these two passages do not bring much new information concerning the domestic animals *per se*, their formulaic structure can tell us a lot. The *grāmya* animals, to say it in a nutshell, make sense, or rather, they are made sense of: they are grouped together, just as various kinds of breaths or metres are grouped together. The individual members of the group, moreover, correspond to other phenomena in the universe, and through that process, their position in the world is secured. On the contrary, *āraṇya* animals are never enumerated, suggesting that their position in the cosmos is perhaps not defined so precisely.

Other Brāhmaṇa passages help us define the *grāmya* animals further. The following Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa passage mentions that there are certain species of animals living in a village that are so

³²⁶ Verbatim parallels of this mantra are found in VS 14.29; MS 2.8.6, 110.13; and ŚBM 8.4.3.11.

³²⁷ I supply “domestic” in the translation, as Keith’s original has “tame”.

³²⁸ Cf. PB 3.3.2, ŚBM 9.5.2.8, etc.

³²⁹ On classification and ordering the world in Vedic India, see especially Smith: 1994.

ajūṣṭa (in this context probably “impure”, i.e. unfit to be sacrificed) that if they walk across the sacrificial ground during the *agnihotra*, they hamper the ritual performance.

JB 1.51³³⁰

<i>trāyo ha tvai grāmyāḥ paśavo 'juṣṭā durvarāha</i> <i>eḍakaḥ śvā teṣāṃ yadi kaś cid antareṇa sann</i> <i>ejīyeta³³¹ kiṃ tatra karma kā prāyaścittir iti </i>	But, indeed, there are three domestic animals which are impure, the hog, the ram, and the dog. If any of these ones should move between [his fires], what rite and what expiation would there be in that case?
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These three animals are peculiar: on one hand, they are said to be *grāmya*, i.e. they live in a village or around it; on other hand, they are impure and not known to be members of the standard group of five or seven (*grāmya*) *paśu*. The identity of the latter two members of the group is certain, and so is their closeness to humans: *śvan*, i.e. a dog, is believed to be the first domesticated animal, and has lived alongside humans at least since the Late Pleistocene.³³² Although dogs were valued greatly by the neighbouring Iranian people, for the Vedic communities, they mostly seemed to be lowly animals, not allowed into a ritual ground.³³³ Not much can be said about the *eḍaka* apart from the fact that it is a particular species of sheep which is valued for its wool, used in ritual.³³⁴ The ritual usage suggests that it might be at least partially domesticated to be shorn.

The first of the three animals, *durvarāha*, is, however, more nebulous. The second member of the compound, *varāha*, is the usual term for “boar”.³³⁵ Eggeling translates the word literally as a “vicious

³³⁰ Cf. parallel passage in ŚBM 12.4.1.4 *trāyo ha tvāvā paśāvo 'medhyāḥ dūrvarāha aiḍakāḥ śvā* | “But, surely, there are three unclean animals, a vicious boar, a vicious ram and a dog.” Notice that Eggeling bases his translation “vicious ram” on the evidence of modern Marathi and argues that it is a ram that is “trained to fight” (ŚBM trl Eggeling, vol. 5, p. 178-9, n. 2). Furthermore, the ŚBM passage uses the word *amedhya* instead of *ajūṣṭa* which points to the meaning “not fit to be sacrificed”.

³³¹ The correct reading of this word is doubted by all the translators. JB trl Bodewitz 1.1-65, p. 157, n. 13, notes that “whatever may be the correct reading, JB. apparently has replaced *saṃcaret* (ŚB.) by an optative of *ejati*.” The *sann*, preceding this word, might be a corruption of the preverb *saṃ*.

³³² E.g. Bergström et al.: 2020; Axelsson et al.: 2013.

³³³ Although there are examples of positively viewed dogs in Vedic (e.g. *Saramā*), dogs are mostly considered ritually impure. The ṚV gives evidence that a dog was not allowed into a ritual, ṚV 9.101.1; dogs were, however, used for hunting boar, as seen in ṚV 10.86.4. On dogs in India, see Bollée: 2006, especially chapter 3 on “cynanthropic relations”. On dogs in Iran, see Skjaervø: 2012, p. 96-7 (according to Skjaervø, dogs participated in Zoroastrian rituals!).

³³⁴ Alternatively, it is called *eḍa* or *aiḍaka* (the latter is found in the parallel passage ŚBM 12.4.1.4, quoted above). In his *KEWA*, Bd. 1, p. 126, Mayrhofer suggests that it might be a word of Dravidian origin; in the later *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 264, he suspects that it might be a cognate of Gk. *aix* and Armenian *ayc*. Sheshadri: 2014, p. 35, identifies the *eḍaka* as Great Tibetan sheep, but to my knowledge, there is not enough evidence to say so, at least not regarding the meaning in the Veda. On *eḍaka* fleece/wool used in ritual setting, see also ŚBM 2.5.2.15 (*anaiḍakīr ūrnī*, wool from a non-*eḍaka* sheep).

³³⁵ Based on Vedic *varāha-* and Avestan *varāza-*, Kümmel: 2017, p. 279, reconstructs the PII term as **warājhá-*.

hog” but I doubt that the prefix *dur-* has an ethical meaning here. Rather, given the context, we are dealing with a domesticated or semi-domesticated pig; if so, then the prefix *dur-* could signify the sacrificial unfitness of the animal. If not a ritual distinction, the prefix *dur-* could describe a certain quality or behaviour of pigs that would distinguish them from wild boar: perhaps, this was the term for pigs that were frequenting human habitation, living off the rubbish of humans.³³⁶ There is, nevertheless, no evidence for this suggestion, and equally, there are many unknowns about the keeping of pigs amongst Vedic people in general. The lack of textual evidence for domestic pigs leads many scholars to the conclusion that pigs were not bred by the Indo-Iranians.³³⁷ Indeed, based on the field data, archaeologists too conclude that although pigs were domesticated locally in the subcontinent, they did not seem to be kept often.³³⁸ To my knowledge, they were never considered to be a sacrificial animal, at least not in the Vedic period. This passage, however, could perhaps support the hypothesis that domesticated or semi-domesticated pigs might have been found in the Indian subcontinent.

What are the implications of this rather technical discussion, you might ask? I believe that this passage, in both of its versions, suggests that although the Vedic prose categorises domestic animals into a neat group of five or seven, there were many more non-human animals living within the village limits. Since they were not sacrificed (or to be precise, since even their presence at the sacrificial ground hindered the ritual action), the myopic ritualistic texts are mostly silent about their existence. As has been my argument throughout this whole chapter, only through reading all the Vedic strata diachronically can we fully appreciate this detail.

Unlike *grāmya*, the term *āraṇya* is not associated with any numerical value. This suggests that the category is perhaps less defined or less structured; perhaps it is just too large to be easily enumerated.³³⁹ Indeed, its separate usage is nebulous and almost non-existent in the Vedic prose. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa even quotes an opinion that the *āraṇya paśu* are not *paśu* at all:

³³⁶ Many thanks to Professor Minkowski for this suggestion.

³³⁷ E.g. Kümmel: 2017, p. 279, concludes: “Pigs were apparently not important in early Indo-Iranian culture, and the words [such as Vedic *sūkara* or *varāha*] may mostly refer to the wild boar.”

³³⁸ Larson et al.: 2010, p. 7689, conclude: “At present, little is known about the history of pig domestication in India. *Sus* bones are a widespread but minor component of archaeological assemblages throughout India and Pakistan. An initial increase and subsequent rapid decrease of pig remains in successive periods at Mehrgarh in Pakistan raises the possibility that efforts were made to keep pigs during the late fourth millennium B.C., but were later abandoned. [...] What the genetic evidence implies, however, is that modern Indian domestic pigs are derived from local wild boar.” Cf. also Thomas: 1989, p. 108, according to whom there are Chalcolithic sites in central India where pigs seem to be the most important livestock after cattle.

³³⁹ There are a few passages which state that *āraṇya* animals are seven, such as ŚBM 3.8.4.16, but these are exceptions. Due to the sheer number, I would be tempted to argue that these are modelled on the basis of the enumeration of (*grāmya*) *paśu*.

ŚBM 13.3.2.3

tád āhuḥ naite sārve paśávo yád ajāváyáś cāraṇyáś As to this they say, ‘These—to wit, goats and
caite vai sārve paśávo yád gavyā íti sheep and the wild [beast]—are not all animals;
but those—to wit, the bovine [victims]—are
indeed all animals’.

This quote is part of the lengthy explanation of the *aśvamedha* ritual. The *aśvamedha* is a primary context where the term *āraṇya paśu* occurs in the Vedic prose. This is to be expected, as this particular ritual is the one of the few where wild animals play a significant role – and as we have discussed many times already, the Vedic texts view the world almost solely through the lens of ritual. I say “play a role” for a reason. Not all the animals are killed and sacrificed during the *aśvamedha*, as is suggested by the quote above: only some of them matter on the ritual scale of things. One hundred and eleven wild animals are tied between the sacrificial posts alongside the domestic species,³⁴⁰ but they are subsequently released back to the wilderness, after a small ritual episode when a fire is carried around them (*paryagni*).³⁴¹ Theologically, or ritualistically speaking, both kinds have their place in the ritual: the domestic animals are said to bring about the obtainment of this world to the sacrificer, whereas the wild ones the yonder world.³⁴² In practice, however, it seems that the large number of all kinds of animals also serve as a display of the power and wealth of the elite sacrificer who sponsors the ritual.

The ritualistic point of view is the only one we have access to, at least in this period. I often wonder whether the amassing of wild animals occurred in practice, and under what conditions? How were the tens of wild animals (included porpoises and fish) managed when they were released at the sacrificial ground full of priests and spectators? These details of the lived ritual would enrich our understanding of the human–animal relationship greatly but the Vedic sources, constrained by their respective genres, are silent about them.

This brief digression on the *aśvamedha* proves an important point. Despite being sometimes called *āraṇya paśu*, the wild animals lack the main characteristics of *paśu*: the fitness to be sacrificed and eaten.³⁴³ The question is, of course, why the wild animals are called *paśu* in the first place given that they lack the perhaps most important features of the group. As suggested above, I suspect that by

³⁴⁰ Cf. TS 5.5.11–21.

³⁴¹ TB 3.8.19 and 3.9.3, PB 21.4.13.

³⁴² TB 3.9.2.1: *táir vai sá ubháu lokā́v āvārundha | grāmyáir evá paśúbhīr imáṃ lokám āvārundha, āraṇyáir amúm |* “By means of them, he obtains both worlds. By means of domestic animals, he obtains this world, by means of wild ones, that one.”

³⁴³ These were discussed in § 2.1.6.

the time of the Vedic prose, when the terminology proliferates, the term *paśu* is much broader than the original meaning “sacrificable domestic livestock” and means, perhaps, a mammalian animal in general.³⁴⁴

A striking element of the categories *grāmya* and *āraṇya* is their supposed binarity. Whilst binarity does not exhaust all the animal natures (gaur and frog were the examples we saw above), the two terms are constructed as fully complementary. One implicitly presupposes the other, even if only one of them is mentioned.

Whilst *grāmya paśu* are eaten and sacrificed, the *āraṇya* are usually not. In this sense, we could conclude that *grāmya paśu* is basically a synonym of the sole (i.e. without any qualifying adjective) term *paśu*; *āraṇya* is “the other one”, so to speak. The following passage from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is a good example of the implicit complementarity of the two terms:

ŚBM 5.3.5.4

<i>pṛthā ha vai vainyó manuṣyāṇām prathamó 'bhīṣice só 'kāmayata sārvaṁ annādyam āvarundhīyēti tasmā etāny ajuhaviḥ sā idam sārvaṁ annādyam avarurudhé 'pi ha smāsmā āraṇyān paśūn abhīhvayanty asāv éhi rājā tvā pakṣyata iti</i>	Now Pṛth{ā}³⁴⁵ Vainya was consecrated first of men. He desired that he might appropriate to himself all food. They offered up for him those [oblations]; {even though ('pi ha)}³⁴⁶ he appropriated to himself all the food here on earth, {t}hey would even call forest beasts to him, saying, “Come hither thou [beast], so and so, the king wants to cook thee!”.
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The first king Pṛthā Vainya is said to have appropriated all food, even the *āraṇya* animals. This implies that under the normal order of things, wild animals would not be eaten, but Pṛthā's claim is so absolute that they are considered and called upon. A similar situation is found in the ritual sphere, where only *grāmya* animals have the fitness to be sacrificed. As discussed above in the case of the *aśvamedha*, they can be utilised in a ritual practice, so to speak. Their actual killing is, nevertheless, generally ill-advised, as suggested by a peculiar *aśvamedha* passage that occurs in a few Brāhmaṇas:

TB 3.9.1.2-3³⁴⁷

<i>yád āraṇyáih sāmsthāpáyet vyávasyetāṁ pitāputráu vy ádhvānaḥ krāmeyuḥ vídūraṁ</i>	[2.] If he [the <i>adhvaryu</i>, acting for the sacrificer], were to perform [the sacrifice] with wild animals,
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³⁴⁴ That we are dealing most likely with mammals is deducible from the JB 1.26 which says that “four feet have the domestic as well as the wild animals”.

³⁴⁵ The name of this first king/cultural hero seems to be variable. Here, it seems to Pṛthā or Pṛthan; Eggeling's translation reads Pṛthin. Furthermore, Macdonell in his *Vedic Index* argues that the name should be Pṛthī rather than Pṛthin, and JB 1.186 reads Pṛthu. For other passages, see Macdonell: 1912, Vol. 2, p. 16.

³⁴⁶ I am modifying Eggeling's translation to stress the force of *api ha*.

³⁴⁷ Cf. the parallel passages in ŚBM 13.2.4.1-4 and JB 2.266.

grāmayor grāmāntāu syātām | ṛkṣīkāḥ ³⁴⁸
puruṣavyāghrāḥ ³⁴⁹ *parimoṣiṇi* ³⁵⁰ *āvyādhūnīs tāskarā*
āraṇyeṣv ājāyeran || 2
tād āhuḥ | āpaśavo vā eté | yād āraṇyāḥ | yād
āraṇyāiḥ sāmsthāpāyet | kṣipré yājāmānam
āraṇyaṃ mṛtāṃ hareyuḥ | āraṇyāyatanā hy
āraṇyāḥ paśáva iti | [...] || 3

father and son would part, the roads would run asunder, the village-boundaries of two villages would be far asunder, and carnivorous beasts, man-tigers, thieves, murderers, and robbers would be born in the forests.

[3.] Concerning this they say: “The wild animals are not [sacrificial] animals. If he [the *adhvaryu*, acting for the sacrificer], were to perform [the sacrifice] with wild animals, they would soon carry away the Sacrificer dead to the forest, for the wild animals have the forest for their home”.

The sacrifice of wild animals is clearly associated with a negative, wild outcome: a breakdown of the tightest family relationships and spatial boundaries, and the emergence of all kinds of evil beings from spirits and supposedly demonic, composite beings to human villains. It also seems to bring about *lex talionis*: if one sacrifices a wild animal in the village, he himself must die in the wilderness. In short, if wild animals are sacrificed, the cultural order dissolves and the world returns to its wild state (I hesitate to say “natural state” because unlike the contemporary Western discourse, the Vedic sources never associate wilderness with the state of naturality). To prevent this, one should follow a simple rule of thumb, to sacrifice only the small subset of pure, domestic animals.

To advance the analysis from the separate instances of the words *grāmya* and *āraṇya* to the passages where they occur together, let me discuss the so-called *bahiṣpavamāna* ritual. This is the opening ritual action of the Soma sacrifice of *jyotiṣṭoma*, documented especially in Sāmavedic prose texts.³⁵¹ Its characteristic mark is that it happens “outdoors”, i.e. away from the designated ritual

³⁴⁸ See the discussion on the demon *ṛkṣīkā* in n. 319 above.

³⁴⁹ Like the preceding word *ṛkṣīkā*, *puruṣavyāghra* is also a peculiar term. It occurs in the same passages as *ṛkṣīkā*, i.e. VS 30.8, TB 3.4.5.1 and 3.9.1.1-4, ŚB 13.2.4.1-4, and JB 2.266. From the context it seems that unlike the Classical language, the meaning is not the standard “tiger amongst men”. Rather, it seems to be a *karmadhāraya* with the meaning “half man, half tiger”, “man-tiger”, or perhaps “a tiger of a man”. Dr Victor D’Avella suggested to me in my Confirmation of Status exam that “the (traditional) analysis of such compounds has always been a *karmadhāraya* either with an implied simile or metaphor: *puruṣo vyāghra iva/eva*”, cf. Pāṇini 2.1.56 (e-mail communication, April 2021). As is the case with the preceding *ṛkṣīkā*, it is a being associated with forested areas and seems to be fearful, possibly because of its composite character. Apart from the *ṛkṣīkā* and *puruṣavyāghra*, the section TB 3.4.5.1 lists various other beings which seem to be of a similar, perhaps other-worldly, distant, or demonic character: for example, *gandharvas* and *apsarasas*, serpents and divine beings, *piśācas*, and *yātudhānas*. Thanks are also due to Professor Lowe and Professor Minkowski who consulted about man-tigers with me via email, 12 May 2020.

³⁵⁰ Peculiar form, found in all editions including Śāyana’s commentary (TB ed Mitra). I suppose it is a form after *sandhi*.

³⁵¹ PB 6.7-8 and JB 1.82-104.

ground; this has wide implications for its treatment of domestic and wild animals. Before I discuss the animal symbolism in the prose passages, let me summarise the ritual briefly.³⁵²

Before dawn, the officiating priests led by the *adhvaryu* leave the ritual ground and silently make their way to the northeast, in the direction of the rising Sun and the *cātvāla* pit.³⁵³ Away from the ritual arena, they sit down around the *cātvāla* pit which is, across the *śākhās*, associated with the Sun, or said to be a path to heavens.³⁵⁴ There, the three Sāmaveda priests take over the ceremony and sing the *bahiṣpavamānastotra* which helps the *yaja*

māna ascend to heaven through the Sun (symbolised by the *cātvāla*), and subsequently achieve immortality.

As Finnian Gerety shows in his doctoral thesis, the *bahiṣpavamāna* ritual has wide implications for the history of *om* – but that is not what interests me here.³⁵⁵ From my point of view, the ritual and the prose detailing it stand as witnesses to the relationship between the domestic and wild spheres of existence. The *bahiṣpavamāna* is one of the few rituals taking place outside the ritual ground, and its “outdoorsy” character means that it has a special connection to wilderness. The Jaiminīya version introduces the ritual, saying:

JB 1.83

<i>aranyam iva vā ete yanti ye bahiṣpavamānaṃ sarpanti tān īśvaro rakṣo vā hantor anyā vā naṃṣṭrā</i>	Those who slowly move to the out-of-doors <i>pavamāna</i> laud go to the forest as it were. A Rakṣas demon or an another destructive demon may probably kill them.
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The wilderness is a dangerous place, inhabited by animals as well as demons, as we have seen frequently in the AV passages discussed in the previous section. Animality is present throughout the ritual descriptions in many forms, wild and domestic alike. The sacrifice itself is said to be like a deer, shy and easy to get scared (PB 6.7.10, discussed above in § 2.2.4); it is also said to acquire the form of a swift horse (PB 6.7.18; JB 1.83); furthermore, in the later Sūtras, the *udgātṛ* is associated with a falcon.³⁵⁶

Furthermore, animals of both kinds – *grāmya* and *āranya* – are discussed amply. The style of description is usual to the Brāhmaṇa literature, in that they are used as a point of reference for the

³⁵² In the discussion of the ritual, I rely on Fujii: 1986, and Gerety: 2015, as well as on the primary sources. It is worth noting that Fujii’s and Gerety’s analysis of the ritual relies on the later Sāmaveda texts, especially the Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa and Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra, that is, texts that I usually do not include in my thesis.

³⁵³ I have discussed their silent walk when discussing the passage PB 6.7.10 in § 2.2.4. In the quoted passage, the sacrifice is likened to a *mṛga*: it must be approached silently so it would not get scared.

³⁵⁴ JB 1.87; PB 6.7.24; ŚB 4.2.5.5, 9, JUB 1.5.5. Cf. Fujii 1986: p. 12; and Gerety: 2015, p. 256.

³⁵⁵ Gerety: 2015, p. 252-260.

³⁵⁶ JŚS 1.11.13.

explication of various ritual elements. The two categories are defined against each other: domestic animals are of many colours, live in an enclosed space (perhaps a fenced pasture), and if they roam free, they return to the village, whereas the wild animals are only of one colour, live in the open, and are occasionally consumed by humans. Consider the following examples from the two Sāmavedic Brāhmaṇas:

PB 6.8.12-4

*grāmebhyo vā etat paśubhyaḥ stuvanti yad ājyair
nānārūpaiḥ stuvanti tasmān nānārūpā grāmyāḥ
paśavaḥ || 12
punarabhyāvartaṃ stuvanti tasmāt pretvaryaḥ
pretya punar āyanti || 13
parīśrite stuvanti tasmāt parigrhītā grāmyāḥ
paśavaḥ || 14*

12. {They chant for the} domestic animals {when} they chant the *ājyas*; they chant verses of various forms; therefore the domestic animals are of various forms [colours].³⁵⁷ 13. They chant [them, i.e. the *ājya* lauds] constantly returning; therefore the cows, having gone forth to freely roam about [on the meadows], do return. 14. On an enclosed [space] they chant [them, i.e. the *ājyas*]; therefore the domestic animals live on an enclosed space.

JB 1.89³⁵⁸

*etadāyatanā vā āraṇyāḥ paśavo yad
bahiṣpavamānam araṇye stuvanti tasmād āraṇyāḥ
paśavo 'raṇyaṃ sacante, [...], ekarūpāsu stuvanti
tasmād āraṇyāḥ paśava ekarūpā, āvad uttamam
akṣaraṃ bhavati tasmād ekaiko {'raṇyacalo'}³⁵⁹
grāme 'dhigamyate atho araṇye hataṃ grāmam
abhyavaharanti |*

The animals of the forest live here [i.e. outside of the *vedi*, where the Out-of-doors laud is chanted]. Because they chant the Out-of-doors laud in the forest, therefore the forest animals go to the forest. [...] They chant the laud on verses of one form. Therefore the forest animals are of one colour. The last syllable contains the meaning “hither”. Therefore they find [once in a while] a single forest animal {'*raṇyacalo*} in the village and they bring to the village one that has been killed in the forest.³⁶⁰

Although the passages are formulaic, according to the convention of the genre, they help us understand the categories and their usage. I have enumerated the most important points: the colour/shape, habitat, and other qualities that the texts ascribe to each of the groups. The most striking

³⁵⁷ I am modifying Caland's translation as his construction does not seem very natural (although it retains the dative). PB 6.8.12 = PB 7.2.6.

³⁵⁸ Note that the JB does not include the descriptions of the domestic animals found in the PB 6.8.8-14.

³⁵⁹ I am following Bodewitz' suggestion in JB trl Bodewitz 1.66-364, p. 226, n. 28, where he argues that the corrupt '*nyo 'calo* should be read '*raṇyacalo* = *araṇyacaro*, “living in the forest”.

³⁶⁰ The explanation in square brackets is Bodewitz', see JB trl Bodewitz 1.66-364, p. 51. For the last sentence, cf. PB 6.8.11 *ahiḥ stuvanty antar anuśaṃsanti tasmād grāmam āhrtair bhuñjate ||* “{Outdoors} they perform the laud, {indoors} they perform the subsequent recitation; therefore they consume the [wild animals] that have been brought to the village.” (I am modifying Caland's translation gently here, saying “out/indoors” instead of “out-of-doors”).

aspect of these description is, nevertheless, their binarity. As I have suggested above, the categories are defined against each other: *grāmya paśu* are what *āranya paśu* are not, and vice versa. One group of animals, for example, is said to be of many forms/colours (*rūpa*), the other has only one colour. Only together, they constitute the totality of all forms, as the Śatapatha says in the following passage:

ŚBM 2.2.3.2³⁶¹

<i>agnau ha vai devāḥ sārvaṇi rūpāṇi nidadhire yāni</i> <i>ca grāmyāṇi yāni cāranyaṇi [...]</i>	Now once upon a time the gods deposited with Agni all forms (<i>rūpa</i>), both domestic and wild.
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Although the categories are used separately, they are complementary. Their character is strictly binary: they implicitly presuppose each other. Together, they constitute the totality of beings, *sarvān paśūn*, possibly including all the other animals that are elsewhere classified as liminal (frog, wild cattle, etc.). As the AB 4.26.3 says, for example: in winter, both domestic and wild animals become shaggy and thin – suggesting, of course, that the seasonal weather changes have effect on the totality of beings, on all animals.³⁶² When used in a simile, this totality then transposes to the whole cosmos, such as in the following ŚB passage:

ŚBM 13.2.4.1³⁶³

<i>prajāpatir akāmayata ubhaú lokān abhījayeyam</i> <i>devalokam ca manuṣyalokam cēti sá etān paśūn</i> <i>apaśyad grāmyāṇs ca tān ālabhata taír imaú lokān</i> <i>āvārunddha grāmyaír evá paśúbhir imān lokam</i> <i>avārunddhāraṇyaír amūm ayaṁ vai lokó</i> <i>manuṣyalokó 'thāsaú devaloko yád grāmyān paśūn</i> <i>ālābhata imām eva taír lokam yájamānó 'varunddhe</i> <i>yád aranyaṇ amuṁ taiḥ </i>	Prajāpati desired, 'Would that I might gain both worlds, the world of the gods, and the world of men.' He saw those beasts, the tame and the wild ones; he seized them, and by means of them took possession of these two worlds: by means of the tame beasts he took possession of this [terrestrial] world, and by means of the wild beasts of yonder [world]; for this world is the world of men, and yonder world is the world of the gods. Thus when he seizes tame beasts he thereby takes possession of this world, and when wild beasts, he thereby [takes possession] of yonder [world].
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What are the implications of all this? What I wanted to show with these passages is that the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āranya* is used primarily in a ritual context in the Vedic prose. This might seem

³⁶¹ Cf. ŚBM 2.3.4.1 which has *sarvān paśūn* instead of *sārvaṇi rūpāṇi*.

³⁶² AB 4.26.3 *tasmād etayor eva śaiśirayor māsayor āgatayor ye caiva grāmyāḥ paśavo ye cāranya aṇimānam eva tat paruṣimāṇam niyanti* | "Therefore in these months of the cool season the cattle of the village and of the wild become thin and shaggy."

³⁶³ Cf. TS 2.5.11.

straightforward, as the whole of Vedic literature is essentially a ritualistic corpus. The comparison of the usage of the terms *āranya paśu* versus *mṛga* in the Vedic prose can be helpful to gauge the difference. If I exaggerate, the passages where *mṛga* occurs are almost always either quotations of RV mantras or narratives about men going hunting; whereas the term *āranya* is found in more ritualistically oriented passages, where various homologies are enumerated and explained. It is important to stress, once again, that in the Vedic corpus, every context is ritualistic – but there are distinct styles within the Vedic prose: what is sometimes called the *itihāsa*, the mythological explanation of the ritual order, and the *arthavāda*, the expository, non-mythical prose. Both styles enable us to at least partially reveal how the Vedic literature understands its environment, I believe, but each with its specific literary devices.³⁶⁴

One of the specific things that the dichotomy allows for is to fit within the intricate system of homologies that are devised in the Classical Vedic ritual. In the middle Vedic period, the ritual becomes a device through which a skilled ritualist can control the world, provided that he understands the connections between particular worldly phenomena. The dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āranya* is a perfect vehicle for this: each group is distinct enough but together, they constitute totality. As seen in the last ŚBM passage: domestic animals are this world, wild animals the yonder world; together, they constitute all animals, a category on a par with the whole world.

³⁶⁴ As I said in the Introduction, I am supporting this assertion with what Michael Witzel says about the Brāhmaṇa prose: “It is in this period that one learnt to discourse and ‘think’ [...], that one learnt to watch and discuss nature, society, thought, and speech [...]” Witzel: 1987, p. 414.

In this subchapter, I have attempted to collect the numerous instances of the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āranya* in the poetry and prose of the Vedic corpus. I have tried to argue that although the dichotomy first occurs in the earliest Samhitās, including the Ṛgveda, it is the Vedic prose where it gains prominence. There are, I believe, at least two reasons for the increasing prominence of this dichotomy over the earlier (mostly implicit) pair *paśu* – *mṛga*.

First, I suspect that the increased usage coincides with the slow evolution of the word *mṛga*. As I have shown in the subchapter § 2.2, I suspect that as the originally semi-nomadic Vedic people spread across the north of the subcontinent and acquired a more sedentary lifestyle, their encounters with wild animals changed. With that, the word *mṛga* evolved from a term for a dangerous wild beast to a word for an animal that can be hunted down. The process of hunting equally changed its societal connotations, from a necessity to a status activity. Although reconsidered, wild and dangerous animals did not disappear; I suspect that due to the evolution of the term *mṛga*, another term, that is *āranya*, started being used more frequently to denote them. Its symmetrical counterpart, the word *grāmya*, followed a suit.

Furthermore, I presume that the increased prominence of the terminology lies in the evolution of the Classical Vedic ritual. In the middle Vedic period, ritual is elevated into a prime position; its prominence and power increases. The ritual ground becomes the place from where ritualist specialists control the whole world by a system of identifications and correspondences between macrocosmic, mesocosmic, and microcosmic phenomena. The ritualist who knows (*ya evaṃ veda*) the proper correspondence between the phenomena is rewarded with the goal of the ritual. With the development of this system of homologies, the prose texts became abundant in various systems of categorisations, groupings, and lists.³⁶⁵ The dichotomy *grāmya* – *āranya* fits this development of Vedic ritual, as it enables one to easily group the worldly phenomena. The two groups then serve as classificatory units (such as in ŚBM 13.2.4.1, the last passage I discussed: domestic animals are this world, wild animals are the yonder world); furthermore, together, they express a totality of all beings.

These two reasons together – and it is worth noting that the middle Vedic ritual development might be itself intertwined with the change in the mode of life – might have triggered the increased usage of the terms *grāmya* and *āranya* in the prose literature. I do not argue that they have been coined by the Vedic prose texts. They are clearly already present in the Ṛgveda. Moreover, the comparable

³⁶⁵ Cf. Smith: 1994.

Avestan dichotomy of *pasuka* and *daitika* animals could suggest a deeper, perhaps Indo-European history of the dichotomy. As tempting as it might be, however, I am not prepared to propose that the dichotomy is universally human.³⁶⁶

To conclude the subchapter, I would like to react to a point made by Stephanie Jamison in her paper *The Function of Animals in the Rig Veda*. I have already discussed Jamison's point in the conclusion of the previous subchapter on *mṛga* but I think it is worth revisiting now, when we have the full picture of development of the various terms for Vedic animal categories. Jamison writes:

"It is, [...], telling that the standard twofold classification of *paśus* into *āraṇya* 'wild' / *grāmya* 'domestic' (lit. 'belonging to the wilderness, belonging to the settlement') is found in the RV only once. [...] I would claim that the RV lacks this categorical distinction because it, as it were, refuses to conceptualize wild animals as a class."³⁶⁷

As I have said in the previous subchapter, I find Jamison's argument compelling. Seeing all the data, I must conclude, however, that the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence. We could easily hinge the evidence of the single Ṛgvedic occurrence of the dichotomy the other way: the fact that it occurs here, in the text which is predominantly interested in the realm of ritual, in the "obscure" that is loved by the gods, must be telling us something as well. If I argued this way, I would be, however, employing the same argumentation strategy.

Upon reading the large majority of instances of both *mṛga* and *āraṇya paśu* in the Vedic corpus, I argue that, *contra* Jamison's suggestion, the evidence of wild animals as a class is, in fact, present in the texts. The ṚV does not lack the categorical distinction between wild and domesticated; it employs different terminology. The term *āraṇya*, I would argue, is not needed in the time of the Ṛgveda, because *mṛga* has the same function at that point: it signifies any animal which is not *paśu*. As the word *mṛga* evolves in meaning from "wild animal" to "game" in the Vedic prose, the dichotomy *grāmya* – *āraṇya* is established to denote the difference between the groups of domesticated and wild animals.

³⁶⁶ *Contra* Smith: 1994, p. 277, n. 12; Smith references Tambiah: 1969.

³⁶⁷ Jamison: 2009, p. 203-4.

§ 2. 4 ANIMAL TERMINOLOGY: A CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have shown in some detail the history of semantics of the three most common Vedic Sanskrit terms for animals: *paśu*, *mṛga*, and the pair *grāmya/āraṇya*. I have discussed many of their instances in chronological order, from their Indo-Iranian predecessors through most of the Vedic prose literature. My aim has been to read the genres of Vedic literature together to explore why they produce results of the sort they do. This reading, I argue, helps us to reconstruct the meaning of the terms and the changes in their semantics.

At the outset of the chapter, I briefly wrote about categorisation and its importance for the understanding of the human world. The terms discussed in this chapter are categories: they are methods of organisation of the natural world. By classifying the animals into such groups, the Vedic texts give meaning to the world around them.

Covering such a vast swathe of literature, what does this chapter tell us about Vedic animal categories then? In the introductory section of this chapter as well as its body, I have repeatedly touched upon the work of Brian Smith. As discussed, Smith's research has been brilliant in recognising the interconnected nature of the Vedic categories, focused around the governing notion of *varṇa*. In my view, however, his discussion was predominantly focused on the category of *paśu*, perhaps disproportionately on the expense of the other terms. This is understandable, as his research was centred around the Vedic society, its stratification, and the inherent discourse of power that comes from the practice of categorisation and enables a social hierarchy.

My approach to the animal categories is different, even though it is to some extent influenced by Smith. Based on the data discussed in this chapter, and in particular their diachronic reading, I aim to stress that the animal categories can be a productive way of thinking even without the discourse around *varṇa*. They are meaningful in themselves as they help us understand how living beings relate to each other.

The complementarity of the categories is perhaps their most characteristic feature. This is most notable when treating the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āraṇya*; in earlier sources, however, it applies to *paśu* and *mṛga* as well. The terms contradict each other: *mṛga* and *āraṇya* are the untamed, wild creatures that cannot be sacrificed; *paśu* their opposite. Without each other, the categories would not make sense.

All the terms rely on an important feature: they depend on their relation to people and human habitats. *Paśus* are the companion species of people, the domesticated livestock upon which rests much of the livelihood of the community. *Mṛga* and *āraṇya* species are those living in the wild,

potentially dangerous to people and their livestock. Furthermore, there are animals that are neither, such as gaur, and their position in the system is changeable. The liminal species, discussed at the outset of the subchapter § 2.3, suggest that although complementary, the categories are not binary, and allow to account for mismatches.

On the surface, the categories are dominated by the division between nature and culture. Their peculiar feature is, however, their self-reflexivity. The human – the referent upon which the categories are built – is in itself part of the system. He is a (*grāmya*) *paśu*; *paśus*, however, are defined by their position *vis-à-vis* the human, and particularly the care he provides on the basis of the process of domestication. On the scale of care, *paśus* are the animals about which the human cares the most (and of them, people themselves are the prime); *mṛga/āraṇya paśu* the ones to which human care does not apply. This does not mean that people do not acknowledge the undomesticated species. Indeed, they recognise their strength and power, especially in the later layers of the Vedic canon, where apex predators are used in similes to male prowess and vigour. There is a lack of constant mutual care, however, which ensures that the primacy is assigned to the domestic species. Domestic species care and are taken care of; they support the wellbeing of the community.

The notion of self-reflexivity of these categories suggests that Vedic literature focuses on the human experience and human form – a fact which will become increasingly clear in the following chapter. There, we will encounter stories of the mythical past according to which people and other *paśus* once looked and behaved the same. This dominance of the human experience does not disregard the fact that human and non-human animals live entangled lives, on the contrary. They are what the philosopher Donna Haraway calls “kin”: they are related in ways other than ancestry or genealogy.³⁶⁸ Perhaps, following the anthropologist Radhika Govindrajan, we could see a “productive and open anthropomorphism” in the self-reflexivity of the system of categories. Govindrajan argues that the openness to mutuality between humans and non-humans – induced by the awareness that although the species are related, they are not *one* – challenges our *hubris* about the distinctiveness of human animals.³⁶⁹ In a similar manner, the category of *paśu* challenges the primacy of people in Vedic literature. The primacy of *paśu* over other animals, however, remains.

The ontological proximity anchored in care is one of the dominant themes of this thesis, and I will dedicate the following chapters to its exploration. Nevertheless, the thorough discussion of the nature and history of the individual terms is the first step in understanding the entanglement of human and nonhuman beings in ancient India.

³⁶⁸ Haraway: 2016, p. 99-103.

³⁶⁹ Govindrajan: 2018, p. 181ff.

§ 3 The Unusual Suspect

“The world is populated with many people, only some of whom are human.”

– David Haberman, *People Trees*³⁷⁰

What distinguishes animals from humans and constitutes the so-called “human nature”?³⁷¹ For millennia, this perennial question has been at the forefront of Philosophy and Theology, and since the advent of the modern scientific disciplines, it has been of great interest to Biology, Psychology, and Social Sciences. Whilst often implicit, the idea of human nature informs our assumptions about what humans are like, their behaviour, goals, and morality. “Human nature”, say Fuentes and Visala, “has a strong ethical and political component.”³⁷²

There seems to be no single, unified discourse to tackle the question of human nature. Some scholars and disciplines refuse the idea altogether; others deem it a useful concept but discuss it separately in their academic camps, in jargon often inaccessible to others. Not being a philosopher, theologian, or anthropologist by training, I do not desire to summarise the complex interdisciplinary research on human nature in this thesis. What I wish to discuss in this chapter, however, is the distinctive notion of Vedic animal categorisation, that is the fact that the human being is considered to be one of *paśus*, the domestic/domesticated species. This notion, I believe, has far-reaching ontological consequences and can shed light on the Vedic idea of “humanity” and “animality”, as well as on our own presuppositions regarding these categories.

³⁷⁰ Haberman: 2013, p. 193.

³⁷¹ On the idea of “human nature” and its interpretations, see Stevenson: 2013.

³⁷² Fuentes & Visala: 2017, p. 3.

The “unusual suspect” of this chapter is the human being: a mammal, a *paśu*, but not quite. Since Charles Darwin’s ground-breaking findings in evolutionary biology, modern science has developed “systematic tools and theories linking human capacities, development, and history to that of other animals”.³⁷³ Although, informed by Darwinian evolutionary biology, we formally identify ourselves as a particular animal species (*Homo sapiens*), the “Western fundamental metaphysical dualism”, as the anthropologist Tim Ingold calls it, prevails in our common thinking.³⁷⁴ In the West, we commonly differentiate between “culture” and “nature”, “human” and “animal”, both in colloquial speech and in academic discourse.³⁷⁵ In this dualistic view, humans have certain capacities that distinguish them from the natural world, be it intellect, soul, reasoning, first-person perspective, laughter, bipedalism, or morality. Western modernity has been, after all, defined by bracketing out various spheres of existence, by “the separation between humans and nonhumans on the one hand, and between what happens ‘above’ [i.e. in the sphere of metaphysical] and what happens ‘below’ [i.e. in the physical world] on the other”, as Bruno Latour says.³⁷⁶ Writing this in 2022, when the climate crisis is indisputably one of the largest threats that the humanity has faced so far, we can note with David Haberman that this separation between humans and nature has “open[ed] up the possibility for an excessive abuse of the nonhuman world with gravely negative environmental results”.³⁷⁷

Whilst many have high hopes that the crisis will be solved by technological advances, human behaviour and lifestyle must change. Although seeing themselves as in a way detached from nature, people have always lived within the environment and their actions have shaped and altered the Earth immensely. Many believe that the knowledge and expertise of Humanities scholarship can help to spark this change.³⁷⁸

Environmentally-inspired reading of the ancient Indian literature can be one of the many tools which would help us rethink our own approach to the world and its various, human and non-human inhabitants. Since the Vedic literature almost unanimously categorises the human as one of the *paśus*, it challenges the Western ontological presuppositions and the separation between nature and culture. In many Vedic narratives, the closeness of people and their companion species, especially cattle, is clearly tangible, even if it has not been analysed this way in the previous scholarship. Humans,

³⁷³ Fuentes & Visala: 2017, p. 5.

³⁷⁴ Ingold: 1994, p. 63. Ingold uses the term “Western” as a convenient shorthand, and I will follow him.

³⁷⁵ It is, however, important to keep in mind that, as David Haberman: 2013, p. 10, says, “like everything else, nature and all ostensible natural phenomena are always viewed through a very particular lens that is determined by the distinct culture and within the precise historical period in which a person is raised.”

³⁷⁶ Latour: 1993, p. 13.

³⁷⁷ Haberman: 2013, p. 9.

³⁷⁸ See, e.g. the volume on climate change and religion, edited by Haberman: 2021.

as we will see, are not the only agents acting in the world: “The world is populated with many people, only some of whom are human.”³⁷⁹

Yet just as the “fundamental metaphysical dualism” does, Vedic cosmology singles out people from the group of domestic animals. Man is a *paśu*, but not quite the same, as it is not commonly sacrificed and eaten. What Tim Ingold says about various contemporary hunter-gatherers – “human beings, uniquely among animals, live a two-tier existence, half-in nature and half-out, both as organisms with bodies and as persons with minds”³⁸⁰ – seems to hold true in ancient India as well.

This chapter will explore the two-tier existence of people in the Vedic cosmos and will establish what it means that the human is categorised as one of the *paśus*. It is worth noting that in this chapter, I am only interested in people in relation to animals: I will not deal with the question of Vedic society or politics.³⁸¹ The chapter will consist of four subchapters. In the first, I will discuss the categorisation of people among *paśu*. In the following three subchapters, I will explore the differences and similarities of the bodies and minds of human and non-human *paśus*.

³⁷⁹ Haberman: 2013, p. 193.

³⁸⁰ Ingold: 1994, p. 63.

³⁸¹ For the similarities between the classifications of *paśus* and the human society, see Smith: 1994, chapter 8.

That the humans are often classified as *paśu* in ancient India is a relatively well-known fact. Not many scholars have, however, dealt with the ontological implications of the assertion, or explored the history of the classification. This will be the aim of this subchapter, first beginning with the classification and its language. Some aspects of this have been already dealt with in § 2.1; therefore, this part of the discussion can be considerably briefer.

The incorporation of humans amongst domestic animals must be, I believe, an inherited feature of Vedic cosmology. When discussing the term *paśu* in chapter § 2.1.1, I touched upon the Indo-European history of the word and argued, following Émile Benveniste, that in its earliest iterations, the word had the meaning “movable personal possession”, chattels.³⁸² The movable wealth, according to Calvert Watkins, included human beings (possibly enslaved people or bondmen, although the evidence for slavery among the Proto-Indo-Europeans is debatable).³⁸³ Watkins’ argument might be supported by the common Vedic dichotomy of two-footed and four-footed creatures. As I have discussed in the previous chapter (especially in § 2.1.5), the bipeds are clearly people, the quadrupeds all other animals. Describing *paśu*, this dichotomy is found only once in the ṚV but becomes a common trope in the later Vedic literature, as we can see from the latter example below:³⁸⁴

ṚV 3.62.14

<i>sómo asmábhyaṃ dvipáde, cátuṣpade ca paśáve,</i> <i>anamīvá íśas karat </i>	Soma—for us, for the two-footed, and for the four-footed livestock, he will make refreshments that bring no disease.
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JB 1.213

<i>dvipadam eva tac catuṣpātsu paśuṣv adhyūhati </i> <i>tasmād dvipāc catuṣpadaḥ paśūn adhitiṣṭhaty</i>	He thus places the two-legged [...] above the four- legged animals. Therefore the two-legged [...] rules the four-legged animals. ³⁸⁵
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From the Atharvaveda onwards, *paśus* are listed as a neat group of five canonical animals: cow, horse, man, sheep, and goat. In all AV instances, human is listed in the middle of the pack, such as is the case below:

³⁸² Benveniste: 1973.

³⁸³ Watkins: 1995, p. 210-213; cf. Watkins: 1979. On IE words for slaves, see e.g. Gamkrelidze & Ivanov: 1995, p. 399-400; Mallory & Adams: 2006, p. 269, 275.

³⁸⁴ As mentioned in § 2.1.1, the two- and four-footed dichotomy also applies to other terms in the ṚV, such as *jīva* or *bhūman*.

³⁸⁵ Bodewitz’ original translation is “the two-legged *man* rules the four-legged animals” (emphasis mine). The word *man* is, however, only implicit in the Sanskrit and therefore, I am omitting it. See Bodewitz: 1990, p. 119.

AVŚ 11.2.9c,d = AVP 16.104.9c,d

távemé páñca paśávo víbhaktā |
gávo ásvāḥ púruṣā {AVP ād} ajāváyaḥ

Thine {= O lord of cattle} are shared out these five creatures (*paśu*) — cows, horses, men, sheep and goats.

The middle position is notable as it differs from the prose passages where human is usually listed first or last, depending on the context.³⁸⁶ The prose lists, which we will discuss shortly, reflect the internal hierarchy of the *paśu* group, with the human being of the highest importance. If the internal hierarchy is at play in the AV as well, what does it tell us about the human beings? Perhaps the AV lists beings according to their size, from the largest (cattle) to the smallest *paśu* (goat). Unfortunately, the small number of poetic passages does not allow us to decide conclusively, although a traditional R̥gvedic grouping of cattle and horses as an initial of a metrical unit (cf. RV 4.57.1, 8.14.3, 9.9.9, 10.119.1, etc.) could be also in the background of the structure.³⁸⁷

Although the fivefold list is considered to be the “standard” enumeration (the Vedic prose, in particular, uses the formula “livestock is fivefold” regularly),³⁸⁸ in the later, post-Brāhmaṇa literature, it expands into a sevenfold list to include a mule (*aśvatara*), donkey (*gardabha*), or camel (*uṣṭra*).³⁸⁹ Equally, shorter, threefold and fourfold forms of the list are found. The latter is the case only in the AV as far as I know,³⁹⁰ whilst the former occurs in the later prose as well and includes cattle, horses, and humans, i.e. the presumably “more valuable”, or larger *paśus*. I quote an example of the threefold list below:

TS 1.5.7.3³⁹¹

yáthā vái púruṣó 'śvo gáur jīryaty evám agnir áhito jīryati Just as a man, a horse, a cow, are worn out, so the fire when established wears out.

³⁸⁶ The only example from the YV Saṃhitās in which human comes in the middle is the list in TS 1.8.6.1-2 (this, however, does not include the goat): *bheṣajám gávé 'śvāya púruṣāya bheṣajám átho asmábhyam bheṣajám súbheṣajam || yáthāsatī sugám meṣāya meṣyāi* “[Give] medicine for ox, for horse, for man, and medicine for us, medicine that it be rich in healing, good for ram and sheep.”

³⁸⁷ Watkins: 1979, p. 278-9 suggests that human separates the “Großvieh” (large livestock, i.e. cattle and horses) from “Kleinvieh” (small livestock, i.e. sheep and goats), both of which are expressed with a merism, always in singular and asyndetic. Watkins compares this with RV 9.9.9 *gám ásvaṇ rāsi vīrávat*, “[give] cow, horse, [and] abundance of men”. As far as I know, Watkins’ reasoning is the only available interpretation of the structure of these passage (Moreau: 2007 adopts Watkins’ interpretation). As I have discussed in § 2.1.1, his interpretation of Großvieh and Kleinvieh has not received enough traction in the Indological scholarly community, and I personally do not find it conclusive.

³⁸⁸ See a random collection of TS passages as an example: TS 1.5.2.1; 2.3.2.7-8; 3.1.5.1; etc.

³⁸⁹ Cf. BŚS 24.5, or MBh 6.5.12-14.

³⁹⁰ As discussed in § 2.1.3, the AVŚ 8.2.25 and 8.7.11 includes a couple of fourfold lists where “*paśu*” is used instead of the usual last two members of the group, i.e. sheep and goats. Humans still come in the third position in these, following cattle and horses.

³⁹¹ Cf. TS 3.2.3.1.

In the Vedic prose, man is usually listed first, just as in the previous TS passage. Often, it is extolled as the best, the strongest, or the most virile of all *paśus*. The Śatapatha says that the *paśus* are “all alike, all similar” (*sadṛśyaḥ sārve hy eté samāḥ sārve*, ŚBM 6.2.1.19) but it is quite clear that they are not: humans have a prime spot in the classification. They are a part of it but transcend it at the same time. According to some passages, men include all the other *paśus* in them, or all non-human *paśus* belong to people:

ŚBM 7.5.2.6

<i>tāsmād āhuḥ pūruṣaḥ prathamāḥ paśūnān vīryāvattama īti [...] tāsmād āhuḥ pūruṣaḥ sārve paśāva īti pūruṣasya hy évaīte sārve bhāvanti</i>	Therefore they say that “man is the first, and strongest of animals.” [...] They say that “man is all animals,” for they all belong to man.
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As suggested above, human is usually found in the first place in the prose lists. We have seen many examples of this in subchapter § 2.1.6: passages such as TB 2.1.2.4, according to which the human was created as the first being; or ŚBM 1.2.3.6-7 where the human is offered as the first sacrificial oblation. This reflects the hierarchy within the group: “the man is the first, the strongest”, says the ŚBM.

There are, however, instances where man is listed as the last, as if he were a cherry on top of all *paśus*. This is the case in the following episode from the Taittirīya Saṃhitā which describes the piling of the altar. Fire keeps running away, and no non-human *paśu*, sent by Prajāpati, can contain it. The human is the last hope and saves the day by placing the heads of the other animals under the altar. His action becomes the prototype for the *agnicayana* sacrifice. It is the uniquely human ability to sacrifice which distinguishes him from the other *paśus* here:

TS 5.7.10.1-2

<i>prajāpatir agnīm asṛjata sò 'smāt sṛṣṭāḥ prāñ prādaravat tāsmā áśvam práty āsyat sá dakṣiṇāvartata tásmāi vṛṣṇīm práty āsyat sá pratyāññ ávartata tásmā ṛṣabhām práty āsyat sá údaññ ávartata tásmāi bastām práty āsyat sá ūrdhvò 'dravat tásmāi pūruṣam práty āsyat yát paśuśīrṣāṇy upadādhāti sarvāta evāinam 1 avarúdhya cinute [...] 2</i>	Prajāpati created the fire; it created ran away east from him; he cast the horse at it, it turned to the south; he cast the ram at it, it turned to the west; he cast the bull at it, it turned to the north; he cast the goat at it, it ran upwards. He cast the man at it. In that he puts down the heads of animals, he piles it, winning it on every side.
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The hierarchy of creatures is evident in the last two passages: the human is the most capable of all *paśus*. This structure is repeated throughout the prose corpus, and the ŚBM offers an explanation: of all the *paśus*, human is the closest one (*nediṣṭha*) to Prajāpati (ŚBM 5.2.1.6).

In previous chapters, I have noted the increasing importance of ritual in the middle Vedic period. This evolution has brought about an apparent change in the pantheon: the emergence of the god Prajāpati. As Jan Gonda explained in many publications, Prajāpati was a relatively minor divine figure in the Ṛgveda, only occurring in the late *maṇḍalas*.³⁹² Incrementally, he became the key creative force in the universe, embodying the power of ritual. In the prose texts, he acts as the sole creator of the whole world and its inhabitants, and the instigator of many primordial ritual acts. In short, Prajāpati occupies a prominent position amongst the gods of the Vedic Brāhmaṇas.

As a creator of all species, Prajāpati is, so to speak, a prototypical being himself, and the human is his mortal counterpart. Both are said to be the strongest or most vigorous of their kind (Prajāpati in ŚBM 13.1.2.5, human in ŚBM 7.5.2.6). Prajāpati's attributes are replicated within humanity: just like human beings, Prajāpati is without skin (*atvac*, ŚBM 5.1.3.8)³⁹³ and hornless (*tūpara*, ŚBM 5.2.1.6). Whilst the fact that the human is one of the domestic animals is an inherited, old notion, the idea of the human closeness to a divine figure – Prajāpati – is an unmistakeable development of the Vedic prose. In the Saṃhitās, the divine and earthly sphere are *sensu stricto* separate, even though gods come down to earth to participate in rituals (which are, as Jamison and Witzel note, really a complex system of exchange between many parties, not only gods and humans but also the ancestors, *ṛṣis*, and more abstract universal powers).³⁹⁴ Whilst some of the gods of the earliest Vedic poetry are said to create human beings (for example, Tvaṣṭṛ in RV 10.10.5 is said to be the begetter of Yama and Yamī, the first mortal couple), there is a distinct absence of an universal cosmogony, anthropogony, or eschatology, and a lack of an universal divine anthropomorphism.³⁹⁵ As Jamison and Brereton note, the gods of the Ṛgveda are unlike the Greek or Old Norse gods in their lack of human behaviour, interests, or social structure.³⁹⁶ In the earliest Vedic poetry, humans and gods seem to be on different ontological planes. Nevertheless, this changes in the middle Vedic period. The evolution in ritual suddenly enables the sacrificer to control both the macrocosmos and microcosmos. Through ritual, human power approximates the divine which, I suggest, translates into an ontological closeness to the god Prajāpati. Prajāpati, it is worth noting, is not the only god measured against the human. In another instance, the ŚBM calls the human “the Indra of *paśus*”:

³⁹² Gonda: 1982, 1984, 1986, 1989.

³⁹³ We will explore this attribute of the human race in the chapter § 4.

³⁹⁴ Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 44.

³⁹⁵ On cosmology and eschatology, see especially the collection of articles by Bodewitz: 2019.

³⁹⁶ Jamison & Brereton: 2020, p. 62-3.

ŚBM 4.5.5-7

<i>eṣa vai śukro yá eṣa tápaty eṣá u</i> <i>evéndraḥ púruṣo vai paśūnām aindras tásmāt</i> <i>paśūnām iṣṭe </i>	But the Śukra {=bright; name of a cup} is the same as he that burns yonder, and he indeed is Indra; and of animals, man is Indra-like: whence he rules over animals.
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“Are people animals?”, I asked in the heading of this subchapter. Until this point, I have been predominantly discussing whether they are a very particular kind of an animal, *paśu*. The answer to this question is not straightforward and depends on the time frame and genre of Vedic literature. For the early poetry, the human indeed seems to be a domestic animal, albeit namely categorised as such only in the AV. In the Vedic prose, the human “lives a two-tier existence”, to borrow Ingold’s phrase mentioned above.³⁹⁷ On one hand, the human is close to Prajāpati, created by him in his image; on the other hand, he is a *paśu*, albeit the first and the strongest of them. If we imagine it as a Venn diagram, “humanity” is for the Vedic cosmos the overlap between *paśu* and Prajāpati. Moreover, hierarchy is in play: human is to other *paśus* what Prajāpati is to the human. As Brian Smith describes it: “In relation to others, [...] the sacrificer himself functions as a prototype with counterparts. An animal, being more nearly resembling the sacrificer than vegetable oblations, in turn stands as the prototype in relation to the lesser forms within the series.”³⁹⁸

If we accept the axiom that the human is a *paśu*, albeit an unusual one, the next question is whether people could be wild animals (*mṛga* or *āraṇya paśu*). Charles Malamoud and Ronan Moreau argue that in several Vedic passages, especially those concerning the *aśvamedha*, this might be the case: according to them, humans are listed among the wild animals.³⁹⁹ The human comes from the wilderness, Moreau suggests, but fears it and tries to escape it by including itself in the *paśu* category:

“Moreover, to place oneself among the domestic *paśu*- as the first of them is undoubtedly a means for man to isolate himself from an element which he seems to dread, the *āraṇya*-. He tries to step aside to remove the savagery that may be in him. Indeed, on several occasions, man tends to be embedded in the wilderness.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ Ingold: 1994, p. 63.

³⁹⁸ Smith: 1989, p. 75.

³⁹⁹ Moreau: 2007; Malamoud: 1996. Moreau’s interpretations are often based on Malamoud.

⁴⁰⁰ Moreau: 2007, p. 58. Translation is mine; French original: « De plus, se mettre parmi les *paśu*- domestiques comme le premier d’entre eux est sans doute un moyen pour l’homme de s’isoler d’un élément qu’il semble redouter, l’*āraṇya*-. Il tente de s’écarter, voire de retirer la sauvagerie qui peut être en lui. En effet à plusieurs reprises, l’homme tend à être intégré dans le monde sauvage. » Many thanks to Carmen Spiers for pointing out Ronan Moreau’s work to me (personal conversation, 14 June 2022.)

I do not share Malamoud's and Moreau's opinion that people are categorised as wild animals in Vedic literature – or at least, not all people. I am hesitant because the primary sources that Malamoud refers to in order to support his argument are ambiguous and rely on an interpretation of a single compound: the word *puruṣamṛga*.⁴⁰¹ This creature is listed among the many sacrificial victims during the *aśvamedha* ritual, such as in the example passage below:

TS 5.5.15.1⁴⁰²

<i>puruṣamṛgás</i>	<i>candrāmase</i>	<i>godhā</i>	<i>kālakā</i>	The <i>puruṣamṛga</i> {is sacrificed} to the moon; the
<i>dārvāghāṭás</i>	<i>té vānaspātīnām</i>	[...]		lizard, the <i>kālakā</i> , ⁴⁰³ the woodpecker, these are
				for the trees; [...].

Malamoud, it seems, understands *puruṣamṛga* to be a sort of a wild human, a synonym of the slightly more common term *kiṃpuruṣa*. This is not, however, a universally accepted interpretation.

The word *kiṃpuruṣa*, literally translated as “what-sort-of-a-man”, has appeared a few times in the preceding sections, and it might be beneficial to finally discuss it in more detail now. The term and its synonyms (*kiṃnara*, *mayu āraṇya*, and perhaps *puruṣamṛga*) are used to describe *āraṇya* counterparts of the Vedic people, as in the following passage from the ŚBM. This passage, which we have discussed in full in § 2.1.6, describes how in the mythical past, the sacrificial essence (*medha*) travelled between various *paśus*. The human was the first creature to be sacrificed, and when the sacrificial essence left him, he became the *kiṃpuruṣa*, “what-kind-of-a-man”:

ŚBM 1.2.3.9

<i>sa yam pūruṣam ālabhanta</i> <i>sá kiṃpūruṣo 'bhavad</i>	The man (<i>puruṣa</i>) whom they had offered up
	became a mock-man (<i>kiṃpuruṣa</i>).

Since the word occurs relatively rarely and always in similar ritual contexts throughout the corpus, the identity of *kiṃpuruṣa* is obscure. It is said to be either an ape/monkey or a wild human – perhaps one

⁴⁰¹ Malamoud: 1996, p. 74, references TS 5.5.11ff; TB 3.9.3.3; VS 24.1 (he does not mention the parallel in MS 3.14.16). All three passages, however, mention only the compound *puruṣamṛga* which is understood to be either a term for non-Vedic people or a male deer. There is no other mention of people as sacrificial oblations in these and other *aśvamedha* passages.

⁴⁰² Similar formulations are found in the texts of the other *śākhās*: KSV 7.5 *puruṣamṛgás candramase*; MS 13.14.16 *puruṣamṛgás candramasás*; VS 24.35 *puruṣamṛgás candramaso*. As Professor Minkowski suggested to me, the fact that the *puruṣamṛga* is sacrificed to the Moon might be telling: their unanimous association suggest a *bandha*, bond between the deity and the creature, in a similar way that there is a connection between the woodpecker and the tree. The nature of the connection between them is, however, unclear.

⁴⁰³ The meaning of *kālakā* is obscure: the TS commentators, Keith says in a note, use a synonym *saraṭā*, a female lizard/chameleon, possibly drawing onto its vicinity to *godhā*. *MW* offers the meaning “small bird”. Due to the inconclusive evidence, I am using the Sanskrit term.

of the non-Vedic tribal people, indigenous to the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁰⁴ Due to the brevity of our sources, it is hard to tell what exactly the Vedic people designated with the term. From the context of the passage above, it is clear that it is a wild counterpart of human beings, perhaps similar in shape and form, just as a gayal is the wild counterpart of domestic cattle. The VS 13.47 glosses the word *kin̐puruṣa* as “the man we hate” which would suggest that it is a term for people living outside of the Vedic society.

Other terms are sometimes found in place of *kin̐puruṣa*. One of them is *kin̐nara* (often spelled *kinnara* in secondary literature), a term which has a similar morphology and meaning to *kin̐puruṣa*. It occurs mostly in later Dharmaśāstra sources (e.g. MDŚ 1.39). Yet another synonym is *mayu āraṇya* which is listed as the wild counterpart of a human being in TS 4.2.10.1. Brian Smith understands the term as “the barbarian of the jungle”.⁴⁰⁵ According to the ŚBM, it is synonymous with *kin̐puruṣa*, and it can be sacrificed to Agni:

ŚBM 7.5.2.32

<i>etán mayúm paśum médham agne juṣasvétī kin̐puruṣo vai mayúḥ kin̐puruṣám agne juṣasvéty puruṣamṛgás candramasás [...] tán mayáu ca śúcāṇ dádhāti yāṇ ca dvéṣṭi tásmiṇś ca</i>	Graciously accept thou, o Agni, the sham-man, the victim, as {offering}! ⁴⁰⁶ A sham-man is a <i>kin̐puruṣa</i> [=mock-man]: thus, “accept graciously the <i>kin̐puruṣa</i> , O Agni!” [...] He thereby lays burning heat into the sham-man, and into him whom he hates.
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Lastly, *puruṣamṛga* is a compound that is sometimes understood as another synonym of these terms.⁴⁰⁷ Its meaning is unclear: from the context, it seems to be yet another term for a person of non-Vedic provenience (“wild man”, says Brian Smith), although some understand it as a term for a male deer.⁴⁰⁸ Since the number of occurrences is relatively low, there is not enough contextual background to decide which of the two options is more likely.

⁴⁰⁴ ŚBM trl Eggeling, vol. 1, p. 51, n. 3, where he lists all the various interpretations. Cf. Parpola: 1983, who argues that the term *kin̐puruṣa* is an Indo-Aryan rendering of the originally Dravidian term *kinnara*, used for a string musical instrument. Since Parpola’s interpretation is wildly different from usual stream of argumentation, I am hesitant to say whether I agree or disagree with it.

⁴⁰⁵ Smith: 1994, p. 252. Keith translates it as the “wailer in the forest”. See also ŚB 1.2.3.6-9, 7.5.2.3; AB 2.8; and TB 3.4.12.1.

⁴⁰⁶ I am modifying Eggeling’s translation “pith” to “offering” for the sake of continuity with my previous translations.

⁴⁰⁷ TS 5.5.15.1; VS 24.35; and MS 3.14.16.

⁴⁰⁸ Smith: 1994, p. 252. Monier-Williams lists it as “male antelope”, Griffith in his translation of the VS as “buck” (Griffith trl VS, p. 222).

These four terms are relatively rare in the Vedic corpus, each of them occurring only a handful of times. Despite that, they are significant since they suggest that not every human being is the same for the Vedic mind (provided that these are indeed terms for non-Vedic people), just as not every animal is *sensu stricto* a *paśu*. If they indeed are terms for non-Vedic people, they reveal that humans can be not only categorised as animals, but that they can be distinguished according to their habitat which, in turn, signifies lifestyle and values. The Vedic people, living in the *grāma*, whom other people do not fear and who can sacrifice, are the domestic *paśus*. The non-Vedic inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent are a counterpart of the *āranya* animals; like them, they do not have enough *medha*, sacrificial essence, and do not thus participate on ritual actions. Since they are categorised as such, they can be included in the lists of *aśvamedha* victims that are tethered to a post at the sacrificial grounds and released towards the end of the ritual. As we have seen above, it is ritual activity that distinguishes culture from nature and *grāmya* from *āranya*, and in this sense, it applies to *puruṣa* and its counterparts as well.

If we accept that terms such as *kinpuruṣa* or *puruṣamṛga* are terms for the non-Vedic population of the Indian subcontinent, then we could, perhaps, agree with Malamoud that people are indeed classified as wild animals. However, this is not applied to all people universally, and those who composed the Vedic literature upon which we base our understanding of the culture certainly did not see themselves as such.

In this section, we have established that humans are classified among animals in the Vedic corpus: in the majority of cases, they are known to be *paśu*; infrequently and under specific circumstances, they can be classified among wild animals. Despite being classified as animals, however, humans are undeniably unlike the rest of the category. There are many things that make the human stand out according to the Vedas: certain aspects of bodily composition or mental prowess, signified by the ability to speak and sacrifice. Equally, there are many things that humans and non-humans have in common.

Both criteria – the bodily and mental – help us clarify what it means to be human and animal. Before exploring them in the following subchapters, there is nevertheless a word of caution to be said. The divide between human and non-human beings, which maintains a firm boundary between the two, has been one of the foundational tenets of modern Western thought. This means, as David Haberman notes, “that spirit, soul, emotions, feelings, sentience, consciousness, and meaningful relationships are all predominantly restricted to the realm of the human.”⁴⁰⁹ With the dualistic

⁴⁰⁹ Haberman: 2013, p. 11.

viewpoint deeply inscribed into our thinking, it can be easy to project this ontological paradigm onto a culture where it does not apply.⁴¹⁰ It is thus important to keep in mind that although the human might be distinct from other *paśus* in many characteristic features, there is no suggestion of a separate ontological status. For the Vedic literature, man is not the Protagorean measure of all things; the whole category of *paśu* is.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Descola et al.: 1996, p. 82.

§ 3.2 BODILY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEOPLE AND ANIMALS

In chapter § 2.1.5, I discussed the animal classifications based on anatomical criteria. Traditionally, *paśu* (unlike *mṛga* or *āraṇya paśu*) are classified on the basis of shape and number of feet, and number of incisor teeth. *Paśu*, as we have seen, can be two-footed or four-footed (*dvipad* or *catuṣpad*), whole-hoofed (also called odd-toed, or – in Linnean jargon – Perissodactyla) or cloven-hoofed (*ekaśapha* or *dviśapha*, or Artiodactyla), and with incisor teeth in the lower jaw or in both jaws (*anyatodat/ekatodat* or *ubhayādat*). Not all of the categories are explicitly named or used at the time of the middle Vedic prose, as I have discussed earlier; they become a coherent and explicit system only by the time of the Dharmaśāstra literature.⁴¹¹

Excluding humans, the group of the four standard non-human *paśus* can be divided into two based on the anatomical criteria. Both of these groups are quadruped. The first group are the odd-toed animals with incisors in both jaws (*ekaśapha* and *ubhayadat*), represented solely by the horse (and possibly other equids, such as the donkey in AVŚ 5.31.3); the other are the cloven-hoofed animals with incisor in lower jaws, represented by cow, goat, and sheep. How does the human fit among these two? First of all, man is the only *paśu* that is two-footed:

AB 3.31⁴¹²

<i>dvipraṭiṣṭho vai puruṣaś catuṣpādāḥ paśavo,</i>	Man has a double support, domestic animals
<i>yajamānam eva tad dvipraṭiṣṭhaṁ catuṣpātsu</i>	have four feet; verily thus he causes {the
<i>paśuṣu pratiṣṭhāpayati </i>	<i>yajamāna</i> } with his double support to find
	support in four-footed cattle.

Unlike the other *paśus*, the human has feet (*pāda*), not hoofs (*śapha*), and therefore it can be categorised neither as whole-hoofed nor cloven-hoofed. The lack of hoofs obviously singles human out from the rest of *paśu*. Whilst the Vedic prose does not explicitly mention that the human belongs to a different group than the rest, the later legal literature categorises the human among the five-clawed (*pañcanakha*) animals. These are, apart from a handful of exceptions, inedible.⁴¹³ Lastly, the teeth: the human has incisors in both jaws, like the horse. The TS 2.2.6.3-4 notes that the horse and the human are on a par in this matter: “were not both of these criteria [of feet and teeth] simultaneously

⁴¹¹ Olivelle: 2002b.

⁴¹² Cf. TS 4.2.10.1-2; VS 17.47-48; ŚBM 7.5.2.32, etc. I am modifying Keith’s translation “[...] he causes *men* [...]” to “he causes the *yajamāna* [...]” to convey the Sanskrit.

⁴¹³ The edible five-clawed animals are the porcupine, hedgehog, monitor lizard, rhinoceros, tortoise, and the hare. See MDŚ 5.17-18; cf. Smith: 1991, p. 529. On the inclusion of rhinoceros, see Jamison: 1998.

in play,” says Brian Smith, “humans, on the one hand, and the horses and asses, on the other, would not be categorically different.”⁴⁴⁴

These are the anatomical criteria traditionally applied to *paśu*, amply discussed by Smith, Olivelle, Moreau, and others.⁴⁴⁵ There are, however, other bodily differences that set people apart from other animals. Since they are not usually listed in such a structured manner as the anatomical criteria and are not utilised in the Dharmaśāstric dietetical rules (although some seem to precede them), they are only rarely picked up on in the secondary literature. In the primary sources, some of these bodily differences are expressed explicitly, others are rarer, more implicit, or subtler.

In the following three sections, I will describe three examples and show that although mentioned less often, they are equally important for the definition of animal and human in Vedic literature. We will see that despite classifying people as *paśu*, the Vedic corpus perceives more differences between people and animals than the lack of hoofs.

§ 3. 2.1 DEXTERITY

In the post-Vedic legal literature, the human is known to be one of the five-clawed (*pañcanakha*) species. Although this category is unknown to the Vedic corpus, we find a TS passage which notices the unusual human hand and classifies human as one of the three animal species with prehensile, dexterous limbs:

TS 6.4.5.7⁴⁴⁶

*kāsmād sātyāt trāyaḥ paśūnāṁ hāstādānā ūti yāt trīr
upāṁśūn hāstena vigṛhṇāti tāsmād trāyaḥ
paśūnāṁ hāstādānāḥ pūruṣo hastī markāṭaḥ ||*

The theologians say, “For what reason is it that three animals take by the hand?” In that thrice he draws separately the Upāṁśu with his hand, therefore there are three animals which take by the hand, man, the elephant, and the ape.

This passage is a complex piece of prose to unpack. Charles Malamoud and Ronan Moreau, the only interpreters of this passage that I know of, argue that by virtue of being placed alongside an elephant and monkey, man is considered to be a forest animal.⁴⁴⁷ For Malamoud (and Moreau follows him in this), this is part of a larger interpretation of human beings as wild animals which we have discussed above. For Malamoud, the human has one foot in the wilderness and one foot in the domestic sphere,

⁴⁴⁴ Smith: 1994, p. 245.

⁴⁴⁵ Smith: 1989; 1991; 1990. Olivelle: 2002b. Moreau: 2007. The terminology is also discussed by Macdonell: 1912.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. BŚS 24.5.

⁴⁴⁷ Moreau: 2007, p. 58. Malamoud: 1996, p. 84-5.

perhaps more akin to an animal than wanted. Malamoud supports this interpretation by a few *aśvamedha* passages, stating that the human is listed among wild animals in these. These passages, however, do not include any general term for a human – only the relatively rare compound *puruṣamṛga* which I discussed towards the end of the previous subchapter.⁴¹⁸ According to some interpretations, the word might signify a “wild human”, perhaps an indigenous, non-Vedic inhabitant of the Indian subcontinent; due to a small number of occurrences, however, this translation is inconclusive. Even if it meant “wild human”, it certainly would not suggest that all humans are understood to be wild animals. That is, however, not the case in the passage TS 6.4.5.7 above, where the unambiguous term *puruṣa* is used.

The basis of Malamoud’s argument is, therefore, not solid. Principally, I agree with his larger interpretation that the human is a being which exists on the border of nature and culture. This is, after all, the point of this chapter: a Vedic human is classified as a domestic animal but is, in fact, radically different from the rest of the group. *Contra* Malamoud (and Moreau), I would argue that positioning *puruṣa* alongside elephant and monkey/ape does not mean that he is categorised as a wild animal; on the contrary.

My reasoning for this is twofold. First, the term *paśu* is used. A possible interpretation could be that the term *paśu* broadens its semantic field in the prose literature, with the word being applied to larger group of animals, such as *āranya paśu*. This could certainly apply here, seeing that elephant and monkey/ape are listed alongside the human. Second, I suggest that the reason that these three animals are grouped together is not because they are wild animals; it is their capability to grasp. Fine motor skills, opposable thumbs, or the capacity to use tools, such as the ritual cups in the passage above, are consistently and quintessentially human features.⁴¹⁹ The human is listed as first in the group of three: clearly, he is the prototype of dexterity, and elephant and monkey/ape are his animal counterparts. The term used for an elephant, *hastin-*, could be an evidence of this, too. Its name clearly derives from the term for a human hand, *hasta* – that is, the human and his capability to grasp by its hand serve as the prototype for understanding the movements of the elephant’s trunk.⁴²⁰ The three of

⁴¹⁸ Malamoud: 1996, p. 283, n. 2. He also includes TB 3.9.3.3 where is no mention of the word *puruṣa* whatsoever.

⁴¹⁹ Many studies show that a range of animals have the capacity to use tools, from birds to mammals, although the fine motoric skills of primates possessing opposable thumbs is the most considerable. See, e.g. Shumaker & Walkup: 2011; Humle: 2012.

⁴²⁰ Another clue that a man is, at least on the level of myth, understood as a prototype for the elephant might be a passage from ŚBM 3.1.3. There, the human and the elephant are said to come from Mārtaṇḍa (literally “stemming from a dead foetus”, in translation of Brereton), the last child of Aditi, who was born as an unformed lump of matter. As the ŚBM 3.1.3.4 says: “They accordingly fashioned it as this man is fashioned. The flesh which was cut off him, and thrown down in a lump, became the elephant: hence they say that one must not accept an

them stand apart from all the other animals which cannot grasp as easily, and the human is their prime example.

§ 3.2.2 PROCREATION STRATEGIES

When discussing the traditional classification methods in § 2.1.5, I noted that the late- and post-Vedic literature includes classifications on the basis of procreation. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad, for example, distinguishes beings into three categories: “There are, as you can see, only three sources from which these creatures here originate: they are born from eggs, from living individuals, or from sprouts.”⁴²¹

Although we do not find classifications such as this in the earlier Vedic texts, the prose literature discusses certain differences in procreation, namely the form of a sexual intercourse. As we have seen in § 2.1.4, the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa notes that when having intercourse, humans face each other, whereas the four-footed animals have their face averted (*parāñc*):

AB 2.38

<i>parāñcam caṭuṣṭpady āsīnam abhyāhvayate, tasmāt parāñco bhūtvā caṭuṣṭpādo retaḥ siñcanti samyañ dvipād bhavati, tasmāt samyañco bhūtvā dvipādo retaḥ siñcanti</i>	To him he {= <i>hotṛ</i>} calls as he {= <i>adhvaryu</i>} {sits}⁴²² on all fours with averted face; therefore turning their backs quadrupeds pour seed; when he faces him who faces him he becomes two-footed; therefore bipeds facing [each other] emit seed.
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Furthermore, the Vedic prose includes information on breeding of various domestic species. In § 2.1.4, I have already discussed JB 1.67, according to which the maximum gestation period of *paśu* is twelve months. There are other passages, especially pertaining to the procreation of goats and sheep.⁴²³ An example is the ŚBM 5.2.1.24, according to which goats give birth three times a year to two to three young.⁴²⁴ Brian Smith deduces from this passage that “we might have here [i.e. in goats and sheep] a

elephant [as a gift], since the elephant has sprung from man.” Cf. MS 1.6.12; KS 11.6; TS 6.5.6; and Brereton: 1981, p. 244ff.

⁴²¹ ChU 6.3.1, I am using the translation of Olivelle: 1998, p. 247. The most complete classification of this kind is found in MDŚ 1.39-48.

⁴²² I am diverting from Keith’s translation in two ways. First, I identify the two agents of the ritual action as *hotṛ* and *adhvaryu*. Second, I translate *caṭuṣṭpady āsīnam* as “sits on all fours” rather than Keith’s “lies”. Although not apt, as suggested to me by Professor Minkowski (e-mail communication, 21 July 2022), it is at least closer to the meaning of *ās-* than “lie”.

⁴²³ Consider also the similarity between people and animals in that they like to have an intercourse in private. JB 1.250 says: “Since a man wanting to sleep with a woman looks for a secret hiding-place and the other living beings, the animals, cover each other in the presence of each other [...].”

⁴²⁴ For the ŚBM, this suggests their affinity to Prajāpati who equally bears multiple offspring. Cf. ŚBM 4.5.5.6, 9; TS 6.5.10.1.

category based on the fecundity (a short gestation period and the ability to produce multiple births)".⁴²⁵ The Vedic texts, nevertheless, neither mention any difference in procreation between animals and humans, nor establish a category of animals based on their procreation strategies. This does not mean that they failed to perceive any differences – seeing that the ŚBM mention that goats and sheep have a specific breeding pattern is, perhaps, evidence of the perception that other *paśu* differ from humans.

§ 3.2.3 STANDING TALL⁴²⁶

Time and again, we have seen that the human is said to be the only two-footed *paśu*.⁴²⁷ Human bipedality brings an obvious consequence: the human being is the only creature that spends most of its time upright.⁴²⁸ Although the Vedic texts mention human bipedality and vertical posture in many instances, marking it as a clear difference between humans and animals, the scholars writing about animals in the Veda usually mention it only in passing.⁴²⁹ The upright posture might seem too obvious a point to consider for us, human researchers who consistently experience the world as two-footed and upright creatures. Nevertheless, it is a frequently alluded-to feature of human nature in the Vedic texts and an important evidence of how human-animal differences might have been perceived.

Let me begin this section with a peculiar passage from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa which provides an explanation of the use of the sacrificial post (*yūpa*) during the animal sacrifice (*paśubandha*). According to this passage, in the mythical past, all *paśus* used to stand erect (*ucchrita*) and on two feet, just as people do. Animals, due to their fear of the sacrificial post, however, collapsed down on all fours. Since then, their characteristic bodily posture became four-footed.

⁴²⁵ Smith: 1994, p. 245.

⁴²⁶ This section was presented as a standalone paper called *Standing Tall in Vedic* in the panel “Language, Myth and Ritual in Vedic Tradition” at the American Oriental Society Meeting, Boston, USA, in March 2022. Many thanks are due to the Balliol College and Max Müller Fund for helping me to fund the conference trip. In preparation for the AOS, I presented the first version of the paper at the Graduate Indology Seminar in Oxford in February 2022. I would like to thank to all who have given me a feedback to the draft paper but especially to Dr Elizabeth Tucker whose excellent remarks helped me to fine-tune the argument.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Lazzeroni: 1975.

⁴²⁸ Strictly speaking, other primates are bipedal as well. Their bipedality is, however, not consistent – what matters is the “distinctive way of moving”, as the theoretician of movement Maxine Sheets-Johnstone: 2011, p. 117, calls it.

⁴²⁹ Smith: 1991, p. 530; Smith: 1994, p. 244. According to Patrick Olivelle: 2002b, p. 10, the categorisation of animals based on the number of feet did not play any significant role in the later Dharmaśāstric dietetic rules; nevertheless, it seems to be a productive category in the earlier Vedic literature.

ŚBM 3.7.3.1-2

[...] *ná ha vá etásmā ágre paśávaś cakṣamire yad ánnam ábhaviṣyan yáthedam ánnam bhūtā yáthā haivāyāṁ dvipāt pūruṣa ucchrita evāṁ haivā dvipāda ucchritāś ceruḥ* || 1

[...] *tam ucchiśriyus tasmād bhīṣā prāvīyanta tātāś cātuṣpādā abhavaṁs tatō 'nnam abhavan* [...] || 2

Well, animals did not at first submit thereto that they should become food, as they are now become food; for just as man here walks two-footed and erect, so did they walk two-footed and erect. Then the gods [...] raised it [=the sacrificial post], and from thereof they [the animals] shrunk together and thus became four-footed and thus became food [...].

Notice, first of all, that the human shape – erect and two-footed– is the prototypical body in this passage, just as the human hand was the prototypical dexterous limb. Originally two-footed and upright, animals evolve into a different form and become food, *annam*, due to their fear of the sacrificial post. Their new form is distinctly opposed to people, four-footed and shrunken. In this, we can glimpse a distant echo of the Classical Sanskrit word *tiryāñc*, “horizontal”, used for animals since the *Manusmṛti*.⁴³⁰

To understand the idea of the difference between the erect and horizontal posture, let me carefully explore the term used in the ŚBM passage: *ucchrita*, a past passive participle of the verb $\sqrt{\text{śri}}$, *śrayati*, with the preverb *ud*, and its synonyms. In general, both in Vedic prose and poetry, the forms of this verb are fairly limited, and usually signify standing or rising up.⁴³¹ It is used, for example, for the god Savitṛ, rising up over the clouds (AVŚ 13.4.3). In ŚBM 1.4.4.8, we find another example in a mythical story where the gods are said to defend the sacrifice from their agelong enemies, the Asuras, by standing erect on the south side of the sacrificial ground. Their upright posture signifies strength, “for strength is, as it were, always erect”.

The forms of the verb *ud* + $\sqrt{\text{śri}}$ seem to be synonymous with another phrase, used much more commonly to signify the upright position: the verb of standing $\sqrt{\text{sthā}}$, *tīṣṭhati*, in conjunction with the adjective *ūrdhva*. The affinity of the two phrases is suggested by the following ṚV passage where they are used interchangeably:

ṚV 3.8.1c, 3a⁴³²

yád ūrdhvás tīṣṭhā dráviṇehá dhattād [...] || 1
úc chrayasva vanaspate, várṣman prthiviyá ádhi || 3

1. When you will stand erect, after that establish material goods here [...].

⁴³⁰ See MDŚ 5.40. Many thanks to Dr Seema Chauhan for this suggestion (feedback at the Graduate Indology Seminar, Oxford, 22 February 2022).

⁴³¹ For example, ṚV 3.8.3, 7.62.1, 7.76.1; AVŚ 3.12.2, 6.142.1-2, 12.3.15, 13.4.3; KB 10.2 (here used for a sacrificial post again); ŚBM 1.4.4.8, 3.7.2.2, 3.7.3.1.

⁴³² Cf. AB 2.2.

3. Rise up, Lord of the Forest, upon the height of the earth.

It is indeed the phrase *ūrdhva* + $\sqrt{\text{sthā}}$ which is found elsewhere in the Vedic literature to express the idea that people stand erect. Previous scholarship has recognised it as an inherited phrase with cognates in Greek, Avestan, and Ossetic.⁴³³ It has been interpreted by a number of scholars, the majority of whom aimed to explain the Avestan cognate of the phrase, the hapax legomenon *ərəδβā hištanta*, found in Yt 13.76, in the so-called Frawardīn Yašt.⁴³⁴ The Avestan phrase applies to the *frawrtis*, a group of powerful guardian and ancestor spirits or deities, who are said to rise up. When looking for an explanation of this hapax, Hermann Lommel argued – influenced by the passage RV 1.36.13, where Agni is pleaded to “stand upright to help like Savitar”⁴³⁵ – that *ūrdhva* + $\sqrt{\text{sthā}}$ does not mean simply standing up but “standing ready to help another being”.⁴³⁶ In turn, Lommel applied this interpretation not only to the Avestan phrase but to all of the manifold R̥gvedic passages. Yet a detailed reading of all the occurrences shows that Lommel’s interpretation might have to be reconsidered, as well as the interpretation of Kuiper, who claimed that “the erect position represents life, and the victory of life over death”.⁴³⁷

The phrase occurs mostly in the R̥V, where it describes a very specific set of agents: certain deities and everyday objects alike.⁴³⁸ First, it seems to be a stock description of the sacrificial post. Celestial phenomena such as the Dawn or the Sun are amongst its more common subjects, clearly being described as such due to their position and movement high up in heavens. As an example, consider the first of the two following R̥V verses which was one of the passages influencing Kuiper’s idea of immortality connected with the word *ūrdhva*. The contrast with the following passage R̥V

⁴³³ For the Greek cognates see Schmitt: 1967, p. 249-52, and West: 2007, p. 339 (the latter on *éstasen orthoús* from Pindar’s *Pyth.* 3.53). On the Ossetic evidence (Digor *urduḡ-ístāg*, and Iron *ūrdýdž-ystāg*, *ūrdyg-ustāg* “attendant at table”), see Bailey: 1954, p. 129. On Avestan *ərəδβā hištanta* (Yt 13.76), see Malandra: 2018, Lommel: 1931, p. 270-2, and Kuiper: 1960, p. 217-281.

⁴³⁴ Yt 13.76 *tā zī hanti yāskarəstamā, †awayā †mainiwā dāmən, yā ašāunqm vajwhiš sūrā spəntā frawašayō, yā taša ərəδβā hištanta, yaṭ mainyū dāmən daiḍitam, yasca spəntō mainyuš yasca aṣrō*. “For they are the bravest / of the creation of both those Spirits / [the good strong, beneficent Frawrtis of the righteous] / who rose up [to help] then / when the two Spirits created [their] creations / [both Spanta Manyu and Ahra Manyu].” From the edition and translation of William Malandra: 2018, p. 99, 149-150. Notice that Malandra uses Lommel’s interpretation of the expression.

⁴³⁵ R̥V 1.36.13a: *ūrdhvā ū śu ṇa utāye, tiṣṭhā devó ná savitā*.

⁴³⁶ Lommel: 1931, p. 270-2.

⁴³⁷ Kuiper: 1960, p. 217-281.

⁴³⁸ The word *ūrdhva* occurs in the R̥V about 75 times. About a third of these (ca. 25 instances) are connected with forms of the verb $\sqrt{\text{sthā}}$.

5.80.5 which compares the Dawn to a female bather, nevertheless, clearly refutes this idea of immortality connected with the phrase.⁴³⁹

ṚV 3.61.3a,b

úṣaḥ praticí bhúvanāni víśvā, ūrdhvā tiṣṭhasi Dawn, facing all beings, you stand erect as the
amṛtasya ketúḥ | beacon of the immortal one.

ṚV 5.80.5a,b

eṣā śubhrā ná tanúvo vidānā, ūrdhvéva snāti dṛśāye She [=Dawn], like a beauty who knows her own
no asthāt | body, has stood up erect like a bather for us to see.

Furthermore, the phrase is applied to the male gods of the ṚV, in particular Savitṛ, Indra, and Agni. In the case of Agni, the phrase describes him in a theomorphic form as well as a blazing fire whose flames are upright.⁴⁴⁰ Finally, Indra's usual position is upright, bearing weapons or striking his enemies, such as in the following passage:

ṚV 2.30.3a,b⁴⁴¹

ūrdhvó hí ásthād ádhi antárikṣe, ádhā vṛtráya prá For he took his stand, erect, in the midspace.
vadhám jabhāra | Then he bore his murderous weapon down
 toward Vṛtra.

Indra's upright position is particularly telling, as his main opponent, Vṛtra, is repeatedly described by the poets of the R̥gveda as lying, clearly showing his inactivity at the time of his defeat.⁴⁴² In this, we see the values attached to the respective bodily positions: standing upright signifies strength and might, lying down weakness, defeat, and death.

Although these occurrences are not exhaustive, it is clear that standing upright holds a positive quality for the ṚV. I would argue that rather than helpfulness or Kuiper's "resurrection of life", the phrase signifies activity and a certain sense of agency which the gods have when they are described as such. With other objects, such as the sacrificial post, trees, or a blazing fire, it seems that being upright is their natural, ideal state. The same is the case for a synonym of the phrase, that is the verb *√sthā* with the preverb *ud-*, which occurs about 22 times in the ṚV in similar contexts, such as ṚV 4.18.8

⁴³⁹ Many thanks to Dr Elizabeth Tucker for bringing this passage to my attention (feedback at the Graduate Indology Seminar, Oxford, 22 February 2022).

⁴⁴⁰ ṚV 5.1.2; 6.63.4.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. ṚV 10.23.1, 10.123.7 = 9.85.12.

⁴⁴² On Vṛtra lying defeated, see ṚV 1.32.8, 10; 1.52.6; 2.11.9; 3.32.6, 11; 4.19.2-3; 5.32.2, 6, 8; etc. Cf. ṚV 7.103 where the frogs are described as "lying like a dried leather bag in the pond", and ṚV 10.108.4 where Saramā threatens to the Paṇis "Smashed by Indra, Paṇis, you will lie still".

where Indra is said to be standing “up with his might”.⁴⁴³ Comparatively, without any qualification of a preverb or adjective, $\sqrt{sthā}$ seems to be a perfectly neutral term. Moreover, and this is important for my argument about the late Vedic prose, becoming upright is a goal, or a quality that humans strive for, as we can see in RV 1.36.14 where Agni is asked to “make us upright to move and live”, *kṛdhī na ūrdhvāñ carāthāya jīvāse*.

Comparing the R̥gvedic instances to the Atharvaveda Saṃhitā, the situation starts appearing slightly different. In both of the recensions of the AV, *ūrdhva sthā* occurs only a handful of times.⁴⁴⁴ Standing upright occurs in the context of martial activity, again applied to a god, such as in AVŚ 19.46.2.⁴⁴⁵ There is also the sense of a natural state of being upright: in AVP 20.34.7 (= AVŚ 6.44.1), everything in the world is described as standing, and trees as sleeping upright.

Perhaps the most notable instance of this phrase in the Atharvaveda is the conclusion of the famous healing hymn AVŚ 4.12, first identified by Adalbert Kuhn as a parallel of the Old High German Merseburg Spells.⁴⁴⁶ Its penultimate verse, delivered after the highly formulaic healing ritual, is a non-metrical phrase comparing the healed individual to a well-serviced chariot.

AVŚ 4.12.6⁴⁴⁷

*sá út tiṣṭha prēhi prá drava ráthaḥ sucakráḥ |
supaviḥ sunábhiḥ prāti tiṣṭhordhvāḥ ||*

So stand up, go on, run on [as] a chariot well-
wheeled, well-tyred, well-naved. Stand firm
upright.

The idea is clear: when a human being stands upright, it signifies its correct, healthy state. The upright human runs as well as a well-wheeled chariot. Compared to the trees, fires, and sacrificial posts, phenomena often described with the same vocabulary, we could deduce that upright state is not only healthy but also “natural” (I am using this charged term in the sense of “innate”, “inherent”).

In the Brāhmaṇas, there are not many occurrences of the phrase. The primary examples are R̥gvedic mantras, repeated during a ritual, for example the mantras from RV 3.8, quoted by AB 2.2 on the occasion of raising up a sacrificial post. Nevertheless, a few passages might elucidate the meaning

⁴⁴³ That the phrase *ud + √sthā* is synonymous with *ūrdhva + √sthā* is suggested e.g. in AVŚ 4.12.6 which uses them interchangeably. See the full quote below.

⁴⁴⁴ The majority of instances of the word *ūrdhva* are in the term for one of the cardinal directions *ūrdhva diś*, “zenith”. Apart from a single exception, I will not treat these in this discussion.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. AVP 4.23.2.

⁴⁴⁶ Kuhn: 1864. Discussed in Watkins: 1995, p. 523ff., and West: 2007, p. 337-9.

⁴⁴⁷ I am using the translation of M. L. West from West: 2007, p. 337. The parallel in AVP 4.5.17 omits the preposition *ūrdhva*, concluding with *prāti tiṣṭha evam*. Cf. AVP 1.101.4, Pindar’s *Pyth.* 3.53 (*éstasen orthoús*).

of the phrase. The following passage from the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa passage is a good example of the evolution in its meaning and the concept in the prose literature:

KB 7.6

<i>athābravīd aditiḥ, mahyam ekām annāhutiṃ juhutāham ekāṃ diśaṃ prajñāsyāmīti tasyā ajuhavuh sordhvāṃ diśaṃ prājānāt iyaṃ vā aditiḥ tasmād asyām ūrdhvā oṣadhaya ūrdhvā vanaspataya ūrdhvā manuṣyā uttiṣṭhanti ūrdhvo 'gnir dīpyate yad asyām kiṃcordhvam eva tad āyattam </i>	Then said Aditi, “Do ye offer to me one libation of food; then shall I discern one quarter.” To her they offered; she discerned the zenith (<i>ūrdhvām diśam</i>); Aditi is this [earth]; therefore on this [earth] plants grow upright, trees upright, men upright, Agni is kindled upright, whatever there is on this [earth] that stretches upright.
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The passage is a part of a long introductory story that is told before the purchase of *soma*. According to the KB, the gods arrive in the heavens but are essentially lost there as they cannot discern heaven’s quarters/cardinal directions. When offered a libation, however, particular gods show the respective sides. Aditi, who symbolizes the earth, identifies the *ūrdhvam diś*, the zenith. Due to Aditi’s action, everything on the earth becomes upright (*ūrdhva*), including trees (previously identified as such in the ṚV and AV) and human beings. Again, there is an idea of an innate, prototypical, or natural form of these phenomena, I would argue, an idea that humans and trees are naturally upright for the Vedic literature. If a tree or a human is not upright, that condition signifies something specific – perhaps an illness, perhaps inactivity, or lack of ability.

Notably, in none of the passages we have seen so far has there been any mention of animals, either *paśu* or wild, *mṛga* or *āraṇya paśu*. If I am not mistaken, neither the phrase *ūrdhva* + *√sthā* nor the word *ūrdhva* qualifies them in the Vedic corpus. As shown, it is used only for specific phenomena and beings, including humans.

This dichotomy between upright humans and non-upright *paśus* comes through in a merism found in multiple Brāhmaṇa passages. The first of them, from the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa, states that people eat in erect position, whereas the domestic animals are bent down. *Paśus* are described with the adjective *nyañc*, “directed downwards”, formed with the *-añc* suffix, like the Classical Sanskrit word for an animal, *tiryañc*. Again, there is a hint of a value judgement present in the short passage: the human being is the *adhipati*, the foremost of *paśu*. Therefore, the human eats/is upright, whereas the rest of the *paśus* have their head down.

PB 6.2.7-8

<i>adhipatiḥ puruṣaḥ paśumān 7</i> <i>tasmān nyañco 'nye paśavo 'danty ūrdhvaḥ puruṣo</i> <i>'dhipatir hi saḥ [...] 8</i>	7. [...] Man is the ruler of animals.
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8. Therefore the other animals eat [with their head] bent down, but man [eats in] erect [position], for he is the lord.

Whilst the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa includes the words *paśu* and *puruṣa*, the following Śatapatha passage speaks only about *prajā*, progeny. This progeny is differentiated between *ūrdhva* and *avāñc*, “turned downwards” (or as Eggeling says, “tending to the ground”), yet another *-añc* suffix formation.⁴⁴⁸

ŚBM 4.4.4.1⁴⁴⁹

*etāsmād vā ubhayāto nyūnāt prajānanāt prajāpatiḥ
prajāḥ sasṛja itāś cordhvā itāś cāvācīs, tātō evaiśā
etāsmād ubhayāto eva nyūnāt prajānanāt prajāḥ
sṛjata itāś cordhvā itāś cāvācīḥ*

It was from that same inferior (lower) source of production on both sides that Prajāpati created the upright, and from the other those tending to the ground. And in like manner does he (the Adhvaryu) now create creatures from that lower source of production on both sides, —from the one the upright, and from the other those tending to the ground.

Although I point out the *-añc* words in these passages, alluding to the Classic Sanskrit expression *tīryañc*, it is important to note that the Vedic prose uses the dichotomy *ūrdhva* and adjectives based on the *-añc* formation relatively frequently, and for all kinds of things. A quick search through, for example, the first book of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa shows that the dichotomy *ūrdhva* and *āvañc* can be used for different kinds of airs within creatures (JB 1.127; 1.166), the movement of waters (JB 1.237), or the worlds (JB 1.146). When applied to creatures, nevertheless, it signifies the dichotomy between humans and other animals, distinguishing within the group on the basis of the bodily posture. The Śatapatha passage which we saw in the beginning of this section, narrating the mythical past when the humans and domestic animals were once alike, is yet another example of this, albeit with the usage of the synonym, *ucchrita*.

Reading all the genres of Vedic literature in conjunction helps us, again, to gauge a more complete meaning of the idea of upright posture. Based on the Ṛgvedic poetry, our view might be quite limited. We could conclude that being upright is the ideal form of specific gods (Indra, Agni, Savitr, Uṣas) and other phenomena (tree, sacrificial post, and blazing fire). In time, however, this comes to be understood to be the ideal of human life and movement. An upright man is as healthy as a well-

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. AB 2.38 discussed in § 3.2.2 where animals are described with yet another *-añc* adjective, *parāñc*, “turned away”.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. ŚBM 2.5.2.5, 7, 9, 20.

served chariot: the upright posture signifies the healthy, natural state of the human being, and shows his departure from the other animals in the *paśu* category.

§ 3.3 CORPOREAL SIMILARITIES

Whilst human bodies (literally) stand out from the rest of the *paśu* category, there are many characteristic bodily features that are shared across the group and affirm its ontological unity. As banal as it might sound, the most striking feature shared by *paśu* is their corporeality: the fact that all *paśu* have bodies that are formed from the same elements and capable of movement. These bodies will be the subject of this subchapter. So far, I have been concerned with the internal anatomical dissimilarities in the group which might lead the reader to think that I am trying to prove a constitutive difference in the ontological status of humans and animals. As I will hope to show in this subchapter, however, the differences are mainly located in the peripheries of their bodies (feet, hands, generative organs) and could be, therefore, seen as superficial. Deep down, human and animal bodies are cut from the same cloth.

Let us start with the latter, less documented characteristic feature of human and animal bodies I mentioned, that is their capability to move. In Ṛgvedic poetry (and in other ancient Indo-European literary sources),⁴⁵⁰ the whole world is often described with the merism “the moving and the still”, *jagat*⁴⁵¹ and *sthā*, as in the two following examples:⁴⁵²

ṚV 2.27.4a,b

<i>dhārayanta ādityāso jagat sthā, devā vīśvasya</i>	The Ādityas sustain what moves and what stands
<i>bhūvanasya gopāḥ </i>	still—[these] gods, the herdsmen of the whole
	living world.

ṚV 10.88.4c,d

<i>sā patatrī itvarāṃ sthā jagad yac, chvātrām agnīr</i>	He made what flies and what goes [on foot], the
<i>akṛṇoj jātāvedāḥ </i>	still and the moving, to wax strong—Agni
	Jātavedas.

The twofold expression describes the whole universe: “the moving” are all living beings (in the second passage further distinguished on the basis of their mode of movement, flying, *patatrin*, and walking,

⁴⁵⁰ West: 2007, p. 101.

⁴⁵¹ On the grammar of *jagat*, see Narten: 1972. It is worth noting that in Vedic prose and Classical Sanskrit, the meaning of *jagat* shifts to a generic expression for the “world”, whilst “the moving” is expressed by the derivatives of the verb *√car*. Cf. Lazzeroni: 1975, p. 17.

⁴⁵² The merism is found in other passages as well, e.g. ṚV 1.59.5; 1.68.1; 1.70.3,7; 1.80.14; 1.89.5; 1.90.5; 1.115.1; 2.27.4; 7.32.22; 7.101.6; 10.63.8; 10.88.4. Compare ṚV 1.32.5 which uses the dichotomy *yātó āvasitasya*, “who travels and of him who is settled”, instead. See also MDŚ 1.41.

Furthermore, Jamison observes that in the Brāhmaṇas, the formula acquired “a legitimizing philosophical patina in the [...] system of equivalences between the physical world and the ritual realm”.⁴⁶⁰

The first attestation of the formula in the AVŚ, mentioned above, is slightly unusual in that it adds a sixth element, “sinew”, *snāvan*. Although the formula is most commonly found as a fivefold list, occasionally, other elements are added; in rarer cases, one or more of the original five are eliminated.⁴⁶¹ If combined with the optional elements, the hypothetical complete formula would have ten members.⁴⁶²

HAIR	<i>loman (roman)</i>	sinews	<i>snāvan</i>
SKIN	<i>tvac (carman, chavi)</i> ⁴⁶³	BONE	<i>asthi</i>
blood	<i>asrk (lohita, rudhira)</i>	joint	<i>paruṣ</i>
fat	<i>medas</i>	MARROW	<i>majjan</i>
FLESH	<i>māṃsa</i>	breath	<i>prāṇa</i>

There are a number of striking things about this sequence of body parts. First, as Jamison has shown, there is its fixed character and omnipresence in the corpus. These, in turn, show the familiarity of the Vedic corpus with bodies of all kinds. Watkins states that the set is “not simply enumerations or catalogues of the parts of the human or animal body in contiguous order – no limbs are involved, n. b. – but a traditional ordered list, viewed as arbitrary.”⁴⁶⁴ The list is, however, all but arbitrary and non-contiguous. It depicts the structure of a body from outside in (hair → skin → flesh → bone → marrow), peeling the layers like onion, albeit in a simplified manner.

Since it occurs predominantly in the Brāhmaṇa prose, Kenneth Zysk considers the formula to be based on animal sacrifice (“The actual butchering and arrangement very likely followed this sequence”, he says).⁴⁶⁵ I don’t believe, however, that the knowledge of bodies can be attributed solely

⁴⁶⁰ Jamison: 1986, p. 175.

⁴⁶¹ E.g. TB 1.2.6.3 which contains only three members, *lóma chaviṛ ásthi*, “hair, skin, bone”; cf. PB 5.1.3.

⁴⁶² The standard members are marked in small capital letters. I combine the lists from Jamison: 1986, p. 173 and Watkins: 1995, p. 525. Watkins adds the word for “joint”, *paruṣ*, attested in AVŚ and AVP but omits Jamison’s addition of *prāṇa*, as it occurs only relatively late in the Aitareya Āraṇyaka. It, however, occurs as the last element (“digit”, *kalā*) in ŚBM 10.4.1.16-7.

⁴⁶³ The word *chaviṛ*, “skin”, is not noted by Jamison but occurs in the lists in two cases: TB 1.2.6.3, 2.3.6.1-3. We will see the importance of this term in the following chapter § 4. The word *carman* is peculiar, as Jamison: 1986, p. 172, notes: “[it] has no place in this scheme: it almost always refers to the hide of an animal, after it has been detached from the body, not to a constituent part of a living body.” Its conclusion amongst the body parts, however, points at the fact that the formula is applied to animals as well as humans.

⁴⁶⁴ Watkins: 1995, p. 526.

⁴⁶⁵ Zysk: 1986, p. 689.

to sacrificial practice. Whilst *paśubandha* involves killing of a sacrificial victim, the procedure is not one of dismemberment: as P. V. Kane shows in much detail, the animal is not cut up as in an abattoir; rather, a small incision is made to remove particular pieces, such as the omentum, before specific organs and limbs are cut off.⁴⁶⁶ Although the specific methods are somewhat obscure due to the lack of post-Vedic commentaries which would elucidate the practice, as Kane notes, the *paśubandha* techniques are unlikely to follow the sequence. As Michael Witzel suggested, moreover, there is so much more at stake for the Brāhmaṇa prose than ritual (although that is indeed the primary concern): “[in the Brāhmaṇas,] one learned to watch and discuss nature [...] in a ‘pre-scientific’ manner.”⁴⁶⁷ Besides, both Jamison and Watkins showed that the formula has a much deeper, Proto-Indo-European history; in that case, by associating it solely with Vedic sacrificial practice, we might be missing an important, non-sacrificial dimension.

Furthermore, a prominent feature of the formula is its applicability to many types of bodies. In the ŚBM passage quoted above, we have seen that it is applied to a human being (cf. AB 2.14). In other passages, the structure is associated with divine bodies – that of Prajāpati (ŚBM 6.1.2.17; 10.3.4) and Agni (ŚBM 8.1.4.5; possibly due to Agni’s/fire’s association with the *vedi*). As we would expect from a formula that is largely used in a ritual context, it is, moreover, applied to animal bodies. In the two following passages exemplifying this usage, the bodies of *paśus* are homologised with various ritual elements: rice cakes and the altar.

ŚBM 1.2.3.8

<i>yadā piṣṭāny ātha lómāni bhavanti yādāpā ānayaty ātha tvāg bhavati yadā saṃyauty ātha māṃsām bhavati sāmtata iva hi sa tārhi bhāvati sāmtatam iva hí māṃsām yadā śṛto 'thāsthi bhavati dārūṇa iva hi sa tārhi bhāvati dārūṇam ity asthy ātha yad udvāsaiṣyaṇn abhighārayati tām majjānaṃ dadhāty eṣo śā sampadyād āhuḥ pāṅktaḥ paśur íti </i>	When it [the rice-cake] still consists of ricemeal, it is the hair. When he pours water on it, it becomes skin. When he mixes it, it becomes flesh: for then it becomes consistent; and consistent also is the flesh. When it is baked, it becomes bone: for then it becomes somewhat hard; and hard is the bone. And when he is about to take it off [the fire] and sprinkles it with butter, he changes it into marrow. This is the completeness which they call “the fivefold animal sacrifice”.
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MS 3.3.3⁴⁶⁸

<i>pāñcatitikaḥ kāryaḥ pāṅkto yajñāḥ pāṅktāḥ paśavas [...] pāñca cītayaḥ pāñca pūrīṣāṇi tād virājaṃ saṃpādyate [...] dvyākṣaraṃ lóma</i>	[The altar] is to be made five-layered, the sacrifice is fivefold, the domestic animals are fivefold. [...] [There are] five layers [of bricks], five [coverings]
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⁴⁶⁶ Kane: HDŚ 2.2, p. 1120ff.

⁴⁶⁷ Witzel: 1987, p. 414.

⁴⁶⁸ I am mostly following the translation of Jamison: 1986, p. 168.

*dvyàkṣarā tvág dvyàkṣaram māṃsāṇ dvyàkṣaram
ásthī dvyàkṣaro majjā tát dáśa dáśākṣarā virāt,
vairājāḥ paśávaḥ paśún evávarunddhe*

of] earth. That is the equivalent of the Virāj meter. [...] “Hair” has two syllables; “skin” has two syllables; “flesh” has two syllables; “bone” has two syllables; “marrow” has two syllables. That is ten. The Virāj has 10 syllables. Domestic animals are connected to the Virāj. Thus he gains *paśus*.

The first passage, in which the rice cake (*puroḍāśa*) is said to be homological with the five-fold *paśu*, is yet another example of a notion which we have discussed in chapter § 2.1.6. There, we saw that according to the ŚBM, the sacrificial essence (*medha*, *medhyatva*) passed through *paśus* until it passed into the ground and entered certain plants, namely barley and rice. Because these grains participate on the sacrificial essence, preparing an oblation from them is homologous to sacrificing an animal, and the process is equalled to the structure of its body. Thus, the *puroḍāśa* is essentially a *paśu*. In a similar manner, the altar is connected with the fivefold body of a *paśu* in the second passage.

In the universe in which everything is connected, the oft-present “fixed traditional expression of the make-up of the canonical beast”⁴⁶⁹ sends a powerful message about the ontological status of all beings. Although there are anatomical differences in the number and shape of feet, dexterous hands, or incisor teeth, these all pertain to the bodily periphery. What matters is the shared structure: hair, skin, flesh, bone, and marrow of which certain living beings consist.

In the next chapter § 4, we will explore a single element from the list, skin, and its importance for the argument of ontological proximity of human and other domestic animals. To conclude this subchapter, however, let me point out an obvious similarity between human and non-human bodies which I have overlooked so far: the fact that humans can theoretically be sacrificed, just as other *paśus*.

§ 3. 3. 1 HUMAN SACRIFICE

Many times in the course of this thesis I have discussed perhaps the most characteristic feature of the *paśu* group: their fitness to be sacrificed. Since *paśus* come in many shapes and sizes, as we have seen in the discussion on anatomy, it is their *medhyatva*, sacrificability, that is the defining feature of the category. If we accept that humans are classified as *paśu*, the logical conclusion is that they too can be offered as an oblation.

The texts suggest at least a theoretical possibility of human sacrifice in the Vedic times. The human, it seems, can be sacrificed in a dedicated ritual called the *puruṣamedha*, or as a part of the so-

⁴⁶⁹ Jamison: 1986, p. 172.

called *sarvamedha*, the “pan-sacrifice”.⁴⁷⁰ The middle Vedic sources, especially the Brāhmaṇas, know about the *puruṣamedha* but do not prescribe it. In fact, they mention symbolic versions of the human sacrifice a few times, in which humans are let free, as wild animals are during the *aśvamedha*.⁴⁷¹ The later Śrautasūtra manuals describe the ritual in detail, shaping it closely on the *aśvamedha*: just as in the *aśvamedha*, the victim is formally bought, treated well for a year, and then sacrificed.⁴⁷²

Apart from the dedicated *puruṣamedha*, there are suggestions that parts of the human body were used in more commonly performed *śrauta* rites, such as the *agnicayana*. In this ritual, a human head is placed under the altar during its construction, together with the heads of the four other *paśus*.⁴⁷³ As Keith argues, the human is not killed for the sake of this ritual action: instead, a head of a man struck by lightning or an arrow is used. If there is no such a head available, it can be substituted for with a dummy made from gold or clay.⁴⁷⁴

There are, moreover, mythical accounts of humans who were to be sacrificed but were eventually rescued, such as Śunaḥśepa.⁴⁷⁵ The Upaniṣadic Naciketas was said to be offered (as a substitution for cattle himself) but returned to the world of living by the grace of Yama.⁴⁷⁶ Despite the textual references (not to mention archaeological excavations which found human remains, interpreted as remnants of human sacrifice),⁴⁷⁷ scholars have long argued about whether these passages are only theoretical exercises of the priestly imagination, included in the texts for the sake of completeness, or whether the sacrifice of humans was ever performed in actuality.

Much ink has been spilled on the topic of human sacrifice and it is not my intention to add my bit to the debate here, as I believe that the evidence we possess is simply inconclusive.⁴⁷⁸ What interests me, nonetheless, is the very possibility of it and the fitness of the human being to be sacrificed. Not just fitness, I should iterate. The human being is repeatedly said to be the first one to be sacrificed, as we have seen in previous sections (namely § 2.1.6): the ŚBM 1.2.3.6 states that the

⁴⁷⁰ For sources on the *sarvamedha*, see Smith & Doniger, 1989: p. 218, n. 5.

⁴⁷¹ Keith: 1925, p. 347. Cf. VS 30.1-22; ŚBM 13.6.1-2; TB 3.4.1.1ff.

⁴⁷² ŚSS 16.1ff.; VSS 37.10ff., 38. 9.

⁴⁷³ ŚBM 6.2.1.1.1ff.; 7.5.2.1.

⁴⁷⁴ Keith: 1925, p. 348. Cf. Thite: 1975, p. 25.

⁴⁷⁵ RV 5.2.7; 1.24.12-3; AB 7.13-18; cf. TS 5.2.1.3 and KS 19.11, where it is simply said that Śunaḥśepa had been seized by Varuṇa but rescued himself from his bonds. Thite: 1975, p. 25, also mentions the story of Mānavī, the wife of Manu, who is sacrificed in ŚBM 1.1.4.14ff. According to Jamison: 1996, p. 21, ŚBM 1.1.4.14ff. is “an abbreviated and reworked version.” In the standard versions across Vedic prose, Mānavī doesn’t get sacrificed: Indra saves her at the last minute.

⁴⁷⁶ On Naciketas, KU 1.1ff.

⁴⁷⁷ Sharma: 1969; and Schlingloff: 1969.

⁴⁷⁸ Thite: 1975, p. 23-8 (summarising the opinions of earlier scholars on p. 26-7); Lincoln: 1986; Keith: 1925, p. 347-8. Consider also the compelling yet complicated argument of Parpola: 1983, who connects human sacrifice and *kiṇṇpuruṣa/kiṇṇara*. More sources are listed in Smith & Doniger: 1989, p. 220, n. 31.

human was the first victim to be offered by gods, the first creature to possess the sacrificial essence (*medha*), before it jumped over to a horse, then to the other *paśus*, and eventually into rice and barley. The human functions as a prototypical victim; all the other domestic animals are its counterparts or substitutes. In fact, the sacrificial fire is said to long for the meat of the *yajamāna* himself but eventually settles for a substitute:

ŚBM 11.7.1.2

<i>sa māṃsīyānti ha vai jūhvato yajamānasyāgnāyas te yajamānam evā dhyāyanti yajamānaṃ sāmkalpayanti pācanti vā anyéṣv agnīṣu vṛthāmāṃsam āthaitéṣāṃ nāto 'nyā māṃsāśā vidyate yāsyao caite bhāvanti </i>	[...] for whilst he is offering the Sacrificer's fires long for flesh; they set their minds on the Sacrificer and harbour designs on him. In other fires, people do indeed cook any kind of meat, but these [sacrificial fires] have no desire for any other flesh but this [sacrificial animal], and for him to whom they belong.
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The idea of substitutes is prevalent in Vedic ritualism, “a feature of that very system”, as Brian Smith and Wendy Doniger write in their joint paper on the topic.⁴⁷⁹ Frederick Smith suggests that the system of substitutions, first legitimised in the Brāhmaṇa prose, fitted neatly into the sacrificial theory, operating with the system of homologies, and “contributed to the survival of the sacrifice” until the present day.⁴⁸⁰

Most frequently, the ritual substitution entails a replacement of one oblation by another, although it is not limited to this. In fact, the Trikāṇḍamaṇḍana, the 11th-century *pariśiṣṭa* to the Āpastamba Śrautasūtra which largely focuses on *pratinidhi* (post-Vedic term for a ritual substitution), allows for a substitution of almost any ritual element bar the sacrificer himself, mantra, fire, deity, and the prescribed (*nitya* or *naimittika*) rite.⁴⁸¹ For example, in various rituals, a human head can be replaced by a dummy made from clay or gold; the whole human being by a *chāga*, a sacrificial goat; and the goat by a vegetable oblation, as was the case in the 1975 *agnicayana*, famously documented by Frits Staal.⁴⁸² Individual ritual actors can be substituted too, such as the priests, in case there is not enough of them or they do not have the right quality, or the sacrificer's wife who, if she menstruates, is replaced by her own son.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹ Smith & Doniger: 1989, p. 203.

⁴⁸⁰ Smith: 1987, p. 64. Many thanks to Professor Minkowski for recommending me this work.

⁴⁸¹ TKM 2.2-3, in Smith: 1987. According to the TKM, substitutions cannot be done in any *kāmya* rituals. The commentators themselves do not agree upon this, however, with some allowing for substitutions when a ritual has already begun. See the discussion in Smith: 1987, p. 224-5.

⁴⁸² Staal et al.: 1983, Vol. 1, p. 303; Vol. 2, p. 464ff.

⁴⁸³ Jamison: 1996, p. 34. Cf. TKM 2.8 states that the wife can be substituted with a wife-shaped dummy made from gold or *kuśa* grass.

To illustrate the principle, let me quote an example of the practice: a famous dialogue about the *agnihotra* between Janaka, the king of Videha, and Yājñavalkya, found in the JB and the ŚBM.

JB 1.19⁴⁸⁴

tad dha janako vaideho yājñavalkyaṃ papraccha vetthāgnihotraṃ yājñavalkyāz iti, vedeti hovāca, kim iti, paya iti, yat payo na syāt kena juhuyā iti, vrīhiyavābhyām iti, yad vrīhiyavau na syātāṃ kena juhuyā iti, yad anyad dhānyaṃ teneti, yad anyad dhānyaṃ na syāt kena juhuyā ity, āraṇyābhir oṣadhībhir iti, yad āraṇyā oṣadhayo na syuḥ kena juhuyā ity, adbhīr iti, yad āpo na syuḥ kena juhuyā iti, sa hovāca na vā iha tarhi kiṃ canāsīd athaitad u hūyata iva satyaṃ śraddhāyām iti, taṃ hovāca vetthāgnihotraṃ yājñavalkya namas te 'stu sahasraṃ bhagavo dadma ity, atha hainam upajagau

Now this Janaka [the king] of Videha asked Yājñavalkya: “Do you know the *agnihotra* [oblation], Yājñavalkya?” “I do,” he said. “What is it?” “Milk.” “If there would be no milk, with what would you perform the offering?” “With rice and barley.” “If there would be no rice and barley, with what would you perform the offering?” “Whatever and other corn.” If there would be no other corn, with what would you perform the offering?” “With forest herbs.” If there would be no forest herbs, with what would you perform the offering?” “With water.” If there would be no water, with what would you perform the offering?” He said: “Then, indeed, there would be nothing at all here, and yet there would be offered here, namely, truth in faith.” To him he spoke: “You know the *agnihotra*, Yājñavalkya. Honour to you. A thousand [cows] we give to you, Sir.”

Although the discussion between Janaka and Yājñavalkya is hypothetical, it points to what incentivises the act of substitution, that is inaccessibility or unavailability of a prescribed ritual element.⁴⁸⁵ “If there was no [X], what would you use?”, Janaka keeps asking. If an oblation or a ritual actor cannot be present, they have to be substituted in order to allow for a smooth ritual experience; although, as Frederick Smith says, this “is to be resorted to only in case of unavoidable emergency.”⁴⁸⁶ Inaccessibility of an element is not the only impetus for the substitution: in some cases, the texts simply offer options or alternatives without explicit statement about availability; sometimes, a variation is offered to induce a particular effect of the ritual action.

Although this discussion on substitution in Vedic ritual might seem to be only tangentially related, it is of the utmost importance to the topic at hand since the system of substitutes presupposes

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. ŚBM 11.3.1.1-4, and TKM 2.35-7. See also Bodewitz’ study on the *agnihotra*, Bodewitz: 1976. For the sake of space, I use commas where Ehlers uses line breaks in his TITUS edition.

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. TKM 2.1, *śiṣṭasyābhāvatastulyaṃ dravyaṃ pratinidhīyate* | “If [any substance] enjoined in the texts is unavailable, an equivalent material should be substituted [for it].”

⁴⁸⁶ Smith: 1987, p. 77.

a certain ontological proximity, the same essence.⁴⁸⁷ A sacrificial oblation cannot be replaced by whatever substance, but only by one that participates in the same sacrificial essence. The Śrautasūtras argue that the substitute should always be of a “similar nature” (*sāmānya*), or “closest resemblance” (*susadṛśa*) to the original.⁴⁸⁸ Thus, the human can be substituted only by other *paśus* or by the most valuable domesticated grains, rice and barley, as only these substances share the *medha*, the sacrificial essence. Thus, ritual substitution is yet another sign of the shared ontological base of the *paśu* group, and of the closeness of people and domesticated animals.

There are other takes on the matter, however. Brian Smith and Wendy Doniger argue that although the replacement is always treated in the same way as the original would have been, it is never forgotten that it is “only” a substitute. For them, the mimesis is never perfect.⁴⁸⁹ From a ritual point of view, however, this does not make sense: if the substitution shares the same ontological essence, produces the intended ritual effect, and the ritual structure remains uninjured, there is no point in worrying about its “originality”. As Frederick Smith says:

“The Mādhvas of Karnataka and southern Maharashtra have, for the last 600 years, substituted a [...] animal made of dough. They have gone to the extremes of placing a special thin flour omentum (*vapā*) over dough organs (*aṅgas*), pasted them onto a specially prepared wooden or papier mache frame (i.e. the skeleton), and bound it to the sacrificial post. It is then suffocated in a mock manner. [...] Neither the ŚSūs nor the TKM sanction such substitutes.”⁴⁹⁰

If the idea of substitute would be “regarded as something of a necessary *evil*”,⁴⁹¹ as Doniger and Smith argue, surely the Mādhvas would not go to such extremes. Doniger and Smith, equating the substitution with simplification and ritual condensation, place their value judgment on the process that is virtually omnipresent. Prompted by both Vedic and post-Vedic ritual manuals, however, I would argue the opposite. Since the process is relatively uniform and presupposes a shared essence, it does not show simplification but broadening, concentration. By enabling one species to be substituted for another, it exhibits a shared essence of the group: the human and the goat become essentially interchangeable. Ritual substitution, I would argue, shows that the Vedic concept of a personhood (and I use this word in its widest possible meaning, following David Haberman)⁴⁹² is extensive, and that the bodies of all *paśus*, including the human, are on a par.

⁴⁸⁷ In a note to this section, Smith & Doniger call the ontological closeness a “platonic” character of Vedic ritualism (which, in a way, seems like a value judgment on their part). See Smith & Doniger: 1989, p. 219, n. 23.

⁴⁸⁸ ApŚS 24.3.51; TKM 2.1. Cf. Smith: 1987, p. 224.

⁴⁸⁹ Smith & Doniger: 1989, p. 204. Cf. Taussig: 1993, on the concept of mimesis and alterity in anthropology.

⁴⁹⁰ Smith: 1987, p. 74.

⁴⁹¹ Smith & Doniger: 1989, p. 205. The emphasis is mine.

⁴⁹² Haberman: 2013.

§ 3.4 DIFFERENCES IN MENTAL PROWESS

In the two previous subchapters, our attention was directed to the bodies of human and non-human *paśus*, and the similarities and differences thereof, noted in the corpus. In this section, we will briefly explore whether the Vedic texts perceive any differences in “mental capacities” between humans and non-humans. Our discussion will be primarily based around two topics: speech and sacrifice. I will argue that unlike the Western common-sense view, Vedic literature recognises that non-human *paśus* have the capability to be self-aware which, yet again, shows the ontological integrity of the *paśu* group.

§ 3.4.1 CAN ANIMALS SPEAK?

In general, Western philosophers of the past (and often present, despite the so-called “animal turn” which swept over the Humanities in recent years) only rarely allowed for any understanding between human and non-human animals even if they, like Jacques Derrida, granted non-human lifeforms selves or agency.⁴⁹³ As an example of the impossibility of the “communication across [this] irreducible difference”,⁴⁹⁴ consider the famous sentence from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, cited by numerous papers in the field of Animal Studies: “If a lion could speak, we could not understand him.”⁴⁹⁵ The usual interpretation of this sentence is that “the lion does not share our form of life, and this is why we could not interpret anything he produces as an utterance that is translatable into a natural human language.”⁴⁹⁶ Thomas Nagel, in the same way, struggled to imagine “what is it like to be a bat” in his eponymous paper,⁴⁹⁷ and there are dozens of other examples. The fact that verbal communication with animals can only get us so far is not only a philosophical conundrum but likely a problem of every single person who has ever tried to guess what a nearby animal might think.⁴⁹⁸

On the contrary, the Vedic corpus, and especially the Brāhmaṇa prose, allows animals a means of communication, although not as commonly as in the later Epics or texts such as the *Pañcatantra* and *Hitopadeśa*.⁴⁹⁹ Indra’s dog Saramā is perhaps the most famous example: in RV 10.108, she acts as a messenger of Indra who sent her to track down the Paṇis, entrapping his cows (= Dawns) in a cave. In the hymn, Saramā talks to the Paṇis at length which, as Jamison and Brereton suggest,

⁴⁹³ Derrida: 2008.

⁴⁹⁴ Haraway: 2003, p. 49.

⁴⁹⁵ Wittgenstein: 2009r (c1953), p. 235^e.

⁴⁹⁶ Von Savigny: 1991, p. 111. Von Savigny attributes this standard interpretation to Pitcher: 1964.

⁴⁹⁷ Nagel: 1974.

⁴⁹⁸ An excellent guide to what animals might think if we asked them the right questions is Despret: 2016.

⁴⁹⁹ Consider especially passages such as the *Mārjāramūṣakasanyāda* in MBh 12.136. I am grateful to Professor Minkowski for reading this passage in the Epic classes in Hilary Term 2020.

must have made the audience relish the passage.⁵⁰⁰ As far as the Brāhmaṇas are concerned, we will see stark examples of animal speech in the following section, § 3.4.2, when we discuss passages according to which cows used to sacrifice in the past. Sacrificial activity presupposes the act of speech. Furthermore, in the following chapter, § 4, we will discuss passages from the Jaiminiya and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇas, in which cattle approach people, asking to exchange skin with them. In the prose, as well as in the Saramā episodes in the ṚV, animals speak out their desires and fears. The Taittiriya Saṃhitā, to mention one last example, says clearly that *paśu* have the same senses that people do and includes speech amongst them:

TS 5.2.10.3

tāsmād vādan prāṇān pásyañ chṛṇvān paśúr jāyate | Therefore an animal is born with speech, breath, sight, and hearing.

I find it remarkable that the Vedic texts, which hardly ever give a voice to anyone else than the priests uttering mantras, allow animals the ability to speak, albeit only in a few sentences, and to act independently. Yet to a certain extent, even the Brāhmaṇas side with Wittgenstein. According to several passages, the speech of *paśus* is incomprehensible or veiled in secret. In the Brāhmaṇas, the domestic animals are able to speak, but as the following ŚBM passage suggests, their speech is unintelligible (*anirukta*):

ŚBM 4.1.3.16⁵⁰¹

<i>sá hovāca</i> <i>túrīyaṃ turīyaṃ cen mām ábibhajus</i> <i>túrīyaṃ eva tárhi vāñ níruktaṃ vadiṣyatíti tád etat</i> <i>túrīyaṃ vāco níruktaṃ yān manuṣyá vādanty</i> <i>áthaitat túríyaṃ vācó 'niruktaṃ yát paśávo vādanty</i> <i>áthaitat túríyaṃ vācó 'niruktaṃ yad vayāṃsi</i> <i>vādanty áthaitat túríyaṃ vācó 'niruktaṃ yád idám</i> <i>kṣudráṃ sarīṣṛpaṃ vádati</i>	He said, 'If they have assigned to me a fourth part each time for my share, then speech shall speak intelligibly only one fourth part!' Hence only that fourth part of speech is intelligible which men speak; but that fourth part of speech which {domestic animals} speak is unintelligible; and that fourth part of speech which birds speak is unintelligible; and that fourth part of speech which the small vermin here speaks is unintelligible.
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⁵⁰⁰ ṚV trl Jamison & Brereton, p. 1573. Cf. ṚV 4.16.8. Other examples of talking animals include Vṛṣākapi, or the goat and the dog in ṚV 1.16.13.

⁵⁰¹ I first read this passage with Professor Christopher Minkowski and Professor John Lowe during the Vedic class in the Michaelmas Term 2019, and I am grateful to both for their suggestions. The following argument is inspired by the discussion in the class. Note that I am translating *paśu* as “domestic animals” instead of Eggeling’s “beasts”.

The idea that speech is divided (or measured, in the translation of Jamison and Brereton) into four parts occurs already in the famous riddle hymn ṚV 1.164. Indeed, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa quotes the Ṛgvedic verse in full in ŚBM 4.1.3.17, clearly building its interpretation of the ritual action on the earlier poetry. According to the ṚV verse in question, one quarter of speech is human; animal speech is not mentioned but perhaps hinted at as the remaining three quarters of speech are said to be secret.⁵⁰²

ṚV 1.164.45

<i>catvāri vāk pārimitā padāni, tāni vidur brāhmaṇāyé manīṣiṇaḥ guhā trīṇi nīhitā néṅgayanti, turīyaṃ vācō manuṣyā vadanti </i>	Speech is measured in four feet [/quarters]. Brahmins of inspired thinking know these. They do not set in motion the three that are imprinted in secret; the sons of Manu speak the fourth [foot/quarter] of speech.
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It is the idea of “secret” (*guhā*) in the Ṛgvedic verse and “unintelligibility” (*anirukta*) in the Śatapatha passage that is a key to these passages and to the human-animal relationship more generally. These terms signify that even though domestic animals have the capability to use speech, *vāc*, they might not be understood.

Even though it does not mention animals, the parallel passage in TS 6.4.7.3 uses alternative terminology. Rather than *nir* + *√vac*, it utilises terms formed on the basis of the verb *vy* + *ā* + *√kr*, “to separate, distinguish”, or “discriminate”, as Keith translates it in the following passage:

TS 6.4.7.3

<i>vāg vai pārācy āvyākṛtāvadat té devā índram abruvan imāṃ no vācaṃ vyākurv iti sò 'bravīt vāraṃ vṛṇai máhyaṃ caiváīṣā vāyāve ca sahā grhyātā iti tāsmād aindravāyavāḥ sahā grhyate tām índro madhyatò 'vakrámya vyākaroṭ tāsmād iyāṇ vyākṛtā vāg udyate </i>	Speech aforetime spoke without discrimination; the gods said to Indra, “Do thou discriminate this speech for us”; he replied, “Let me choose a boon; let this [cup] be drawn for me and for Vāyu together.” Therefore the cup is drawn together for Indra and Vāyu. Indra approaching it in the midst discriminated it; therefore is speech spoken distinctly.
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Both of the key terms are well-known from the later history of Indian linguistics: *nirukta* is the name of the discipline of semantic etymology, codified by Yāska, whereas *vy+ā+√kr* is the root behind the Sanskrit word for grammar and philosophy of language, *vyākaraṇa*.⁵⁰³ It is unlikely that either of the terms would be used in their technical, linguistic sense in these prose passages that precede the

⁵⁰² Cf. Jamison: 1991, pp. 255-9. According to Jamison, the unexpressed three parts of speech are “higher” than human speech (heavenly / belong to the gods, etc.).

⁵⁰³ On *nirukta* and *anirukta* in Vedic ritual, see e.g. Parpola: 1979, p. 146.

grammarians by some centuries. Therefore, we cannot expect the meaning to be that the domestic animals can speak but only using a language that is ungrammatical, or not based on proper etymology. Yet it is tempting to see the connection with Wittgenstein's lion which, according to the standard course of interpretation, would not be understood by people, even if he was "a competent speaker of some natural human language [...], able to utter syntactically and semantically non-deviant sentences,"⁵⁰⁴ because he would not use utterances in proper situations.

When they talk, the animals in Vedic sources speak at the right moments and grammatically correctly: Saramā eloquently debates with the Paṇis; cows observe the *sattra* and barter with people. Seen through an anthropocentric lens, these situations presuppose human-like speech, but what if domestic animals communicate their feelings differently? The multispecies anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, following the philosopher Charles Peirce, argues that "all thought and knowledge is by signs".⁵⁰⁵ For him, this has implications for the possibility of interspecies relationships and communications which he documents on the case of the Quechua-speaking Runa people, based in Ecuador's Upper Amazon. Via Peirce, Kohn argues that although we can never know what other living beings – human and non-human – truly think, we can access glimpses through the signs that they give us.

"Because there is no absolute 'incognizable' there is also no absolute incommensurability. We can know something of how red might be experienced by a blind person, what it might be like to be a bat, or what those dogs might have been thinking moments before they were attacked, however mediated, provisional, fallible, and tenuous these understandings may be. Selves relate the way that thoughts relate: we are all living, growing thoughts."⁵⁰⁶

Kohn illustrates his theory with a simple example of scarecrows that the Runa people make to scare parakeets from their cornfields. These are not realistic representations of raptors, but icons made of painted balsa wood, capturing "something of what a raptor is like for a parakeet".⁵⁰⁷ The Runa people do not know what it is like to be a parakeet or how a parakeet experiences a raptor – but they catch a glimpse of it from effects that their actions have on parakeets' behaviour. Although not verbal, their sign-based interspecies communication is effective.

A similar idea of multispecies communication is, I believe, what the Vedic texts hint at in the handful of passages about the fourfold speech. Although animal speech is said to be indistinguishable, secret, or unintelligible, the fact that it is labelled "speech" (*vāc*) might suggest the possibility of interspecies communication, albeit on a limited level. The search through the primary sources

⁵⁰⁴ Von Savigny: 1991, p. 111.

⁵⁰⁵ Kohn: 2013, p. 87; he quotes Peirce: 1994, 8.332.

⁵⁰⁶ Kohn: 2013, p. 89.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

suggests that for Vedic people, interspecies communication is largely possible only with the so-called “companion species”,⁵⁰⁸ that is livestock and other domesticated animals, such as dogs. Domestication is a process which “implies that humans and animals are mutually transformed over the lengthy process that produces human domesticators and domesticated animals,” as Vinciane Despret says.⁵⁰⁹ To domesticate an animal species requires care in the broadest sense, the constant reading of cues and signs that the animal conveys. When domesticated, the human-animal relationship turns into mutual care of one species for another. Researching the interspecies relatedness in contemporary North Indian mountainous communities, the anthropologist Radhika Govindrajan imagines the interspecies communication to be “facilitated through an embodied, touchy-feely, language of mutual recognition and response”,⁵¹⁰ and based on everyday mutual care.

Naturally, we cannot transpose the contemporary anthropological observations onto the ancient Indian texts. Yet we cannot underestimate how much care for their domesticated animals the Vedic pastoralists took. Their constant, everyday care comes across to us in the form of all kinds of “proto-zoological” data that the Vedic corpus shares with us. We have seen snippets of it in the previous chapters: details about body shape, reproduction strategies, or dietary behaviour. That this kind of data crops up in the Vedic corpus, despite its ritualistic focus and the narrowness of its genres, is an indication of the importance of pastoralist care.

When discussing the human-animal relationships in ancient communities, it is easy to fall into extreme interpretative traps: to disregard them completely, or to romanticise them as “pristine”, or “pure”. Neither of the positions is, however, tangible, as Stephanie Jamison suggests, and we need to seek a middle ground:

“We seem to be willing to believe that ancient cultures simply did not pay attention to what went on around them. Yet, on the other hand, there is a commonplace that ancient or primitive man was ‘closer to nature’ than our urbanized and mechanized societies. It is a commonplace worth bearing in mind. People who live by their herds and their fields are likely to notice a good deal more than we do about (1) weather and astronomical phenomena in general, (2) animal physiology, (3) animal behavior, both of domestic animals and of wild ones, potential predators.”⁵¹¹

If we accept the material dimension of human-animal relationships and the everyday need for unromanticised mutual care, the possibility that humans and their animal companions can

⁵⁰⁸ A term coined by Haraway: 2003.

⁵⁰⁹ Despret: 2016, p. 30.

⁵¹⁰ Govindrajan: 2018, p. 20.

⁵¹¹ Jamison: 1991, p. 38.

communicate, albeit on a limited basis, opens up. The language of non-human *paśus* might be hard to understand or unintelligible, but it is a language after all.

The possibility of animal speech brings us to our next topic: the question whether animals have the capability to partake on the most important of human activities, ritual.

§ 3. 4. 2 CAN ANIMALS SACRIFICE?⁵¹²

It cannot be overemphasized that ritual is the central focus of all Vedic intellectual activity that we have access to. The whole world is viewed through its lens, at least in the textual corpus which came down to us. Ritual activity is the activity *par excellence*, reserved for the *crème de la crème* of Vedic society: initiated men of the three highest *varṇas*. Throughout Vedic literature, it is also associated with the gods, whose primordial actions are often mythical prototypes of ritual activity, such as the sacrifice of the first man called Puruṣa, first alluded to in the ṚV 10.90. Many other episodes from the Brāhmaṇa prose tell us of other divine sacrifices, in which the gods set an example, a precedent for a human ritual behaviour, as it were. So did the mythical ancestors of the Vedic people, such as Manu. In ŚBM 1.8.1.7ff., for example, Manu is the only living being who survives the devastating world flood; alone in the world, he offers the *pāka* sacrifice of dairy products (ghee, sour milk, whey, and curds)⁵¹³ which begins the post-flood restoration of human society and eventually sets up a precedent for the ritual practice called *idā*.

Often, when talking about human–animal relationships in ancient India, it might seem that the ability to sacrifice is what sets people apart from other *paśus*. Ritual is an *adhikāra* for people, as it were, and by doing it, they are akin to their mythical ancestors and gods. The Vedic texts themselves, however, suggest that the potential to sacrifice is not limited to anthropomorphic living beings: once upon a time in the mythical past (*agre*), domestic animals were capable of this action, too.

⁵¹² This section is a revised version of my talk *When Cows Sacrifice*, first presented at the 231th Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society (online, 13th March 2021). In preparation for the AOS, I read all the passages with Professor Minkowski (July 2020) and I am thankful to him for all his suggestions. Subsequently, I presented the paper at the Graduate Indology Seminar at Oxford (online, February 2021), and I am grateful especially to Dr Elizabeth Tucker for her ever helpful feedback of my usage of the Atharvaveda passages. In a modified version, I presented this paper at the 12th International Indology Graduate Research Symposium (online, 22 July 2021). Many thanks to the participants of both conferences for their feedback and criticism. In a longer, more detailed version, this section will be published as a paper under the name *When Cows Sacrifice: The Meaning of Vedic tūpara* (see Sojková: forthcoming a). I am grateful to Christopher Fleming, Toke Knudsen, Vishal Sharma, and Anuj Mishra for encouraging me to submit the paper in the prepared volume, and to Dr Lubomír Ondračka who kindly proofread the final draft of the paper.

⁵¹³ One can only wonder where Manu found all the dairy in the world where “the flood then swept away all these creatures, and Manu alone remained here”, ŚBM 1.8.1.6.

Two brief mythical narratives exist in the Vedic prose, telling us about times when animals used to dedicate themselves to a year-long *soma* ritual, known in the Vedic ritual parlance as *sattra*. The Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa briefly mentions a *sarpasattra*, a ritual performed by snakes (*sarpa*, perhaps serpentine beings also known as *nāgas*) to defeat death.⁵¹⁴ Although the account of this ritual is brief, its appearance in the corpus is noteworthy.

In a few other Brāhmaṇas, we find a narrative which will be the focus of this subchapter: a story about the mythical past when cows did not have horns, one of their most characteristic features.⁵¹⁵ Since then, this specific ritual is known as *gavāmayana* (literally “the path, course of cows”). After ten months, the cows acquired their desired horns but a group of them decided to continue with the ritual activity for the rest the year, as planned. These cows became known as *tūpara*, a peculiar term which is understood by the later tradition as a term for a hornless animal, especially a sacrificial hornless goat. Reading the Vedic versions of the story carefully, however, suggests that this might not be the original meaning. The word is likely the key to the whole story; nevertheless, due to the scope of this chapter, I will limit myself to the discussion of *tūpara* in the context of the narrative, leaving out matters such as etymology or textual history of the term which I have treated elsewhere.⁵¹⁶

The myth occurs in six passages across five different *śākhās* (TS 7.5.1.1-2, TS 7.5.2.1-2, KS 33.1, AB 4.17, JB 2.374, PB 4.1). Despite their diverse *śākhā* affiliations, the passages are very close both in terms of grammar and narrative. Their affinity is emphasized by their introductory formula, “the cows held a *sattra*” (*gāvo vā etāt sattrām āsata*, TS 7.5.1.1), shared more or less *verbatim*.⁵¹⁷ As Stephanie Jamison argued, many Vedic myths are introduced with an almost identical incipit, even though the main narrative can be rendered differently. The shared incipit suggests that the myth in question is rather old: it, or at least its part, must have existed in a precise verbal form before the Vedic tradition divided into the respective *śākhās*.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ PB 25.15. Whilst in the PB, the *sarpasattra* is clearly a *sattra* performed by the snakes themselves, the term is reused in the MBh 1.45-53 where it becomes a term for a ritual hold by Janamejaya to get rid of all snakes. For details on the Mahābhārata story, see Minkowski: 1991; cf. Bronkhorst: 2022. On the difficulty of discerning between *sarpas* and *nāgas*, and basic details on their worship, see Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 84-5.

⁵¹⁵ Horns seem to be an important characteristic feature of both wild and domestic cattle in the RV. Animals and deities alike are described with epithets such as “sharp-horned” (*tigmāśṛṅga*; e.g. RV 6.16.39) or “ample-horned” (*bhūriśṛṅga*; e.g. RV 1.154.6), and Indra is said to be the king of horned and hornless beings (RV 1.32.15 *īndro [...]* *rājā śāmasya ca śṛṅgīno*).

⁵¹⁶ Sojková: forthcoming a.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. KS 33.1 *gāvo vai sattram āsata*; TS 7.5.2.1 *gāvo vā etāt sattrām āsata*; AB 4.17 *gāvo vai satram āsata*; JB 2.374 *gāvo vā etad agre sattram āsata*; PB 4.1 *gāvo vā etat sattram āsata*. Notice that the JB adds the word *agre*, used frequently by the JB to introduce mythical episodes that happened *in illo tempore*.

⁵¹⁸ Jamison: 1997, p. 127. We will see another example of a myth with a shared incipit in the following chapter § 4.

To make my argument easier to follow, I will quote the JB version in full. The JB is certainly not the oldest version of the story; it is, however, the longest account and despite a few changes in the narrative, it provides us with valuable additional details about the ritual.

JB 2.374⁵¹⁹

*gāvo vā etad agre sattram āsatānnādyam
avarurutsamānās | tā daśame māsy udatiṣṭhan
sarvam annādyam avārutsmahīti manyamānās | tā
etās śṛṅgiṇīs | tāsām tvā ivābruvan sarvān evaitān
dvādaśa māsas samāpayāmeti | tā atiprāyuñjata |
tāsām dvādaśe māsi śṛṅgāṇi prāvartanta | tā etās
tūparās | tasmāt sattriṇo dvādaśe māsy api śikhāḥ
pravapante | gavāṃ hi tarhy anurūpā bhavanti | tā
udatiṣṭhann arātsmety āptvā sattram āptvā sarvam
annādyam | tasmād etās sarvān dvādaśa māsas
uttiṣṭhanti {prartvāpi}⁵²⁰ vārṣikān api śaiśirau |*

In the beginning, the cows held a *sattra* in this way, wishing to obtain the food to eat (*annādyam*). They, finishing in the tenth month, thought: “We have obtained all the food to eat.” These are the horned ones. But some of them said: “We will complete all twelve months.” They went on performing the *prayoga* past [the ten months]. Their horns got curved (*prāvartanta*)⁵²¹ in the twelfth month. They are the *tūpara* [cattle]. Therefore, those who hold a *sattra* (*sattrin*) shave off the hair towards the region of their hair-knots (*śikhā*) [i.e. in order to have the *śikhā* in the front of their head] in the twelfth month. Because then, they become like the cows in form. They finished (the *sattra*), [saying] “we have obtained [the the food to eat]”. Having obtained the *sattra*, having obtained all [of] the eating of food. Therefore, they [i.e. the *tūpara* cattle] stand up [even] for the duration of all the twelve months, having roamed widely even during the two rainy [months], even in the two winter [months].

⁵¹⁹ I am citing the critical edition of Murakawa: 2010, pp. 5-7, and not the standard edition of Vira & Chandra: 1954. For the sake of consistency between the passages, I use *daṇḍas* where Murakawa uses full stops. The translation of the passage is my own.

⁵²⁰ This is a problematic form which also occurs in the passage TS 7.5.1.1-2. Murakawa: 2010, p. 7 reads *partvā*, whereas Caland: 1919 (see also 1927, p. 253) emends *partvā* to *prartvā*, followed also by Vira & Chandra: 1954. Hoffmann: 1992, p. 785, opposes Caland and argues that we would ideally expect **prārtya*. He also states that *prartvā* is only Caland’s emendation without a sufficient textual support. Gerhard Ehlers notes in his unpublished JB edition (courtesy of Professor Michael Witzel) that Hoffmann’s assertions are not correct as *prartvā* occurs in two mss. He keeps the form despite the problems with the reading as it ultimately makes the most sense in the context. I have decided to follow Caland and Ehlers in my translation as I find their reasoning convincing.

⁵²¹ In his translation of the PB, Caland: 1931, p. 43, argues that it is unlikely that the verb *prāvartanta* means “they fell off”, as it is sometimes suggested, e.g. by Keith: 1920, p. 208, n. 2. He argues that it should be translated as “they became curved”, “round”, or “circular”, comparing it with words such as *pravarta* “a circular ornament”, or *pravṛtta* “round”. I agree with Caland’s opinion and use this translation.

As we have seen in the passage above, the cows are said to hold the *sattra* in order to obtain *annādya*, “food to eat”, a favoured ritual goal of the Jaiminīya Sāmavedins.⁵²² Alternatively, the *ūrj*, “liquid nourishment” is mentioned in the BYV versions as the goal.⁵²³ Other passages, however, reveal their true motivation: they desired to obtain horns, and in the case of the AB, hooves as well.

AB 4.17

gāvo vai satram āsata śaphāñ chṛṇḡgāṇi śiṣāsantyas, The cows performed a sacrificial session seeking
tāsāṃ daśame māsi śaphāḥ śṛṇḡgāṇy ajāyanta | to win hoofs and horns; in the tenth month their
 hoofs and horns came into being.

After ten months, the cattle obtained the desired outcome: in a couple of passages, these cows are called “the horned ones” (JB 2.374 *śṛṇḡṇīs*, AB 4.17 *śṛṇḡṇīyo*). As we have seen in the JB passage, a smaller group of the cows (or half of them, as said by TS 7.5.2.1 and KS 33.1), decided to go on with the ritual. At the end of the year-long period, due to their lack of “ritual confidence” (*aśraddhayā*),⁵²⁴ their horns became “curved” (*prāvantanta*) and since then, they are known as *tūpara*.

By far the most interesting point of these passages is their descriptions of the *tūparas*’ behaviour. In the JB passage, we saw that the *tūpara* cattle was said to keep outside even during the rainy and cold seasons. This is confirmed by other passages: the KS and TS state that they roam widely for the whole twelve months, and the AB that they stand upright. As an example, consider the KS passage:

KS 33.1

tasmād dvādaśa mās{a}s⁵²⁵ tūparāḥ prertvarīś⁵²⁶ Therefore, the *tūpara* [cattle] are active, moving
caranti, daśa śṛṇḡṇīr about for twelve months; the horned [cattle are
 active] for ten [months].

⁵²² *annādya* is a peculiar compound used throughout the Vedic corpus and is especially common in the JB cosmology. In this mythical narrative, JB is not the only text using this concept; we also find it in the PB 4.1. The compound is a merism formed from two participles of the verb *√ad*, *atti*, “to eat”: the past passive participle *anna* and the future passive participle *adya*. There have been many attempts to translate it as a unit: for example, Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 63, suggest “stored food”, Olivelle: 1998, p. 490-1, n. 3.17, “foodstuff”, and Weber-Brosamer: 1988, “Nahrungsmittel”, i.e. any substance that may be used as food. According to Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 63, it is not a mere food but an abstract power, or substance which is ritually exchanged among gods and men. Here, I am following the translation of Jones: 2017, pp. 78-80, “food to eat”.

⁵²³ On *ūrj*, see Minkowski: 1989, p. 10.

⁵²⁴ Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 65, note, following Köhler: 1973, that the usual translation of *śraddhā* as “faith” is erroneous and argue that it “originally referred to ‘confidence’ in the efficacy of the ritual, i.e. [ritual] ability to motivate counter-gifts.”

⁵²⁵ I am reading *māsas* instead of *māsās*, following Caland: 1927, p. 253.

⁵²⁶ As Caland: *ibid.*, notes, this form is most likely connected with the mysterious form *prārtvā* found in the TS and JB versions. I have discussed this form above.

What does the word *tūpara* stand for?⁵²⁷ To recapitulate, *tūpara* are the cows that are said to go on with the sacrifice for the additional months, finishing at the year mark. Moreover, after this episode, they are said to behave differently, keeping outside for the whole winter. Ordinarily, the word is translated as a “hornless [animal]”, or a “hornless goat”; but I doubt that it is the original meaning of it, or at least not in this mythical episode. In fact, I am not the first one to express such a doubt: Willem Caland noted in his translation of the PB that “a *tūpara* animal is [...] not only a hornless animal, but also one with small, inward bent horns”.⁵²⁸

If we accept the translation “hornless”, the narrative seems rather inelegant. All the passages tell us that the cows decided to follow a year-long ritual in order to obtain horns. All of the cows acquired horns after ten months but those who persevered became *tūpara*, on top of obtaining the more practical goals of the ritual, such as the “food to eat” or the “liquid nourishment”. We would expect that the cattle that actually finished up the challenge of the year-long *sattra* in full obtained something for their effort. Hornlessness would be a return to the pre-ritual state, a negation of the goal of the ritual. Moreover, every iteration of the mythical story describes the different behaviour of the *tūpara* cattle, as we have seen above. They are said to move about the whole rainy season and winter, unlike the horned cows which are moving outside only for ten months of the year. As far as I am aware, the lack of horns does not cause any change of behaviour in cattle. On this ground, “hornless” is an unlikely meaning.

The longer, ritualistically-oriented JB passage provides an indispensable detail regarding the sacrificers’ hairstyle which could help us understand the word *tūpara*. The sacrificers, observing a strict *dikṣita* lifestyle, do not cut their hair for the whole duration of the ritual, i.e. the whole year. At the end of the ritual period, they keep a tuft of their hair in the very front of the head, mirroring the *tūpara* cows whose horns “became curved” (*prāvartanta*) at the end of the year-long *sattra*.⁵²⁹ If the

⁵²⁷ The etymology of the word is uncertain. There are many variants: Mayrhofer: *KEWA*, Bd. 1, p. 518-9, notes *tūvara* or *tūbara*, referring to a “hornless bull”, “beardless man”, or an “eunuch”, and *tūvaraka* or *tūbaraka*, a MBh derogatory term for a “castrated person”, “eunuch”. In *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 661, Mayrhofer further connects the word with modern Indian variants such as the Bengali words *thubarā*, or *thobrā*, “blunt” which, however, do not seem to be plausibly associated with the Sanskrit word *tūpara*. All of these variants show a great degree of flexibility in the second labial consonant; they fluctuate between *-v-*, *-b-*, and *-p-*. On this account, Kuiper: 1948, p. 74-5, suggested that the word is unlikely to be of an Indo-European etymology but Proto-Munda, with the initial *t-* standing for *ṭ-*. The meaning is uncertain, I think, but hypothetically, it could be close to “cut off”, “trimmed”, or more specifically, “the one whose characteristic feature has been cut off/polled”.

⁵²⁸ Caland: 1931, p. 43. Cf. Hoffmann: 1992, p. 782-3, who understood it to mean “cow with deformed horns” (“Kuh mit mißgebildeten Hörnern”).

⁵²⁹ As Ehlers: 2003, suggests, the *pūrvaśikha* hair-fashion might be alluded in this myth. The *pūrvaśikha* style is explained by Mahadevan & Staal: 2003, p. 5-6, who suggest that “there were in the main two different waves of Vedism arriving in South India at two different periods of history: the first is represented by the *pūrvaśikha* Brahmans with their fronted top-knots and the second by the *aparaśikha* Brahmans, their topknots toward the

cows were to be hornless, we would expect the sacrificers to follow them and shave their hair completely. To me, this is a clear internal evidence of the narrative that we are not dealing with hornless cattle but rather with cattle that have a different shape of horn. Despite the sparse descriptions of the *tūpara* cattle, I propose that the myth is not talking about “hornless” cattle but about a different cattle species, breed, or variant. The locally domesticated zebu cattle (*Bos indicus*), with their distinctive upright horns,⁵³⁰ slender body, and resistance to extreme weather conditions, are an obvious fit for our mythical narrative.

There are many stances from which we could dissect the narrative. Elsewhere, I have suggested that, with a pinch of salt, we could understand the mythical story to portray a time when the semi-pastoral Indo-Aryans met the zebu, a new species of cattle, perhaps semi-domesticated or feral (judging from the association with wilderness in the earliest occurrence of the word *tūpara* in AVŚ 11.9.22), with different bodily characteristics and behaviour. Meeting such a strange, yet familiar animal, they had to account for it in their symbolic system: such a hardy animal with a different shape of horn must have surely deserved its body through a prolonged ritual action.⁵³¹ Equally, we could understand the passages to be another proof of Vedic zoological knowledge resurfacing in the highly elite ritual literature. Or else, in accordance with the larger topic of this chapter, the passages could be yet another proof of human–animal entanglements.

The topic of this subchapter was whether animals can sacrifice. This mythical narrative leaves no doubts that cows were capable of a complex ritual action, albeit situated in the realm of “once upon a time” (*agre*). Any *sattra* is an extremely complicated *soma* ritual, lasting for a long time, in this case a whole year, in other cases multiple years. It is a sacrifice which is done out of choice: there is no *yajamāna* commissioning the ritual, and the Brahmin priests officiating the sacrifice are doing so by themselves for themselves, with the goal of obtaining progeny, prosperity, or a satisfactory post-humous fate.⁵³² With no division between priests and a sacrificer, there is no economic benefit, no *dakṣiṇā*. Furthermore, for the whole duration of the *sattra*, the Brahmins are expected to follow the strict rules of *dīkṣā*, involving prohibitions on worldly behaviour, such as the observance of the daily

back of their heads, making a pony tail.” Although Mahadevan’s and Staal’s theory is not widely accepted, I find Ehlers’ following argument and connection with this myth convincing. For illustration of the *pūrvaśikha* hair-style see the cover photo of the paper by Mahadevan & Staal: 2003.

⁵³⁰ As Bökönyi: 1997, p. 648, suggests: “Their [zebu’s] horn form basically differs from that of taurine cattle: their typical direction is lateral or upright with a backward tendency (this is the so-called “auchenokeratos” type) and in profile they are well behind the plane of the face.”

⁵³¹ Sojková: forthcoming a.

⁵³² For more detailed discussion, see Kāṇe: HDŚ 2.2, p. 1239ff. Cf. Falk: 1985.

agnihotra, sexual intercourse, running, entering a boat, or eating a normal, non-*vrātya* diet.⁵³³ In short, there is a strong sense of dedication and agency associated with the *sattra*.

That such a complicated and long sacrificial activity follows a mythical precedent set up by cattle is at least peculiar. I suggest that the fact that cattle are so strongly associated with this sacrifice in almost all major middle Vedic texts is a strong argument of their mental capabilities. In this myth, cattle are portrayed as using the faculty of volition and agency: they themselves choose to perform the ritual in order to change their physical appearance and gain one of their most characteristic features, horns. Furthermore, any Vedic ritual activity presupposes the ability to recite and perform various actions; there is no suggestion in the texts that the cows would not perform these. Whilst the JB situates the mythical episode *in illo tempore*, the ritual activity of cattle clearly sets up a precedent and gives the name to the ritual. It might be foolish to think that in the historical Vedic period, cattle performed rituals. By allowing them to do so in the mythical past, however, the Vedic texts show that cattle participate in intellectual capacities and agency, otherwise associated solely with people.

⁵³³ Kane: *HDŚ* 2.2, p. 1239ff.

§ 3.5 THE HUMAN & THE NON-HUMAN: A CONCLUSION

In search for the notion of human nature in the Vedas, this chapter has taken us through many seemingly disparate topics.

First, we have considered the textual history of the idea that a human is categorised as a *paśu*, a domestic animal. Based on our sources, we can be confident that this is the most common classification of the human being. In the previous chapter § 2, I established that in the middle Vedic sources, the term *paśu* is routinely categorised on the basis of habitat into *grāmya*, domestic, and *āranya*, wild. Applying a similar line of reasoning to the human being, the discussion in this chapter attempted to answer whether Vedic literature identifies certain people as *āranya*, wild. Anchored in a discussion of terminology such as *kiṃpuruṣa* or *mayu āranya*, commonly understood as names for non-Vedic, indigenous inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, I have argued that people are associated with wild animals only in certain circumstances. As a species, they are understood as *paśu*.

Second, this chapter examined the differences and similarities between people and other *paśus*, both in terms of body and mind. On the physical side, my discussion followed both the common anatomical classificatory criteria, developed fully in the later Dharmaśāstric sources, as well as other, lesser studied bodily differences. I have established that although there are certain differences in the bodies of humans and animals, these are mainly confined to their extremities, namely their limbs (i.e. dexterous hands and the bipedal, upright position of the human *versus* four-footed, “horizontal” livestock). As a whole, the bodies of animals and people have a similar structure. Their bodies are made from the same building blocks: hair, skin, flesh, bone, marrow. Due to this common embodiment, both animals and people share the fitness to be sacrificed. On the mental side of things, people and domestic livestock are depicted as on a similar footing as well: just like people, *paśu* are said to possess the ability to speak and to sacrifice. The latter quality is particularly important, since in the optic of the Vedic texts, sacrifice is clearly the activity *par excellence*.

Whilst the topics covered in this chapter might seem diverse on the surface, they have a common denominator: the fact that the notions of “humanity” and “animality” are not as disparate as it might seem at a first glance.⁵³⁴ For the Vedic sources, I would argue, the relationship between the

⁵³⁴ Whose first glance, we might ask? It is the modern Western point of view which commonly distinguishes between “nature”/“animality” and “culture”/“humanity”, but not necessarily other points of view. As Bruno Latour: 1993, p. 104, says, however “the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing Nature off. Cultures – different or universal – do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only natures-cultures [...]” That means that the borders between the categories are much fuzzier; in fact, they are what Latour calls “hybrids”.

human and the animal is not just an “encounter” (a term commonly used in Multispecies Anthropology and Animal Studies to convey both the voluntary and involuntary contact of human and non-human actors).⁵³⁵ All suggests that the lives of people and livestock in the Vedic era were fully entangled, fuelled by the constant and mutual everyday care.⁵³⁶ Thinking about these multispecies relationships between people and the four kinds of livestock, I am reminded of what the anthropologist Anna Tsing once wrote: “Domination, domestication, and love are deeply entangled.”⁵³⁷ The Vedic texts allude to these entanglements in snippets but constantly, suggesting that the boundaries between people and domestic animals might indeed be blurrier than first thought.

When writing about the notion of the nature-culture entanglements in ancient and premodern societies, it is easy to disregard the presence and importance of animals – both wild and domesticated – in human communities. The narrowly anthropogenic character of the sources and our reading thereof are usually to blame, as historians Robert Malcomson and Stephan Matoris suggest in their book *The English Pig*:

“All human communities have involved animals. While, in a sense, we all know this, and might regard such a statement as self-evident, the history that we read tends not to pay much attention to species other than our own. History, being written by humans, is mostly about humans; and we may sometimes forget how prevalent – indeed, very visibly prevalent – animals were in most earlier societies.”⁵³⁸

This is something that we face reading Vedic literature, which is preoccupied mostly with only a small sliver of reality: the theory and practice of ritual. As I have noted more than once, the human-animal relationship is mentioned only when it directly influences ritual practice. Due to the nature of the discourse, the closeness of people and animals is usually confined to domesticated animals. Even then, it is located to other times or spaces: stories of human-animal relationships are recounted to explain or exemplify certain ritual actions. Therefore, we read that once upon a time (*agre*) the bodies of livestock were just like the bodies of people: two-footed and upright. In the deep past, cattle were able to decide to hold a year-long ritual with the goal of changing their physical appearance. Both of these stories are told in order to underline specific ritual actions: the usage of the *yūpa*, sacrificial post, and the history of a *sattra*, the *gavāmayana* respectively. In the following chapter § 4, furthermore, we will treat yet another example of similar expository prose which again places the physical resemblance of

⁵³⁵ E.g. Mathur: 2021 or Haraway: 2006.

⁵³⁶ When considering care in human-animal relationships, I have been especially inspired by writings of Radhika Govindrajan on contemporary Indian mountainous communities. Govindrajan: 2018; 2021.

⁵³⁷ Tsing: 2012, p. 141.

⁵³⁸ Malcomson & Matoris: 1998, p. 29.

people and cattle in the mythical past. We will see, moreover, that it also allows for a close contact of the humans and animals in the yonder world, i.e. in the afterlife, the mythical future.

That these myths about the close affinity of the species are placed into the mythical past or future creates the impression that there is an insurmountable difference between people and animals. Indeed, I believe that this is a reason why most scholars do not seriously consider the classification of the human among the *paśus*: the texts make it clear that the human-animal affinity is not a topic of present times. The texts, however, never argue that the human has a different ontological character than his *paśu* counterparts. In all the stories that we have seen so far, there is almost an idea of “evolution by a jump” – a bodily change which happens in a short, concentrated burst.⁵³⁹ A certain event causes the animals’ bodies to change from their original, more human-like form to their current one. For example, the creation of the *yūpa* causes such a great fear in animals that they crouch and become four-footed. Whilst this is the case for all the stories I have looked at so far, it is important to note that the texts never claim that the essence of the animals in question would change in any way. The sudden evolution of their bodies does not imply a transformation in ontology. Humans are not suddenly said to be different or better and animals are not said to be inferior on the hierarchy of species. To certain extent, this might be attributed to the nature of the texts we work with: the stories are fragmentary, concentrated. Perhaps, the situation would be different if we had access to the full oral tradition. Since we do not, however, and since the *topos* repeats time and again, it is not preposterous to argue that people and animals share a certain ontological essence. The Vedic cosmos, we could say with David Haberman, “is populated with many people, only some of whom are human.”⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁹ I use the term “evolution by a jump” almost in a tongue-in-cheek way, alluding to a famous quote by Carl Linnaeus (frequently ascribed to Charles Darwin): “Natura non facit saltum”. I acknowledge that there are number of problems with this expression. For one, the usage of the word “evolution” signifies a change in essence, or at least taxonomy, and I am of course suggesting a complete opposite of that. Furthermore, although the “evolution by a jump” seems to be a favoured “evolutionary” strategy of the Vedic texts, it is not accounted for by the Darwinian theory. This section has been inspired by reading some introductory and/or popular accounts on evolutionary biology, e.g. Buranyi: 2022; Laland et al.: 2014; and Howard: 2001.

⁵⁴⁰ Haberman: 2013, p. 193.

§ 4 Skin⁵⁴¹

“Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?”

– Donna Haraway, *Sinians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*⁵⁴²

This chapter, a case study in “ontological proximity”, is where our previous discussions come together. Building on the explorations of chapters § 2 and § 3, detailing what is the animal and the human and how these categories are treated in Vedic myth and ritual, we will explore one of the most evocative narratives I have encountered in the Vedic prose so far: the story of the origin of human skin and animal hide.

Before we get into the myth and its implications, however, let me start by discussing what I mean by the term “ontological proximity”. I have used this phrase or variations thereof (such as “closeness”) several times in the previous chapter without much explanation. It is a term which, in my eyes, encompasses the idea that human and non-human domesticated animals are essentially related,

⁵⁴¹ This chapter is a version of the paper submitted to support my application for Transfer of Status in Michaelmas Term 2019. I would like to thank my assessors, Professor Diwakar Acharya and Professor Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, for their feedback to my writing as well as my thesis project in general. In a modified version, the arguments were presented in a paper called “*With my own skin I may flourish*”: *Brāhmaṇa prose on the relationship of men and cattle* at the 11th International Indology Graduate Research Symposium (IIGRS) held in November 2019 at the Wolfson College, University of Oxford. The paper will be published in the IIGRS conference proceedings; see Sojková: forthcoming b. Many thanks to Dr Yiming Shen and Valters Negribs for the invitation to contribute to the conference proceedings.

⁵⁴² Haraway: 1991, p. 178.

and that their relatedness is supported by their mutual, constant care for each other.⁵⁴³ Through the process of domestication and mutual care, they “become with” one another.⁵⁴⁴

Although it is deeply influenced by research in Multispecies Anthropology/Ethnography, Animal Studies, or the “ontological-turn-influenced” Humanities, the term “ontological proximity” is my own. I have coined the term, which I consider necessary, since I have not found a theoretical concept that would suit the situation described by the Vedic texts.

As we have seen many times by now, the human is understood to be a domesticated animal (*paśu*) in all Vedic genres. He is different from other domesticated animals, yet similar. Although two-footed and endowed with opposable thumbs, the human body is built from the same building blocks as the animal one. The Vedic texts suggest that although at present, the human is the only creature that speaks in an understandable manner and can sacrifice, there was a time when he was not exceptional in these matters. In the mythical past, the other domesticated animals had the same abilities. Just like the bodies of domesticated animals, the human body can theoretically be sacrificed, although more often, it is substituted by a different *paśu* or a dummy. This suggests that people and animals are interchangeable and hence close in terms of their essence. Their lives cannot be disentangled; they co-participate in each other’s existence. The notion of “ontological proximity” accounts for the human-animal entanglements and their shared essence.

In its theoretical background, the concept of “ontological proximity” is akin to what the anthropologist Radhika Govindrajan calls “relatedness”.⁵⁴⁵ Like Govindrajan, I am inspired by the theoretical framework developed by the “ontological turn” in ethnography, represented by scholars such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo Kohn, or Philippe Descola.⁵⁴⁶ The influence of the “ontological turn” on my work is evident in my usage of the word “ontology”. I use this term in the sense or “way or manner of being”, as it is used in the field.⁵⁴⁷ Moreover, I appreciate that the proponents of the “ontological turn” centre their discussions on indigenous people and their distinct understanding of the non-human world. They argue that all vernacular knowledge is of a “radical alterity”: as non-native researchers, we can never fully encompass it in our imaginative constructs.

⁵⁴³ I like the definition of care used by María Puig de la Bellacasa, who says that care is “vital in interweaving a web of life”, “a human trouble, but this does not make of care a human-only matter”. Bellacasa: 2017, p. 2 and 4.

⁵⁴⁴ The phrase “become with” is a now-famous quote from Donna Haraway’s work on multispecies entanglements: “to be one is always to *become with* many”. Haraway: 2008, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁵ Govindrajan: 2018.

⁵⁴⁶ Viveiros de Castro: 2015a, b. Kohn: 2013. Descola: 2014.

⁵⁴⁷ Graeber: 2015, p. 14-22. Graeber argues that in the ontological-turn-inspired literature (and well before that, considering that he identifies a paper of Irving Hallowell from 1960 in which the word is used in the same sense for the first time), the meaning has undergone a profound change in meaning from “the discourse on being” (onto-logy; the emphasis is intentional), as it is used in philosophy, to a more general idea of “way of being”.

Although my reading of the Vedic texts is influenced by the “ontological turn”, I am fairly cautious of its implications. Like Govindrajan, I am aware that if taken too far, the concept of “radical alterity” is too homogenous and static, and therefore bounding.⁵⁴⁸ Furthermore, as David Graeber argued, the subjects of ethnographic studies would not necessarily agree with the assertion that they inhabit a world radically different to ours.⁵⁴⁹

Besides the “ontological turn”, both Govindrajan and I take inspiration from Bruno Latour and his theory of a network of actors (more often known as “actor-network theory”, or ANT). A broad sociological theory, the ANT is a powerful tool which brings attention to relationships between different agents, human and non-human alike.⁵⁵⁰ The concept is succinctly explained by Radhika Govindrajan when she describes the methodological background of her field research: “I am especially drawn to work that extends subjectivity to nonhuman animals and approaches them as persons whose inner lives and affective states are critically shaped by their experience of life in a world they inhabit in relation to a host of others.”⁵⁵¹

Considering that we are rooted in the same methodological background, why am I not simply using Govindrajan’s terminology of “relatedness”? The principal reason is that our datasets are largely different. Govindrajan works with living communities of human and non-human (domesticated and wild) actors; I read ancient texts which mention the everyday life in these communities in passing. This influences how we read the room. For Govindrajan, the non-humans remain “intimate strangers”.⁵⁵² Based on her ethnographic research, in which she observes the separation between people and animals, she argues that:

“[...] relatedness does not overcome or erase ontological differences between human and nonhuman animals. I do not wish to suggest that in “becoming with” one another, humans and animals become one.”⁵⁵³

Govindrajan can base these assertions on what the anthropologist Anna Tsing calls “the art of noticing”: an immersive ethnographic act that engages sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.⁵⁵⁴ Unlike her, I cannot rely on my senses when researching the non-human animals in Vedic literature. Whilst treating the sources critically and philologically, I still have to take them at face value. If “relatedness” is a concept which encompasses ontological differences between human and non-human animals,

⁵⁴⁸ Govindrajan: 2018, p. 13.

⁵⁴⁹ Graeber: 2015.

⁵⁵⁰ Latour: 2005.

⁵⁵¹ Govindrajan: 2018, p. 20.

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁵⁴ Tsing: 2015, p. 37.

then it is, I believe, incompatible with what I read in the Vedic sources where the human and non-human animals share their essence, their “way of being”.

As argued at the outset, the aim of this chapter is to explore the concept of “ontological proximity”. Through a close reading of a mythical story about the origin of human skin and animal hide, I am hoping to exemplify the assertions made in the previous chapter § 3: the entanglement, “becoming with” of the human and non-human actors. As far as I am aware, the only scholar who worked with the myth about the origin of human skin was Wendy Doniger. In passing, it was also noted by Charles Malamoud.⁵⁵⁵ My interpretation is vastly different from that of both of the scholars; therefore, I will refer to their interpretations only rarely.

Formally, this chapter is divided into three subchapters. Its first section introduces the mythical narrative, its variants, and their ritual context. Following the texts, I offer two lines of interpretation of the mythical story. The first deals with the image of skin in Vedic literature and its connection to the human-animal relationship. This section expands on my discussion of bodily similarities in the *paśu* group, collected in the subchapter § 3.3. The last section of this chapter explores the consequences of the story on a larger, metaphysical scale, drawing on the parallel of the myth about Bhṛgu, the son of Varuṇa, and his travels in the yonder world.

⁵⁵⁵ JB trl O’Flaherty, 1985; and Doniger, 2015. Doniger’s interpretation of the myth is also followed by Das, 2013. Malamoud: 1996.

§ 4.1 THE NARRATIVE & THE RITUAL

The focus of the chapter, the mythical narrative about the origin of human skin, is possibly one of the most expressive stories in the Vedic prose. The myth tells a story of times when the skin that now covers the bodies of people used to be the skin of the livestock species. With such a thin skin, the *paśus* suffered from weather extremes and noxious insects; they decided to approach people (themselves, or mediated by gods, depending on the version) and exchange skin with them. Although it is a story about the history of human-animal body cover, it speaks to many aspects of the human-animal relationship that we have seen in the previous chapters: communication, sacrifice, proximity of species. It is yet another account of the mythical past when people and domestic animals were still close to each other in physique and mentality.

In full, the story occurs in two Brāhmaṇas: the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa (JB 2.182-3) and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, in both recensions (ŚBM 3.1.2.13-17 and ŚBK 4.1.2.8-9). In terms of the Brāhmaṇa prose, these passages are relatively long, self-contained stories. Following Stephanie Jamison's examination of the introductory formulae in middle Vedic literature, which we first discussed in § 3.4.2, we can prove the affinity of the three passages on the basis of their introductory sentences.

To remind us of Jamison's argument, she remarks that there are many instances in the Vedic prose that introduce a mythical story in an almost identical way, regardless of the *śākhā*. The following narrative can proceed with greater or lesser flexibility, but the shared incipit suggests that we are dealing with a distinctive myth. Jamison adds that:

“if we have incipits of myths in identical form agreeing across Śākhā boundaries, then the myth (or some of it) must have already existed, not merely as some vague kernel plot, but in a precise verbal form, before the division into Śākhās [...].”⁵⁵⁶

Jamison continues to categorise the formulae into two groups: that of an *individual myth*, “a single, self-contained story whose theme or main character is introduced in the first sentence”, and that of a *vehicle myth*, “general myths or mythical cycles [which] are applicable to a large set of contexts”.⁵⁵⁷ In the following discussion, as was the case in chapter § 3.4.2, we will be dealing with the “individual myth” category.

Jamison's observations about the incipits give us a theoretical apparatus to identify variants of the myth in different Brāhmaṇas. Indeed, there are two other instances of the introductory formulae in the Pañcaviṃśa and Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇas. Although these variants do not tell the myth in full, they

⁵⁵⁶ Jamison: 1997, p. 127.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 129-130.

include a few valuable details, enriching the Jaiminīya and Śatapatha passages. Altogether, this is the collection of all the introductory formulae:

JB 2.182	<i>rohiṇīm chaviṃ paridhatta</i>	He puts on a hide of a red cow.
ŚBK 4.1.2.8	<i>átha dikṣitavāsanaṃ páridhatte</i>	Now, he puts on a garment of an initiate.
ŚBM 3.1.2.13	<i>athá vásaḥ páridhatte</i>	Now, he puts on a garment.
PB 16.6.1	[...] <i>tac chaviṃ paridhatte</i>	[...] he puts on a hide.
KB 25.13.18	<i>vatsacchaviṃ paridadhīta</i>	He should put on a calfskin.

All the formulae are nearly identical and share the same syntactical structure. They are ritual prescriptions, ordering a sacrificer to dress in a certain type of clothing, either a hide (*chaviṃ*), or a garment (*vāsa*, *vasana*). Let us look at the two constitutive parts of the formula, the verb and the noun.

All incipits use the verb *paridhatte*, the 3rd sg. *ātmanepada* present from the root *pari* + $\sqrt{dhā}$, “to put on”, apart from the KB version, which uses the 3rd sg. *ātmanepada* optative from the same root, most likely in order to stress the importance of the ritual prescription.

Except for the Śatapatha variants which talk about a garment (*vāsa*, *vasana*), the object of the verb is the word *chaviṃ* meaning “hide, skin”. This is a rare term in the Vedic prose, and it is its occurrence that is a compelling reason to include the PB and KB passages which otherwise narrate only a short section of the myth. The term is used sparingly in the Brāhmaṇa literature. It occurs only six times, predominantly in the variant ending with -ī.⁵⁵⁸ The six instances can be split perfectly into two groups: a) three times, the word is found in the introductory formulae mentioned above, i.e. as an object of the verb *pari* + $\sqrt{dhā}$; b) the other three instances are found solely in the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (TB 1.2.6.3, 2.3.6.2, and 2.3.7.2), in passages referring to the mythical cycle according to which Prajāpati emits beings. The act of creation exhausts Prajāpati, breaks him into pieces, and he has to be healed by other gods. In the passages in question, Prajāpati is reconstituted by means of various *haviryajñas* (here called generally *yajñakratu*, “a sacrificial rite”)⁵⁵⁹ which are listed systematically according to the number of priests needed for the sacrifice. In all three instances, *chaviṃ* is a second element in a list of bodily parts which are acquired by means of the *cāturmāsya*, the “four-monthly” seasonal sacrifice, and are used to reconstruct Prajāpati’s body:

⁵⁵⁸ As far as the Vedic Saṃhitās are concerned, the term *chaviṃ* occurs only three times, twice in TS 5.7.20.1, in the section on *aśvamedha*, and once in KS 53.10.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Hillebrandt: 1897, p. 165-6.

TB 2.3.6.2-3⁵⁶⁰

<i>pañcakṛtvó 'hwayat paśávaḥ prátyaśṛṇvan té</i>	He cried out five times. The animals heard him.
<i>cāturmāsyáir evá yajñakratúnā úpaparyávantanta </i>	They went to his aid by means of <i>cāturmāsyā</i>
<i>tá úpauhan lóma cchavīṃ māmśám ásthi</i>	sacrifice. They brought him hair, hide, flesh, bone,
<i>majjānam </i>	[and] marrow. Therefore, there are five priests of
<i>tásmāc cāturmāsyānāṃ yajñakratóḥ 2</i>	the <i>cāturmāsyā</i> sacrifice.
<i>pañca ṛtvjáḥ [...] 3</i>	

Hair, hide, flesh, bone, and marrow: these five elements are the building blocks of the five *paśus*. We have discussed this list already in § 3.3. The examples we looked at in our previous discussion, however, standardly included the words *tvac* or *carman*, “skin”, in the second position. It is unclear why the three TB passages decided to use the word *chavī* instead of the more common terms. Perhaps, the term could be a local dialect term or neologism extant only in the Taittirīya *śākhā*, although its Young Avestan cognate might suggest otherwise.⁵⁶¹ Perhaps, it is used due to its disyllabic form which, as Jamison showed, is an important element of the formula.⁵⁶² Whatever the reason, it is clear that since the word *chavī* is found only six times in the whole of the prose corpus and half of the instances occur in the formula introducing our myth, it is very probable that the two passages (PB 16.6.1, KB 25.13.18) are variants of that myth, albeit short and less detailed than their JB and ŚB counterparts.

The mythical narrative occurs in two separate ritual contexts. The passages JB 2.182-3, PB 16.6.1, and KB 25.13.18 are set within exposition of the ritual practice called *viśvajit*, whereas the Śatapatha passages discuss it in the midst of their exposition on *dikṣā*, ritual initiation. In what follows, I will quote the passages and explain their ritual context.

The mythical narrative which occurs in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is perhaps the most complete version of the story. Embedded in the discussion of the *viśvajit* (the “all-conquering”) sacrifice, it is a mythical explanation of the use of the hide of a red cow (*rohiṇī chavī*). It introduces the key points of our story: in the mythical past, the livestock were not satisfied with their skin and approached people to barter it for their own bodies. Since then, the Jaiminīya says, animals are eaten by people and their

⁵⁶⁰ In the TB's account of the reconstruction of Prajāpati's body, the list of five bodily parts is preceded by a trunk (*kusindham*), four limbs (*aṅgāni*), and followed by a list of six generative “organs”: two breasts, two testicles, downward turned penis, and breath (*stanau, āṇḍau, śísnam avāñcam, prāṇam*), seven breaths “in the head”[?] (*śiṛṣanyān prāṇān*), and the totality of Prajāpati's self (*sarvam ātmānam aparivargam*). The parallel passage in TB 1.2.6.3 includes *chavī* in a shorter, threefold list: *lóma chavī ásthi*, “hair, skin, bone”.

⁵⁶¹ Mayrhofer: *EWA*, Bd. 1, p. 557, lists the lemma *chavī* as a term that is found from KS onwards, and connects it possibly with YAv *suri*, “skin of a living human”, possibly from *s(ə)uuī.

⁵⁶² Jamison: 1986. Cf. MS 3.3.3: *dvyākṣaram lóma dvýākṣarā tvág dvýākṣaram māmśam dvýākṣaram ásthi dvýākṣaro majjā*, “‘Hair’ is disyllabic; ‘skin’ is disyllabic; ‘meat’ is disyllabic; ‘bone’ is disyllabic; ‘marrow’ is disyllabic.”

hide is used for clothing. In the next world, however, the tables will turn, and the livestock will take advantage of people.

Before we look at the Jaiminīya version of the story let me briefly discuss the *viśvajit* sacrifice. The *viśvajit* is one of the *ekāhas*, the one-day soma-sacrifices based on the *jyotiṣṭoma*. Crucially, the sacrificer gives away all his wealth (or a thousand cows, which is perhaps just a ritual substitution for “all wealth”) during the ritual. Following the ceremony, the *yajamāna* leaves his home clothed in a hide of a red cow and for the subsequent twelve days dwells in various places for three days at a time. First, he stays at a root of an *udumbara* tree (*Ficus glomerata*), subsisting only on fruits and roots which he digs himself.⁵⁶³ Then he moves to a settlement of Niṣādas, the non-Aryan inhabitants of ancient India who are described as living “neither in a village, nor in a wilderness” (*na grāmo nāraṇyo*). After three days there, he moves to an Aryan settlement, and dwells with Vaiśyas (or in PB, foreigners) for three days, followed by three days with Kṣatriyas (in PB, his own kin). For a whole year after, he should wander, sleep outside on the ground, dress in and eat only what is given to him and should not beg.⁵⁶⁴

Knowing a little more about the ritual context, let us consider the Brāhmaṇa passages now: the Jaiminīya account in full, telling the myth as well as the ritual context; and the initial sentences from the Pañcaviṃśa and Kauṣītaki.

JB 2.182-183⁵⁶⁵

*rohiṇūṃ chaviṃ paridhatta, etad vai paśūnāṃ
priyaṃ rūpaṃ yad rohiṭaṃ, paśūnāṃ eva tat
priyeṇa rūpeṇa samṛdhyate, khanate, khanitram
avṛttim apajayaty, ubhayataḥkṣṇūr abhrir bhavaty,
ubhayata evāsmā annādyam radaty, araṇye tisro
vasati, yad āraṇyam annādyam tad eva tābhir
avarunddhe, na grāme nāraṇye tisro, yan na grāme
nāraṇye 'nnādyam tad eva tābhir, jane tisro, janyam
tābhis, sajane tisras, sajanyam tābhis, tā dvādaśa
sampadyante, dvādaśa māsās saṃvatsaras,
saṃvatsarād evānnādyam avarunddhe, rohiṇūṃ
chaviṃ paridhatta, eṣā ha vā agre paśūnāṃ tvag āsa
yā puruṣasya, yā paśūnāṃ sā puruṣasya, te paśava
ātapaṃ varṣaṃ daṃśān maśakān na dhārayanti, te
puruṣam etyābruvan puruṣeyam tava tvag astv
eṣāsmākam iti, kiṃ tatas syād ity, ādyās te syāma ity*

182. He puts on the skin of a red cow. The one which is red is the own colour [form] of livestock. In that way, he prospers with the livestock's own colour. He digs [the food with] a digger – he wards off the lack of prosperity. [The digger] is a two-edged sharp scrape – he scrapes the proper food for himself from the both sides [i.e. from this world and the yonder world]. He dwells in the forest for the duration of three [nights] – whatever is the eating of food connected to the forest, he obtains that by those [three nights]. He [dwells] neither in the village nor in the forest for the duration of three [nights] – whatever is the eating of food which is neither in the village nor in the forest, he [obtains] that by those [three nights]. [He dwells] for the duration of three

⁵⁶³ For the symbolism of *udumbara*, see Minkowski: 1989.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Kane: *HDS*, vol. II. 2, p. 1212-13, n. 2644.

⁵⁶⁵ I am using the unpublished edition of Gerhard Ehlers, available on TITUS. The translation is my own. For the sake of space, I use commas where Ehlers uses line breaks to divide syntactical units. Many thanks to Professor Minkowski and Dr Antonia Ruppel who read the text with me in Hilary Term 2019.

abruvann, idaṃ te vāsa iti vāsaḥ prāyacchaṃs, tad yad rohiṇīṃ chaviṃ paridhatte svenaiva tad rūpeṇa samṛdhyate, tathā hainam amuṣmin loke paśavo nādanty, adanti ha vā amuṣmin loke paśavaḥ puruṣaṃ, tasmād u ha gor ante nagno na syād, īśvaro hāsmād apakramitos tvacam asya bibharmīti || 182
sā sapucchā bhavati kṛtsnatvāya [...] || 183

[nights] amongst [foreign]⁵⁶⁶ people – [whatever is the] foreign [eating of food], [he obtains that] by those [three nights]. [He dwells] for the duration of three [nights] together with [his own] people – [whatever is the eating of food] of his own people, [he obtains that] by those [three nights]. They add up to twelve. Twelve months is a full year. He obtains the eating of food from the full year. He puts on the skin of a red cow. In the beginning, the skin of livestock was the one which is of a man, [and] the [skin] which is of cattle [was] of a man. The livestock [could not] endure heat, rain, gadflies [and] mosquitos. Coming to the man, they said: “O man, let this skin of yours be ours.” “What would be from that [for me]?” They said: “We could be eaten by you.” They offered clothing, [saying]: “This [would be] your clothing.” In that way, when he puts on the skin of the reddish cow, he thus succeeds by his own form. In this way, the cattle do not eat him in the yonder world. On the other hand, the cattle eat a man in the yonder world. Therefore, one should not be naked in the proximity of a cow. It is liable to run away from him, [thinking]: “I bear his skin.”

183. For the sake of wholeness, [the skin] is endowed with a tail. [...].

The Pañcaviṃśa, and Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇas provide a much shorter, condensed account of the story; their focus is mostly the commentary on the ritual activity. For the sake of brevity, I will not quote their discussion of the ritual in full. Both accounts mostly affirm what is found in the Jaiminiya, though some interesting points are added such as the fact that red colour is the most common for cattle (PB), and that putting on a calfskin during the ritual equals being naked, bare (KB).

PB 16.6.1-2

{paśu}bhīr⁵⁶⁷ vā eṣa vyṛdhyata ity āhur yaḥ sarvaṃ dadāti tac chaviṃ paridhatte paśubhir eva samṛdhyate | 1

⁵⁶⁶ In the translation *jana* as “foreign”, I follow Caland’s translation. Caland collects all the evidence for the meaning of *jana* in his translation of the parallel passage from the PB (most notably ŚB 1.7.3., MS 1.4.99: 57.4). Kane: *HDŚ*, vol. II, 2, p. 1212-13, n. 2644, mentions that *jana* is a person from another *gotra*.

⁵⁶⁷ Although both the edition of Chinnaśwami Śāstri and the electronic edition of Kümmel, Griffiths, and Kobayashi read *paraśubhir*, I follow Caland’s translation and read *paśubhir*. The same reading is also implied by

rohiṇī chavī bhavaty etad vai paśunā bhūyiṣṭhaṃ [as upper garment] a hide; he is not separated from cattle.⁵⁶⁸
rūpaṃ yad rohiṭaṃ sākṣād evainān avarundhe | 2

2. The hide is red, for this is the colour most common to cattle [cows]. In that it is red, he obtains [cattle] in bodily form.⁵⁶⁹

KB 25.15⁵⁷⁰

vatsacchavīm paridadhīta | riricāna iva vā He should put on a calfskin. Bare as it were
etasyātmā bhavati yaḥ sarvaṃ dadāti | vatsaṃ vai becomes the body of whom who gives all. [He
paśavo vāñchanti | punar mā paśavo vāñchantv iti | puts {on the calfskin} thinking] ‘Cattle desire a calf; let cattle desire me.’

The Śatapatha versions of our myth are largely similar to the JB, although in both of the recensions, there are slight variations in the narrative. Let me quote the ŚBK version here; the ŚBM is close to its counterpart in terms of content but is longer and differs in the usage of certain verb forms. Following the passage, I will discuss its integration in the discussion of the *dikṣā*.

ŚBK 4.1.2.8-9⁵⁷¹

ātha dikṣitavāsanaṃ pāridhatte sarvatvāya vai 8. Now, he puts on the garment of an initiate
dikṣitavāsanaṃ pāridhatte kṛtsnātāyai pūruṣe ha vā indeed for the sake of completeness. He puts on
iyam āgre tvāg āsā yeyaṃ gāvi || 8 the garment of an initiate for the sake of
té ha devā ūcur iyaṃ vā idaṃ sārvaṃ bibharti yad wholeness (*kṛtsnātāyai*). In the past (*agre*), the
gaur iti hāntā yeyaṃ pūruṣe tvak tām avacchāyā skin which is on the cow used to be on the man.
gāvi dādadhāma tāyeyaṃ ghṛṇīm titikṣiṣyāte tāyā 9. The gods said: “This one, the cow, supports
vārśantaṃ tāyā himam iti tathēti tām avacchāyā everything.” “Look! The skin which is now on the
gāvya adadhus tāyaiṣā ghṛṇīm titikṣate tāyā man, having flayed it, let us put it onto the cow.
vārśantaṃ tāyā himam athāyām āvacchitāḥ pūruṣo With it, it will be able to endure the heat, rain,

Sāyaṇa, who says *yo yajamānaḥ sarvaṃ dhanam dadāti eṣa paśubhiḥ khaly vyṛdhyaṭe vihiyate sarveṣu gavādīnām paśūnām dattatvāt iti brāhmanavādina āhuḥ ||* The emphasis is mine. For the full passage, see PB ed Chinnaśwami Śāstri, part II, p. 233.

⁵⁶⁸ Notice that Caland translates the verb *sam* + *√rdh* as “to be separated from”, possibly in an antithesis to *vy* + *√rdh*. In the JB sections, I have translated the same verb (+ a noun in I) as “to succeed with, prosper, flourish”. In my understanding, a translation closer to the original would be “He who gives all, that one is indeed deprived of cattle. He puts on the hide (*chavīm*); he succeeds with the cattle [form].”

⁵⁶⁹ Again, Caland’s reading is peculiar here, as he understands *yad rohiṭaṃ* to go with the sentence that follows it. I think otherwise, understanding *sākṣād evainān avarundhe* as a separate sentence. In my translation, the verse would mean roughly: “The hide is red. That which is red, that is the most abundant form/colour of livestock. He obtains them [= livestock] personally (*sākṣāt*).”

⁵⁷⁰ This is the numbering of Lindner’s edition and Keith’s translation. Due to the different subdivision of *khaṇḍas* in the Kerala edition, the passage is found under the designation 25.13.18–25.14.22 in Sarma’s edition. The simple *danḍas* are adopted from the Kerala edition. I am modifying Keith’s translation here to deliver a clearer understanding of the passage; instead of “he puts round” (emphasis mine), I say “he puts on the calfskin”.

⁵⁷¹ I am using the edition of Willem Caland, see in ŚBK ed Caland. There is a newer edition and English translation by C. R. Swaminathan (in ŚBK trl Swaminathan), however, the translation seems to be rather rough and not very exact. For example, Swaminathan translates *dikṣitavāsanaṃ* as “the garment [prescribed for the vow]”. I am providing my own translation instead of his.

'vacchito hi⁵⁷² vai púruṣas tasmād yátrá kva cāsyāpī kuśó víkṛntāti táta eva lóhitam útpatati tásminn etāṃ tvācam ádadhuryad vāsaḥ púruṣasya hi vā eṣā tvak āsmād etāṃ nānyāḥ paśúr bibharti tasmād u suvāsā evā bubhūṣet tad dhi svayā tvacā sámṛddho bhávati tasmād ápy aślilāṃ suvāsasaṃ didṛkṣanta eva sváyā hí tvacā sámṛddho bhávati tasmād gór ante ná nagnāḥ syād véda ha gaúr ahám asya tvācam bibharmīti sá hāsmād īśvaras trāsitor yán me 'yaṃ tvācam nādadhūtēti tasmāt suvāsasaṃ úpaiva níśrayante paśávaḥ || 9

[and] cold." [Saying] "yes," having flayed it, they put it onto the cow. With it, [the cow] is able to endure the heat, rain, [and] cold. Now, the man is flayed. For indeed the man is flayed. Therefore, wherever the *kuśa* grass cuts him, from there the blood flows. Therefore, on [him] they placed this garment which is his skin. For indeed [this garment] is the man's skin. Other than him, no domestic animal (*paśu*) wears it. Therefore, one should strive to be well dressed. For he becomes successful with his own skin. Therefore, [people] want to see even a lowly person well dressed. For he becomes fulfilled with his own skin. On that account, one should not be naked near a cow. For the cow knows: "I wear his skin." [The cow] is liable to be afraid of him [thinking]: "Will he not take my skin?" Therefore, the domestic animals resort to the one who is well dressed.

The basic plot of the myth is largely similar to the JB, yet there are differences. Most importantly, the ŚB lacks the metaphysical outcome of the skin exchange. The cattle do not offer themselves as food, and therefore, people are not threatened to be eaten in the yonder world. Moreover, the gods are the agents of the story; they make the decision that the cow, the supporter of the whole universe, needs a new skin and hence, they flay the man. Naked and prone to be cut, the human has to wear clothes since then, a feature that distinguishes him from the rest of the *paśus*, domestic animals.

Unlike the three previous passages, the ŚB recensions situate the mythological story within the discussion of the *dikṣā*, the consecration or initiation of the sacrificer before the *agniṣṭoma* ritual. The *dikṣā* commences in the afternoon, following a preparation of the place of worship. As is widely known, the main focus of the *dikṣā* is the ritual purification of the sacrificer. At first, the sacrificer mainly prepares his own body for the ritual: he shaves his hair and beard, cuts his nails, brushes his teeth, and bathes. When clean, he puts on a garment – the point at which the ŚB introduces our mythical narrative. He smears his body with butter and performs the *dikṣaṇīyā iṣṭi*, a ritual sequence which entitles him to be called a *dikṣita*, initiand. In that state, the sacrificer observes silence and subsists on milk and a simple diet. On the prominent days of the ritual, he is not allowed to sleep at all, and on the days when he can, he sleeps on the ground in the middle of the ritual ground, never turning his back towards the *āhavanīya* fire. He observes celibacy, is not allowed to touch or to speak

⁵⁷² Although I would have expected *ha vai*, both Caland and Swaminathan read *hi vai*.

to anybody, and always sits on the blackbuck hide, holding his token antelope horn and staff made from *udumbara* wood.⁵⁷³

From a ritual perspective, the *dikṣā* and *viśvajit* have different goals and purposes, yet I would argue that in terms of structure, they share certain symbolic features. They remind one of a classic rite of passage with its tripartite structure: a) separation, b) liminality, and c) aggregation, first described by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep and further developed by the Scottish ethnographer Victor Turner.⁵⁷⁴

“The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a ‘state’), or from both. During the intervening ‘liminal’ period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger’) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more [...].”⁵⁷⁵

The use of the same mythical narrative only adds to the structural similarities of the respective rituals. The Brāhmaṇa passages referring to the *viśvajit* introduce the myth in the moment when the sacrificer gives up all possessions and lives a semi-ascetic life on the fringes of society. For some time, the sacrificer lives an almost animal life, wearing the cow hide, sustaining himself on roots and fruits (cf. KB 25.15). Furthermore, his liminality is underlined by eating food “which is neither in the village nor in the forest” (JB 2.182). He then gradually enters Vedic society, approaching from the bottom to the top of the hierarchical structure, starting with the non-Vedic Nīṣādas. In the moment when the sacrificer puts on the hide that will cover him for the whole time of the ritual, the JB tells the story about the origin of the skin which now covers the body of the sacrificer, as if the skin was the material proof of the sacrificer’s change of status. Since the mythical barter, humans are never “either here or there”. Their existence is shaped by the primordial exchange; if not in this world, then in another one, when they are eaten by cattle. The hide of a red cow worn by the sacrificer during the ritual expresses the ambiguity of the human condition – they are *paśu* but differ from the rest of the class – and the ambiguity of the ritual practices carried out after the *viśvajit* rite.

The ŚB utilises the myth in a slightly different part of the tripartite ritual structure. Here, it is mentioned in the first, separative phase, i.e. when the sacrificer is preparing for the main *iṣṭi* of the

⁵⁷³ For more details, see the indispensable source for the description of the *agnīṣṭoma*, the classic volume *L’Agniṣṭoma*, Caland & Henry: 1906-7. I have also found helpful Kane’s account in Kane: *HDŚ*, vol.II.2, p. 1135ff.

⁵⁷⁴ Van Gennep: 1960, and Turner: 1997, ch. 3.

⁵⁷⁵ Turner: 1997, p. 94-5.

dikṣā sequence. He has just cleansed his whole body and now, he puts on a garment “for the sake of completeness” (in ŚBM *sarvatvāyaiva*). The garment is equal to his original skin which he lost to cattle in the mythical past. In this case, the sacrificer is also moving away from his original state into the ambiguous state of an initiand. The fact that the *dikṣā* is a transformation into a new state of being, a rebirth, is clear from the passage AB 1.1.3 which refers to the *dikṣā* in almost obstetric terms: *punar vā etam ṛtvijo garbhaṃ kurvanti yaṃ dikṣayanty*, “The priests make the one whom they consecrate into an embryo again.” Again, I would suggest that the ritual clothing that the *yajamāna* dons is a materialisation of the change of his status and nature. Until the end of the *agniṣṭoma* performance, the *yajamāna* remains a *dikṣita*. He lives on the borders of human and animal existence, encompassing both. The sacrificer dressed in the ritual garment representing the cow hide (i.e. in his original skin) suggests that the mythical past and the primordial affinity of species has not been forgotten, or at least not in the realm of ritual.

§ 4.2 ON SKIN

Now that we have reviewed the myth and its ritual context, let me commence with its interpretation. Its first part focuses on the most superficial topic of the mythical narrative: the skin (*tvac*) and hide (*carman*, *chavi*) covering the bodies of people and cattle, and the symbolism surrounding this body part. In this section, I will argue that the myth as well as the ritual usage of hide points to what I call “ontological proximity”, a way of being shared by people and domestic animals.

The premise of the myth is clear: people and livestock swapped their bodily cover in the mythical past. But what does skin stand for in the Vedic symbolic canon? How can we understand the flaying of a man and his subsequent need of clothing? What are the intertextual and semantic connections of the symbol? These questions provide the structure for the following discussion.

As we have seen several times in the previous subchapter, in the mythical past, the skin of cattle was that which at present covers the human body and vice versa:

JB 2.182

eṣā ha vā agre paśūnām tvag āsa yā puruṣasya, yā paśūnām sā puruṣasya | Once upon a time (*agre*), the skin of cattle was the one which is of a man, [and] that [skin] which is of cattle [was] man’s.

For the sake of this interpretation, I will be treating skin (*tvac*) and hide (*carman*, *chavi*) as interchangeable. Outside of our myth, the words are used interchangeably by the Vedic corpus, for example in the fivefold list of bodily parts.⁵⁷⁶ Possibly, they are seen as variations of the same bodily part, perhaps with the slight distinction that one is predominantly without hair (*tvac*, used for people, snakes, etc.) and the other one hairy (*carman*, *chavi*), although this difference does not always hold true.

In the Vedic corpus, the bodies of creatures are often divided into a number of parts, grouped into various lists.⁵⁷⁷ Some of these lists mention skin, some do not. We discussed one of these in the previous chapter § 3.3 – namely the fivefold list of constitutive bodily parts, featuring skin on the second position, following hair, *loma*. Common sense would suggest that skin serves as a bodily cover in these lists. This is the case in the example from the Atharvaveda, cited below, which lists slightly different body parts from the list that we examined previously:

⁵⁷⁶ I have discussed this in § 3.3. For more details, see Jamison: 1986, p. 174-5.

⁵⁷⁷ According to Zysk: 1986, these lists might take an inspiration from the ritual dissections of domestic animals; he however, does not provide much evidence for this. On different words for various butchers and other professional animal handlers, see Rau: 1957, p. 24.

AVŚ 11.8.15

śíro hástāv átho múkhaṃ jihvāṃ grīvāś ca kíkāsāḥ | Head, [two] hands, also face, tongue and neck,
tvacā prāvṛtya sárvaṃ tát saṃdhá sám adadhān vertebrae – all that having enveloped with skin,
mahí || the great-putting together put together.

What is the symbolic value of skin? In her literary and historical-anthropological treatment of human skin, Claudia Benthien argues that there are two ways to understand the motif of skin in modern European languages and literature:

“First, there is the idea that the skin encloses the self: skin is imagined as a protective and sheltering cover but in some expressions also as a concealing and deceptive one. [...] A second group of sayings equates the skin with the subject, the person: here the essence does not lie beneath the skin, hidden inside. Rather, it is the skin itself, which stands metonymically for the whole human being.”⁵⁷⁸

Even though Benthien’s book refers to texts thousands of miles and years away from middle Vedic prose, her understanding of the motif encompasses similar semantic aggregates to what we found in the Brāhmaṇas: the skin is a *pars pro toto* for the whole being, a boundary between one’s essence and the world. Nakedness and the flayed body are essentially its opposite. Clothing, furthermore, serves as a substitute for the flayed skin, at least according to the Śatapatha versions.

Ancient Indian textual sources dealing with the motif of skin are relatively scarce, as are Indo-European sources.⁵⁷⁹ We find, however, a few examples. As far as the metaphorical usage of skin is concerned, the Brāhmaṇas often use the imagery of a snake shedding its skin. This image serves as a simile for getting rid of the evil, such as in the following ŚBM passage: just as a snake gets rid of his skin – relatively regularly and easily – in the same way the priest officiating the *agnihotra* casts away the darkness of the night and the evil.

ŚBM 2.3.1.6⁵⁸⁰

sa yathāhis tvacó nirmucyéta | evaṃ rátreḥ Even as a snake frees itself from its skin, so does it
pāpmāno nirmucyate yáthā ha vā áhis tvacó [...] free itself from the night, from the evil: and,
nirmucyétaivaṃ sárvasmāt pāpmāno nirmucyate yá verily, whosoever, knowing this, offers the
eváṃ vidván agnihotrāṃ juhóti [...] *agnihotra*, he frees himself from all evil, even as a
 snake frees itself from its skin; [...].

⁵⁷⁸ Benthien: 2002, p. 17.

⁵⁷⁹ The exception is the well-developed motif in the old Germanic sources, largely known as “shapeshifting”. In Old Norse and Old English literatures, gods and heroes frequently change their own anthropomorphic skin for an animal one. This is usually done in order to use a certain skill, available only when they are of a different shape. The god Óðinn, for example, takes on the *hamr* (skin, shape) of an eagle in order to fly away with the stolen mead of poetry, hidden in his beak. See *Skáldskaparmál*, in Faulkes: 1987, p. 60. For more examples of *hamr*, see Ellis Davidson: 1986.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. ŚBM 2.5.2.47; 9.2.6.13; AB 6.1.6-7; 18.7.

The ritual literature provides evidence for the material usage of hide. Hides are used as mats, being spread out at the west of the sacrificial fire. There are numerous instances of this ritual feature in many Vedic texts, each of which explains its usage differently. The texts usually prescribe a blackbuck hide but other animals are found as well – tiger, boar, cow and ox, he-goat, etc.⁵⁸¹ As an example, consider this ŚBM passage on the preparation of the fire altar for the ritual of the *agnicayana*:

ŚBM 7.3.2.1

[...] *pravargyopasádbhyām pracaryáthaitām cārmaṇi cítiṇ samávaśamayanti tad yac cārmaṇi cārma vaí rūpāṇ rūpāṇām úpāptyai lomato lóma vaí rūpāṇ rūpāṇām úpāptyai róhite róhite ha sárvaṇi rūpāṇi sárveṣāṇ rūpāṇām úpāptyā ánaḍuḥe 'gnir eṣa yád anaḍván agnirūpāṇām úpāptyai prācínagrīve tad dhí devatrā ||*

[...] Having performed the *pravargya* and the *upasad*, they appease that [first] layer on the [red ox-]skin. And as to why on a skin: for the obtainment, the skin being outward form; – on the hair side: for the obtainment of the forms, hair being the outward form; – on a ruddy [skin]: for the obtainment of all forms, all forms [colours being contained] in the ruddy; on [the skin] of an ox: for the obtainment of Agni's forms, the ox being the same as Agni; – on [the skin spread] with the neck towards the east, for that [tends] godward.

Jan Gonda suggests that the hide spread out at the sacrificial ground neutralises and destroys the evil influences, appeases (*samávaśamayanti*) the first layer of bricks on the altar. According to Gonda, the hide constitutes “a ‘natural boundary’ between two spheres”, the human and divine.⁵⁸² Elsewhere, the blackbuck hide represents sacrifice; the ŚBM uses the formula *yajño vaí kṛṣṇājīnām*, “a skin of a black antelope is indeed the sacrifice”, many times, as I have noted in § 2.2.⁵⁸³ Both these meanings of animal hide – it being a boundary between spheres and a symbol of a larger, abstract concept – are helpful directions in which we can take the interpretation of our myth.

We have discussed the ritual usage of the animal hide and the metaphorical image of a snake shedding its skin. As far as the mythological narratives are concerned, however, skin is the main motif of only one other myth – the story of a girl called Apālā. She is known to the ancient Indian literature since the time of the Ṛgveda where she acts as the main protagonist (and author) of the hymn ṚV 8.92.

⁵⁸¹ Regarding the blackbuck skin, see chapter § 2.2.3-4. For more details, consider KauśS 67.23, ŚBM 5.2.1.21, or the description in Caland & Henry: 1906, p. 30, 41, or 103-4. The reasoning behind the blackbuck skin as an important sacrificial instrument is e.g. in ŚBM 1.1.4.1-3.

⁵⁸² Gonda: 1965, p. 125. Cf. KauśS 7.22 where the oblations placed on the sacrificial skin undergo a *saṃskāra* (purification, initiation) and are made ritually fit.

⁵⁸³ E.g. ŚBM 1.1.4.1-5.

The myth is later treated by the JB 1.221, where we find more details of the narrative: there, Apālā is said to have moles (*tilakā*) and a bad skin (*rucchvasā*). Unhappy about her looks, she finds a stalk of *soma* on the road, chews it, and offers it to Indra, asking to make her father's field, his bald head, and her own belly (i.e. genitals) become "hairy". Fulfilling her wish, Indra also makes her "sun-skinned" (*sūryatvac*),⁵⁸⁴ using the most curious method. Three times, he pulls Apālā through various holes in a cart or a chariot and she becomes an animal (or her skin changes into a skin of a certain animal).⁵⁸⁵ First, she is pulled through a hole of the chariot and she/her skin becomes a lizard; when pulled through a hole in a cart, she becomes a chameleon, and lastly, when pulled through a hole in a yoke, she becomes "the one to be embraced" (*saṃśliṣṭakā*).⁵⁸⁶ Here is the AVŚ version as an example:

AVŚ 14.1.41

khé ráthasya khé 'nasaḥ khé yugāsya śatakrato |
apālām indra trīṣ pūtvākṛṇoḥ sūryatvacam || 41

In the hole of the chariot, in the hole of the cart,
in the hole of the yoke, o thou of a hundred
activities; having thrice purified Apālā, o Indra,
you didst make her sun-skinned.

The standard interpretation of this mythical episode, probably stemming from Sāyaṇa's *itihāsa* to the ṚV 8.92, used to be that Apālā is a woman afflicted with a skin disease causing hair loss. Hanns-Peter Schmidt, however, has argued that it is most likely that Apālā is a young girl on the verge of puberty who has acne and longs for pubic hair which will make her mature and marriageable.⁵⁸⁷

As was the case for most ancient Indo-Europeans, among the Indo-Iranians, there was no separate female puberty or initiation rite (many argue that it must have been subsumed under the marriage early on, if it existed at all), and the hymn thus lack a direct ritual counterpart. Yet, Schmidt sees the ṚV Apālā-*sūkta* from this perspective:

"The hymn telescopes the slow process of incipient pubescence to full maturity."⁵⁸⁸

"The hymn is not only a legendary account of a girl's growth into nubility put in analogy with the reawakening of nature, but also a rather human and touching document inasmuch as it offers a glimpse

⁵⁸⁴ The sun-like quality of a skin does not apply only to Apālā. In the ṚV, this epithet is used also for the chariot of the Ásvins (1.47.9; 8.8.2) and the Vedic poets (7.59.11). The PB narrates the story of a female Aṅgiras Akūpāra who is made sun-skinned by Indra (PB 9.2.14). On its possible connection to the Apālā myth, see the commentary of Jamison: 1991, p. 146-182. In the ŚBM, the adjective "sun-skinned" is used in the consecration ceremony before the *rājasūya*, ŚBM 5.3.4.12 (the mantras including the term are from the VS 10.4).

⁵⁸⁵ This variation is found in the *Bṛhaddevatā* 6.106.

⁵⁸⁶ Interpretation of the word *saṃśliṣṭakā* based on Schmidt: 1987, p. 7-8.

⁵⁸⁷ Schmidt: 1987, p. 1-29. See also Jamison: 1991, p. 146-182.

⁵⁸⁸ Schmidt: 1987, p. 28.

into the girl's private worries and fantasies while she is preparing herself for the event she is half dreading, half yearning for: to be a woman and a wife."⁵⁸⁹

The myth about Apālā is by all means different to the myth on the origin of human skin, as is clear from Schmidt's conclusion. Despite that, I would like to suggest that they share an important thematic element: the skin and its condition have symbolic dimensions. Apālā clearly wants to get rid of her skin troubles (*pāpaṃ varṇaṃ*), be it alopecia or acne. She says, in the Jaiminīya version (JB 1.220): *sākāmayatāpa pāpaṃ varṇaṃ hanīyati*, "She wished: 'Might I smash off my bad colour.'" She succeeds in this by a private offering to Indra, literally performed by chewing *soma* stalks in her mouth. When Indra pulls her through the various holes, not only does he make her skin similar to the sun (*sūryatvacam*) and her form the most beautiful of all forms (*tasyai ha yat kalyāṇatamaṃ rūpāṇāṃ tad rūpaṃ āsa*) but he also changes her social – and therefore ritual – status from a pubescent girl to a marriageable woman, wife. In a way, Indra makes Apālā complete, perfected. As I shall explain shortly, I suggest that the symbolic meaning of the skin in our myth is comparable: the change in Apālā's skin quality alludes to the change of her status as a person living in a community.

Skin, as the ŚBM said in one of the quoted passages above, is the outer form. Symbolically, it is a materialisation of the relationships one has with their community, human and nonhuman. In the ŚB versions of our myth at least, the original human skin (i.e. bovine hide) has to be substituted by clothes. These are needed to cover the naked body which would cause distress to the livestock; to protect one against cuts (clothing is protection, as the AB says below); and to show off his success in the community. From then on, skin equals clothing, and clothing equals well-being and prosperity, as is suggested in the following passages:

AB 7.13

annaṃ ha prāṇa śaraṇaṃ ha vāso

Breath is food; clothing is a protection.

AVŚ 19.24.6

*pārīdāṃ vāso adhithāḥ svastáyé 'bhūr {v}āpīnām⁵⁹⁰
abhiśastipá u |
śatām ca jīva śarādaḥ purūcīr vāsūni cārur ví bhajāsi
jīvan || 6*

Thou hast wrapped thyself in this garment {for} well-being; thou hast become protector of thine allies [?] against imprecation; and live thou a hundred numerous autumns; living, pleasant (*cāru*), thou shalt share out good things.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁹⁰ Whitney emends *vāpīnām* to *āpīnām*, drawing on a reading from the Mantra-Pāṭha 2.2.8 and one of his AVŚ mss. (he does not state which one). See note for verse 6 in AVŚ trl Whitney, p. 936. Furthermore, I modify his translation "garment in order to well-being", and am very unsure about his translation "ally".

Clothing not only ensures prosperity and protection, but it also provides an opportunity to reacquire the natural state of the body, lost by the skin exchange. It allows the human to transform himself from the wounded, naked being into a consecrated sacrificer. For both the JB and the ŚB, the garment of an initiand or the hide of a *rohiṇī* cow has a sense of completeness (*krtsnatvā, sarvatvā*).

“For the sake of completeness” (*sarvatvāya*) is a usual phrase found in the Brāhmaṇa prose, expressing the idea of integrity, wholeness, and perfection which is at the forefront of Vedic thought. If a ritual is incomplete, it has no efficacy; if the body of a sacrificial victim is not up to a certain standard, it cannot be sacrificed; and if a human being is in any way abnormal, it is unhealthy (remember the poor Apālā, who wants a better version of her skin in order to become a complete woman). This axiom is transposed to everything else in the universe as well. Its meaning is close to metaphysical, as Gonda notes:

“[...] the Indians, identifying *brāhman* and *sarvam*, choose this term [i.e. *sarvam*] for ‘intact, uninjured, entire, complete’ to denote the Whole of Existence, the All, which in being eternally complete, is always free from decay, illness, and death. By realizing that he is *sarva-*, a man escapes death and its precursors.”⁵⁹¹

It is not surprising to find the wish for completeness included in description of rituals which promise, among others, good conditions in the yonder world (in case of the *viśvajit* of the JB version) or material and spiritual well-being in this world and in the next one (in case of the *agniṣṭoma* of the ŚB). Lacking skin, the human lacks completeness. This is attained again when he relives the mythical past through the ritual action of putting on a garment/bovine hide.

Human nudity is treated as a lack of completeness in the Vedic sources: something that must be covered, healed. That is, at least, suggested by the ṚV which includes the act of covering a naked body in the enumeration of Soma’s helpful deeds in the hymn 8.79. Here, to cover a naked body is similar to healing an injury. In another verse ṚV 10.33, nakedness is an oppressing state of being, comparable to tiredness.

ṚV 8.79.2b-d

abhí ūṛṇoti yán nagnám |
bhiṣákti víśvaṇ yát turám |
prém andháh khyan níḥ śronó bhūt ||

He [i.e. Soma] covers what is naked.
He heals everything that is hurt.
The blind man sees, the lame one sets off.

ṚV 10.33.2c-d

ní bādhaté ámatir nagnátā jásur |
vér ná vevīyate matíḥ ||

The lack of attention, nakedness, and exhaustion
restrain [me]. My mind flits about like a bird.

⁵⁹¹ Gonda: 1975, p. 69.

These passages show that nakedness is not a positive quality. It represents vulnerability: in the cold, a naked person huddles close to a fire (RV 10.61.9) or stays awake (RV 8.2.12). In the ŚB, nakedness has a similar accent. Purūravas loses his wife, the nymph Urvaśī, due to his nudity (ŚBM 9.5.1; the RV version in 10.95 does not mention his nakedness at all); the altar for the *darśapūrṇamāsa* has to be covered not to be “naked and despoiled” (ŚBM 1.2.2.16), and even the sacrifice itself fears nakedness (ŚBM 1.7.3.28, *sá haiśá yajñá uvāca nagnátāyā vaí bibhemīti*). Likely, the negative subtext of nakedness expressed in the earlier Vedic texts assures that the Brāhmaṇa prose refers to it only occasionally.

Claudia Benthien suggests that “nakedness is [...] not an ontological category but rather a relationship that always relates to something else.”⁵⁹² This, I believe, applies to the Vedas as well. The bare human skin, naked after the barter in mythical past, seems to allude to their relationship with other *paśus*. Its absence, nakedness, is a significant point that sets people apart from the rest of the category. Not many other species are described as skinless, or naked. In fact, according to the AVŚ, the human is the only one; the ŚBM considers Prajāpati and wheat to be the only other examples of “skinless” (*atvac*) species.

AVŚ 12.3.51

<i>eśá tvacám púruṣe sám babhūvānagnāḥ sárve paśávo yé anyé </i> <i>kṣatrénātmánam pári dhāpayātho 'motám vāso múkham odanásya </i>	This one of skins (<i>tvac</i>) hath come into being on man; not naked are all the animals (<i>paśu</i>) that are other; ye [du.] cause to wrap (<i>paridhā</i>) yourselves (<i>ātman</i>) with authority (<i>kṣatra</i>), a home-woven garment, the mouth of the rice-dish.
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ŚBM 5.2.1.6⁵⁹³

[...] <i>púruṣo vaí prajāpater nédiṣṭham só 'yám atvág ete vai púruṣasyauṣadhīnām nedīṣṭhatamām yád godhūmās téṣām na tvág asti [...]</i>	[...] man is nearest to Prajāpati and he is skinless. And among plants wheat comes nearest to man, [for] it has no skin [...].
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The nakedness of a man is, at least in the case of the ŚB, caused by the gods flaying him. We have seen that the lack of skin implies incompleteness, which is understood as an injury, a wound which needs to be healed. In Vedic ritual, sacrificial animals are flayed in one piece.⁵⁹⁴ Whilst there is no direct evidence that this was the way the human body was flayed, the same verbal root $\sqrt{cho}$,⁵⁹⁵ used for both

⁵⁹² Benthien: 2002, p. ix.

⁵⁹³ I am unsure about the force of the Ac in *nedīṣṭhatamām*. Cf. AB 2.8-9 where the husk of the rice seed is associated with the skin.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. AB 2.6.14: *ekadhāsyā tvacam ācchyatāt | purā nābhyā apīśaso vapām utkhidatād* | “Flay off its skin in one piece; before cutting the navel force out the omentum.”

⁵⁹⁵ Whitney lists the same root as $\sqrt{chā}$.

the animal and the human, suggest a similar technique. In any case, the whole human body is a gash since then and has to be anointed with butter during the *dīkṣā*, as a ŚBM tells us:

ŚBM 3.1.3.7

<i>athāgreṇa śālāṃ tīṣṭhann abhyāñkte árur vai</i> <i>púruṣó 'vachitó 'narur évaitád bhavati yád</i> <i>abhyāñkte gávi vai púruṣasya tvag gor vā etan</i> <i>nāvanūtaṃ bhavati svāyāivainam etát tvacā</i> <i>sāmardhayati tasmād vā abhyāñkte </i>	He [the sacrificer] then gets himself anointed [with fresh butter], while standing east of the hall. For, having been flayed, man is sore; and by getting himself anointed, he becomes healed of his soreness: for man's skin is on the cow, and that fresh butter also comes from the cow. ⁵⁹⁶ He [the <i>adhvaryu</i>] thus supplies him with his own skin, and for this reason he gets himself anointed.
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Skin, or rather its absence, is the place where human identity is formed and assigned in the Vedic prose. If the Biblical book of Genesis states that a man was created naked, the original state of the human being could not be more different according to Brāhmaṇas. There, the human has lost his natural state, his original animal-like hide which now covers the bodies of kine. The man has to provide himself an artificial skin consisting of fresh butter healing his body and clothes covering it. These are applied during the ritual for which the man has to be in the state of completeness. There is an interesting paradox: to return to the natural state, the man has to use man-created materials and techniques. He has to adapt to the new situation, to “change his skin”. His return is, however, only temporary: at the end of the ritual, the sacrificer will wash off the anointment of the fresh butter and take off the linen garment or the hide of the red cow. He will return to his intrinsic condition of being sore, helpless, and naked.

As we come to the end of this subchapter, there is an obvious conclusive question to answer. What does this myth, and in particular its imagery of skin, mean in terms of the human-animal relationship? There are a few parts to the answer. First, I argue that the myth strongly implies the closeness between people and domesticated animals. This closeness is situated in the realm of the body: the species in question exchange the skin and the hide that cover their bodies.

With the closeness of bodies comes the necessity of communication, a topic which I discussed previously. Whilst the ŚB passages incorporate a divine intervention (the gods decide that the livestock need a different bodily cover), the JB allows for a direct dialogue between the human and its animal counterpart. In that sense, the myth is yet another example of the possibility of communication between species, albeit situated in the mythical realm.

⁵⁹⁶ On usage of the fresh butter see the subsequent verse, ŚBM 3.1.3.8: “It is fresh butter, – for melted butter [ghee] belongs to the gods, and creamy butter to men. [...]” Cf. AB 1.1.3.

Furthermore, the idea of closeness is also intertwined with the idea of completeness. The process of the skin exchange leaves the human intrinsically incomplete. The completeness can be achieved only by a ritual activity which, in turn, requires a relationship of care between people and domesticated animals. The human-animal proximity forms the multispecies community; it interweaves the web of life, as María Puig de la Bellacasa says.⁵⁹⁷

Another factor that plays a large role in this myth is the idea of mutuality and reciprocity. The animal in the story is aware that it passes over some discomfort to the human with its skin: from that moment, the human will be either too cold or too hot and insects will bite him. To make up for it, the animal offers its own meat and hide for the human to use in this world.⁵⁹⁸ This barter is not without metaphysical repercussions, as I will discuss in the following subchapter. The use of animal products – meat, leather, dairy – is unimaginable without care: to reliably use these products in this world, the human must intentionally establish a relationship with the animal and fulfil it on a daily basis. This relationship is reciprocal; it is a dialogue in which both actors have to co-participate.

Just like the other Vedic narratives that allude to human-animal relationships, this myth is situated in the era of “once upon a time”. From the perspective of the ritual, this strategy provides a legitimacy to the story. The myth is an exemplification of a specific ritual action – placing it into the mythical past highlights its timelessness and tradition. I suggest, furthermore, that the story creates the impression of timelessness also in terms of the human-animal relationship. The fact that the story is shared in different ritual contexts across the Vedic prose canon further accentuates that the topic of closeness, care, and reciprocity is perhaps more significant than it seems at the first sight.

⁵⁹⁷ Bellacasa: 2017, p. 2.

⁵⁹⁸ Dairy products are not mentioned in the list of things used by people in this world, even though milk is omnipresent in the texts as well as archaeological data (see e.g. Garnier et al.: 2017; or McCormick: 2012). Not mentioning it here, in a story which delineates the relationship between the human and *paśu*, is significant, even though the motifs of this choice are unclear. Perhaps, its omnipresence meant that milking was not understood to be a violent act which has to be redeemed in the yonder world.

§ 4.3 ON METAPHYSICS: BHRGU AND THE YONDER WORLD

In the Jaiminiya reading of the story, the act of the skin exchange brings about great metaphysical consequences. By trading their original skin with *paśus*, humans gain the right to eat beef and use cow hides for clothes in this world. In the yonder world (*amuṣmin loke*, as the Jaiminiya calls it), on the other hand, the cattle will eat people unless they prevent this destiny by a ritual action. If a sacrificer wears the prescribed red cow hide (or the garment of the *dīkṣita*, in the Śatapatha versions) – that is, if he restores his original form, his completeness – the livestock will not devour him. To remind us of the context, let me quote this part of the Jaiminiya version of the story once again:

JB 2.182-183

<i>te puruṣam etyābruvan puruṣeyaṃ tava tvag astv eṣāsmākam iti kiṃ tatas syād ity ādyās te syāma ity abruvann idaṃ te vāsa iti vāsaḥ prāyacchaṃs tad yad rohiṇīm chaviṃ paridhatte svenaiva tad rūpeṇa samṛdhyate tathā hainam amuṣmin loke paśavo nādanty adanti ha vā amuṣmin loke paśavaḥ puruṣam</i>	Coming to the man, it said: “O man, let this skin of yours be ours.” “What would be from that [for me]?” They said: “We could be eaten by you.” They offered clothing, [saying]: ‘This [would be] your clothing.’ Thereby, when he puts on the skin of the reddish cow, he thus succeeds by his own form. In that way, the livestock do not eat him in the yonder world. For the livestock eat a man in the yonder world.
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The story presents a serious conundrum. Livestock experience bodily discomfort and propose a skin exchange. To make the barter worth it, they offer the human their own meat and hide. Although this offer might seem worth it, it causes repercussions in the next world: the human will be used in the same manner in the yonder world. Whilst the human does the struggling livestock a favour, it is not facing a favourable fate.⁵⁹⁹

As is clear from the texts as well as archaeological evidence, cattle was considered the most important source of livelihood for the pastoralists of Vedic India, so much so that it was said to “support the whole world”.⁶⁰⁰ This, however, brings up a vexed question for Vedic ritualists: how can one kill and eat a being that supports his sustenance? How can one survive without it? At the time of the Brāhmaṇa prose, “eat or not to eat” seems to become an unresolvable dilemma which even the usually cunning authors of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa struggle to elucidate. On one hand, they vilify meat-eating, consider it a wicked deed (*pāpa*), and compare it to the destruction of everything:

⁵⁹⁹ Lommel: 1950, p. 93-109, argues, however, that the fate of the human in the yonder world is not considered to be a punishment.

⁶⁰⁰ E.g. ŚBM 3.1.2.14, 3.1.2.21, etc.

ŚBM 3.1.2.21

*tād dhaitāt sarvāśyam iva yó dhenvanaḍuháyor
aśnīyād ántagatir iva taṃ hádbhutam abhíjanitor
jāyāyai garbhaṃ nírabadhīd íti pāpām akad⁶⁰¹ íti
pāpī kīrtis tásmād dhenvanaḍuháyor nāśnīyāt*

Hence, were one to eat [the flesh] of an ox or a cow, there would be, as it were, an eating of everything, there would be, as it were, a going on to the end [or, to destruction]. Such a one indeed would be likely to be born [again] as a strange being, [as one of whom there is] evil report such as ‘he has expelled an embryo from a woman,’ ‘he has committed a sin,’ let him therefore not eat [the flesh] of the cow and the ox.

Yet on the other hand, this very same passage – which also passionately describes the unfortunate destinies of meat-eaters, such as being born as “strange beings” – ends with Yājñavalkya’s famous statement clearly refuting the previous paragraph:

ŚBM 3.1.2.21⁶⁰²

*tād u hovāca yājñavalkyo ‘śnāmy evāhám aṃsalaṃ
ced bhavatīti*

Nevertheless Yājñavalkya said, ‘I, for one, eat it, provided it is tender.’

There is an inescapable ambiguity in eating the meat of animals: it is crucial for survival; it is pleasurable; yet it implicates a certain sorrow connected with killing. In his excellent book *Ardor*, a novel about the Vedic sacrifice and its importance for post-modern epistemology, the late Italian author Roberto Calasso brilliantly comments on this passage from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa:

“Yājñavalkya’s metaphysical probe had touched a point that is usually avoided: there is a pleasure in eating the flesh of dead animals that is deeply physiological, just like sexual pleasure. In that case too, pleasure and guilt come back together – and remain inseparable. When we go back beyond a certain threshold in phylogenesis, there is no escaping these simultaneous conflicting drives, which are not yet feelings but dark and highly powerful imperatives: allusions to our most distant memories, from which, however, we are separated by an insuperable barrier, like dreams that have been blotted out.”⁶⁰³

Even though the cattle offered their bodies willingly and in exchange got their share of human meat in the next world, human sorrow is still irredeemable. That is, unless the sacrificer is aware of the esoteric knowledge about the ritual, unless he knows the so-called *prāyaścitti* or *niṣkṛti*, an expiation which changes the usual course of things.

⁶⁰¹ Whitney lists *akad* as a Śatapatha alternative of *akar* in his *Roots*.

⁶⁰² Cf. ŚBM 11.7.1.3.

⁶⁰³ Calasso: 2014, p. 59. The idea of guilt is perhaps too monotheistic, David Shulman says in his review of Calasso’s book, and I agree with him, using the concept of sorrow instead. See Shulman: 2015.

Some researchers, such as Wendy Doniger, understand the Jaiminīya myth about the origin of human skin in an ethicised manner, associating the human fate in the yonder world with the later development of Indian religions, especially the ideas of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*),⁶⁰⁴ ethical vegetarianism, and karmic retribution. Following Hermann Lommel, Doniger considers the myth – and an associated myth about Bhṛgu, son of the god Varuṇa, which we will discuss in detail shortly – to be a very early foreshadowing of the doctrine of reincarnation.⁶⁰⁵ She suggests that:

“It is easy enough to see how this idea of reversals in the other world could, in fact, quickly become ethicized, how one could come to believe that the best way to avoid being eaten in the other world was [...] to stop eating them altogether.”⁶⁰⁶

It seems that Doniger is aiming to say that this myth, perhaps together with the Śatapatha passages quoted above, is the first indication of ethical vegetarianism, commonly associated with Indian culture until today. A lot has been written on the development of vegetarianism in South Asia, especially in relation to the concept of *ahiṃsā*.⁶⁰⁷ Whilst these two notions are often considered to be interchangeable, vegetarianism is not implicit in the notion of *ahiṃsā*; in fact, as Bodewitz argues, it is its consequence.⁶⁰⁸ More often than not, the debates about vegetarianism have been motivated by contemporary South Asian identity politics; a subject matter which is beyond the scope of this thesis.⁶⁰⁹ I do not wish to add much to this topic: I am of the opinion that ethical vegetarianism and non-violence are constitutive neither to the human-animal relationships nor to the categories of human or animal in Vedic India. Instead, what I want to do in this subchapter is to focus on the notion of “the yonder world” (*asau loka*) and its opposite, “this world”.⁶¹⁰ I suggest that the examination of these concepts and their metaphysical connotations might further broaden our understanding of the categories of human and animal.

The locative formula *amuṣmin loke*, “in the yonder world”, found in our myth, is a common expression in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. One of its best-known instances is the well-known and aptly-

⁶⁰⁴ Bodewitz: 1999, p. 18, argues that in the pre-Upaniṣadic literature, *ahiṃsā* means “security”, or “safeness” rather than “non-violence”.

⁶⁰⁵ Lommel: 1950.

⁶⁰⁶ JB trl O’Flaherty, p. 41.

⁶⁰⁷ On *ahiṃsā*, see Schmidt: 1968 and 1997. Cf. Bodewitz: 1999. Their arguments are summarised by Bronkhorst: 2007, p. 260-2.

⁶⁰⁸ Bodewitz: 1999, p. 19.

⁶⁰⁹ E.g. Jha: 2009.

⁶¹⁰ My understanding of the “yonder world” is particularly informed by the works of Henk Bodewitz who researched the topic of Vedic cosmology in detail. He published his research in many papers which have been recently collected in an edited volume (Bodewitz: 2019). I will quote the edited volume throughout this chapter instead of the original references.

researched myth about Bhṛgu, the son of the god Varuṇa, and his travels through the yonder worlds.⁶¹¹ Just like the myth about the origin of human skin which is the object of this chapter, the story about Bhṛgu is found in two variants in the Brāhmaṇa prose: JB 1.42-44 and ŚBM 11.6.1.1. Due to the length of the passages, I will quote only the Jaiminiya variant. Whilst this version is considerably longer and more elaborate than the Śatapatha, the two passages clearly come from a similar source.⁶¹²

JB 1.42-44⁶¹³

bhṛgur ha vāruṇir anūcāna āsa, sa hāty eva pitaraṃ mene 'ti devān aty anyān brāhmaṇān anūcānān, sa ha varuṇa ikṣāṇ cakre na vai me putraḥ kiṃ cana prajānāti, hantainaṃ prajñāpayāniti, tasya ha prāṇān abhijagrāha, sa ha tatāma, sa ha tāntaḥ paraṃ lokaṃ jagāma, sa hāmuṣmin loka ājagāma, puruṣa eva puruṣaṃ saṃvṛścyāthainaṃ jaghāsa, sa hovācābhūd batedaṃ kiṃ svid idam iti, taṃ hocuḥ pitaraṃ varuṇaṃ prcchāsi, sa ta idam pravakteti, dvitīyaṃ hājagāma, puruṣa eva puruṣaṃ ākrandayantaṃ jaghāsa, sa hovācābhūd batedaṃ kiṃ svid idam iti, taṃ hocuḥ pitaraṃ varuṇaṃ prcchāsi, sa ta idam pravakteti, tṛtīyaṃ hājagāma, puruṣa eva puruṣaṃ tūṣṇīm avyāharantaṃ jaghāsa, sa hovācābhūd batedaṃ kiṃ svid idam iti, taṃ hocuḥ pitaraṃ varuṇaṃ prcchāsi, sa ta idam pravakteti, caturthaṃ hājagāma, dve striyau mahad vittaṃ jugupatus, sa hovācābhūd batedaṃ kiṃ svid idam iti, taṃ hocuḥ pitaraṃ varuṇaṃ prcchāsi, sa ta idam pravakteti, pañcamaṃ hājagāma, lohitaḥ kalyāṇ ca ghṛtakalyāṇ ca prabāhuk syandamāne, sā yā lohitaḥ kalyāṇa tāṃ kṛṣṇo nagnaḥ puruṣo musalī jugopa, atha yā ghṛtakalyāṇ tasyai hiraṇmayāḥ puruṣā hiraṇmayaiś camasais sarvān kāmān udācīre, sa hovācābhūd batedaṃ kiṃ svid idam iti, taṃ hocuḥ pitaraṃ varuṇaṃ prcchāsi, sa ta idam pravakteti, ṣaṣṭhaṃ hājagāma, pañca nadīḥ

42. Bhṛgu, the son of Varuṇa, was devoted to learning. He deemed himself superior to his father, to the gods, and to the other brahmins who were devoted to learning.

Varuṇa considered: “My son knows nothing at all. Come, let me make him have a clear insight!” He took his lifebreaths away. He [=Bhṛgu] fainted. He, having fainted, he passed from this world. He arrived to the yonder world. A man cut an [other] man into pieces and then devoured him. He said: “Ah! Has this [really] happened? What is [the meaning of] this?” They said to him: “Ask your father Varuṇa. He will explain it to you.”

He arrived [there] for a second time. A man devoured an [other] man who was crying out. He said: “Ah! Has this [really] happened? What is [the meaning of] this?” They said to him: “Ask your father Varuṇa. He will explain it to you.”

He arrived [there] for a third time. A man devoured an [other] man who was inaudibly uttering sounds. He said: “Ah! Has this [really] happened? What is [the meaning of] this?” They said to him: “Ask your father Varuṇa. He will explain it to you.”

He arrived [there] for a fourth time. Two women guarded a large property. He said: “Ah! Has this [really] happened? What is [the meaning of]

⁶¹¹ See the rich history of the research on this passage in JB trl Bodewitz, p. 99.

⁶¹² The differences between the versions are summarised by both Doniger O’Flaherty and Bodewitz, see JB trl O’Flaherty, p. 35, and JB trl Bodewitz, p. 99-102. Interestingly, even though Caland: 1915, p. 28, states that the JB version of the story is of a better composition and possibly “more original”, Bodewitz notes that despite all the parallels and differences, the ŚBM version must be independent, not a direct borrowing of the JB version, as Caland thought. Bodewitz concludes that they perhaps come from a common textual source, now lost; see JB trl Bodewitz, p. 101.

⁶¹³ I am using the unpublished edition of Ehlers, available on TITUS, and the translation of Bodewitz in JB trl Bodewitz. For the sake of space, I use commas where Ehlers uses line breaks to divide syntactical units. Many thanks to Professor Minkowski and Dr Antonia Ruppel who read the text with me in Hilary Term 2019.

puṣkariṇīḥ puṇḍarīkiṇīr madhūdakās syandmānās, tāsu nṛtagitaṃ vīṇāghoṣo 'psarasāṃ gaṇās surabhir gandho mahān ghoṣo babhūva, sa hovācābhūd batedaṃ kiṃ svid idam iti, taṃ hocuḥ pitaraṃ varuṇaṃ prcchāsi, sa ta idam pravakteti || 42

sa ha tata evāvṛte, sa ha varuṇaṃ evājagāma, taṃ hovācāgās tātāz ity, āgāṃ tatety, adarśas tātāz ity, adarśaṃ tateti, kiṃ tātāz ity, puruṣa eva puruṣaṃ saṃvṛścayāthainam aghad ity, om iti hovāca, ye vā asmin loke 'gnihotraṃ juhvato⁶¹⁴ naivaṃvido vanaspatīn saṃvṛścyābhyādadhātī tān vā amuṣmin loke vanaspatayaḥ puruṣarūpaṃ kṛtvā pratyadanti, tasya kā niṣkṛtir iti, yad evaitat samidham abhyādadhātī sā tasya niṣkṛtis tayā tad atimucyata iti, kiṃ dvitīyam iti, puruṣa eva puruṣaṃ ākrandayantam aghad iti, om iti hovāca, ye vā asmin lokam 'gnihotraṃ juhvato naivaṃvidah⁶¹⁵ paśūn ākrandayataḥ pacante tān vā amuṣmin loke paśavaḥ puruṣurūpaṃ kṛtvā pratyadanti, tasya kā niṣkṛtir iti, yad evaitad vācā pūrvām āhutiṃ juhvoti sā tasya niṣkṛtis tayā tad atimucyata iti, kiṃ tṛtīyam iti, puruṣa eva puruṣaṃ tūṣṇīm vyāharantam⁶¹⁵ aghad iti, om iti hovāca, ye vā asmin loke 'gnihotraṃ juhvato naivaṃvido vṛhiyavāṃs tuṣṇīm vyāharataḥ pacante tān vā amuṣmin loke vṛhiyavāḥ puruṣarūpaṃ kṛtvā pratyadanti, tasya kā niṣkṛtir iti, yad evaitan manasottarām āhutiṃ juhvoti sā tasya niṣkṛtis tayā tad atimucyata iti, kiṃ caturtham iti, dve striyau mahad vittam ajūgapatām ity, om iti hovāca, śraddhā ca vai te aśraddhā cābhūtām, ye vā

this?" They said to him: "Ask your father Varuṇa. He will explain it to you."

He arrived [there] for a fifth time. [Of] two streams flowing side by side, one filled with blood and the other with ghee a black naked man with a club guarded the stream filled with blood, and the stream filled with ghee, out of that golden men drew up all things one may desire with golden cups. He said: "Ah! Has this [really] happened? What is [the meaning of] this?" They said to him: "Ask your father Varuṇa. He will explain it to you."

He arrived [there] for a sixth time. Five rivers with blue and white lotuses, flowing with honey as water, in these there was dancing and singing, the sound of lutes, crowds of *apsaras*, a fragrant smell, and a great noise. He said: "Ah! Has this [really] happened? What is [the meaning of] this?" They said to him: "Ask your father Varuṇa. He will explain it to you."

43. He returned from there. He came to Varuṇa. He [Varuṇa] said to him: "Did you arrive [there], son?" "I have arrived [there], father." "You have seen [it], son?" "I have seen [it], father." "What, my son?" "A man cut an [other] man into pieces and then devoured him." "Yes," he said. "Those who in this world offer the *agnihotra* without knowing thus and cut trees and lay them on the fire, those the trees, having taken human form, eat in their turn in yonder world. "What is an expiation for this?" "That he lays here [i.e. in the

⁶¹⁴ The reading of *juhvato* is problematic. The standard Vira & Chandra's edition reads *ajuhvato* whilst also listing a variant reading *juhvato*, extant in two mss. Ehlers reads *juhvato* based on the evidence of three manuscripts. Bodewitz notes that this reading might be correct: "The point is not that people do not offer the *agnihotra*, a sacrifice which is accepted even by the most a-ritualistic circles, but that the knowledge of its implications is lacking with some people. The opposite of *agnihotraṃ juhvato naivaṃvidah* is *sa ya evaṃ vidvān agnihotraṃ juhvoti* (end of JB. 1, 44). If *ajuhvato* is read, the negation before *evanvidah* either is superfluous and irregular, or it separates *evanvidah* from *juhvato*, as appears from Oertel's, Lévi's and Geldner's translations. *evan agnihotraṃ juhvoti* forms, however, one expression." JB trl Bodewitz, p. 106-7, n. 15. Later iterations of the text also read *juhvato naivaṃvido* which support this reading even further.

⁶¹⁵ This is another complicated reading. Vira & Chandra's edition reads *avyāharantam* and lists a variant reading *vyāharantam* from a single mss. Ehlers reads *avyāharantam* without any note of a manuscript evidence. The parallel passage in ŚBM reads *tūṣṇīm āśinān*, "sitting still, silent". Once again, I follow Bodewitz' suggestion: "Contrary to all translators and editors the forms without privative *a-* should be retained. The question is not so much that rice and barley, when harvested and cooked, do not cry, as they cry inaudibly." JB trl Bodewitz, p. 107, n. 18. I adopt the same reading in the following instance as well.

asmin loke 'gnihotraṃ juhvato naivaṇvīdo
'śraddadhānā yajante tad aśraddhāṃ gacchati yac
chraddadhānās tac chraddhāṃ, tasya kā niṣkṛtir iti,
yad evaitad dvir aṅgulyā prāśnāti sā tasya niṣkṛtis
tayā tad atimucyata iti || 43

kiṃ pañcamam iti, lohitaḥ puruṣo musalī jugopa, atha yā
ghṛtakulyā tasyai hiraṇmayāḥ puruṣā hiraṇmayaiś
camasais sarvān kāmān udacanta iti, om iti hovāca,
ye vā asmin loke 'gnihotraṃ juhvato naivaṇvīdo
brāhmaṇasya lohitaṃ utpīlayanti sā sā lohitaḥ puruṣo
musaly ajūgopat krodhas sa tasyo tad evāṇnam iti, tasya kā niṣkṛtir iti,
yad evaitat sruṇā prāśnāti sā tasya niṣkṛtis tayā tad
atimucyata iti, atha yā etāṃ sruṇā nirṇijyodīcī
apa utsiñcati sā sā ghṛtakulyā, tasyai hiraṇmayāḥ
puruṣā hiraṇmayaiś camasais sarvān kāmān
udacanta iti, kiṃ ṣaṣṭham iti, pañca nadiḥ
puṣkariṇī puṇḍarikīṇī madhūdakās
syandamānās, tāsū nṛtagītaṃ vīṇāghoṣo 'psarasāṃ
gaṇās surabhir gandho mahān ghoṣo 'bhūd iti, om
iti hovāca, mamaivaite lokā abhūvann iti, te
kenābhijayā iti, etenaiva pañcagrhitena
pañconnīteneti, sa hovāca na vai
kilānyatrāgnihotrāl lokajityā avakāśo 'sty, adyaiva
me 'gnyādheyasyopavasatha iti, tasya ha tathā
cakrus, sa ya evaṃ vidvān aṅgulyā juhvati nainam
amuṣmin loke vanaspatyaḥ puruṣarūpaṃ kṛtvā
pratyadanti na pāśavo na vrīhiyavā nāsyēṣṭāpūrte
śraddhāṃ cāśraddhāṃ ca gacchato 'pahate
lohitaḥ puruṣo avarunddhe ghṛtakulyā || 44

agnihotra ritual] a log of wood on the fire, that is
its expiation. By that [expiation] it is avoided."

"What [did you see] the second time?" "A man
devoured an [other] man who was crying out."

"Yes," he said; "those who in this world offer
agnihotra without knowing thus and cook for
themselves animals which cry out, those the
animals, having taken human form, eat in their
turn in yonder world. "What is the expiation for
this?" "That he offers here the first oblation with
speech [i.e. reciting the formula aloud], that is its
expiation. By that [expiation] it is avoided."

"What the third time?" "A man devoured an
[other] man who was inaudibly uttering sounds."

"Yes," he said; "those who in this world offer
agnihotra without knowing thus and cook
themselves rice and barley, which inaudibly utter
sounds, those rice and barley, having taken
human form, eat in their turn in yonder world.

"What is the expiation of this?" "That he offers the
second oblation [reciting the formula] in
thoughts, that is its expiation. By that [expiation]
it is avoided."

"What the fourth time?" "Two women guarded a
large property." "Yes," he said. "They were Faith
and Non-Faith. If any in this world offer the
agnihotra without knowing thus and sacrifice
without faith, then it [i.e. that sacrifice] goes to
Non-Faith; if [they sacrifice] with faith, it [goes]
to Faith. "What is the expiation of this?" "That he
eats here twice with his finger, that is its expiation
of this. By that [expiation] it is avoided."

44. "What the fifth time?" "[Of] two streams
flowing side by side, one filled with blood and the
other with ghee, a black naked man with a club
guarded the stream filled with blood, and the
stream filled with ghee, out of that [stream]
golden men drew up all things one may desire
with golden cups." "Yes," he said; "if any in this
world offer aṅgulyā juhvati without knowing thus and
shed [literally: press out] the blood of a brahmin,
then it [i.e. that blood] becomes that stream filled
with blood; and the black naked man with a club
who guarded it, he is Wrath. That [blood] indeed
is his food." "What is the expiation for this?" "That

he eats here with the ladle [i.e. drinks the milk out of the ladle], that is its expiation. By that [expiation] it is avoided. And the water that he tosses upwards to the north after having washed the spoon, that is the stream filled with ghee. Out of that [stream] golden men drew up all things one may desire with golden cups.”

“What the sixth time?” “Five rivers with blue and white lotuses, flowing with honey as water, in these, there was dancing and singing, the sound of lutes, crowds of *apsarasas*, a fragrant smell and a great noise.” “Yes,” he said; “these, forsooth, were my worlds.” “By what are they to be won?” “By fivefoldly taking this [milk out of the cauldron] and lifting [it] out [into the *sruc*].” He [Bṛghu] said: “There is indeed nowhere outside the *agnihotra* an opportunity for the conquest of a world [in heaven]. [So] today, [will be] my fastday preceding the setting up of the sacred fires.” Thus they arranged it for him. He who knowing thus offers the *agnihotra*, him do not eat in their turn the trees having taken human form in yonder world, nor the animals, nor rice and barley; nor do his meritorious works and his sacrifice go to Faith and Non-Faith. He wards off the stream of blood. He obtains the river of ghee.

The passage offers a colourful description of Bṛghu’s travels in the yonder world, pictured in six different stages. Some scholars, namely Wendy Doniger, suggest that the yonder world is “the inverse of this world, a looking-glass world, upside down, reversing the roles of subject and object.”⁶¹⁶ Other see it as a form of an afterlife, perhaps a hell of some sort, where one ends up atoning for his actions in this world.

The answer to the question of what the yonder world is is not straightforward. The JB passage does not divulge many details about it. We know that it is a manifold place from where Bṛghu returns alive, though this does not seem to be possible for a mere human being.⁶¹⁷ Since Bṛghu appears there after Varuṇa takes away his breaths – that is, when he temporarily suspends his life – we can conclude

⁶¹⁶ JB trl Doniger O’Flaherty, p. 39.

⁶¹⁷ Bṛghu, the son of Varuṇa, is clearly a special case, and so we cannot induce that every human being would be able to return from it as well. More likely, normal human beings cannot return to this world. As Caland notes: “There is no return from yonder world: once and for all they depart hence thither [...], cp. the well-known phrase *sakṛt parāñcaḥ pitaraḥ*.” PB trl Caland, p. 122.

that it is a place where beings end up when they die. This seems to be an all-inclusive and automatic fate.⁶¹⁸ The role that a certain being assumes in the yonder world appears to be, in most cases, an opposite of how they were treated in this world (I will discuss what this entails towards the end of this subchapter). The JB, however, does not value it as either a desirable or an undesirable place to be after death; it simply does not say.

The localisation of the yonder world is notoriously difficult, since there is no single and complete description of the Vedic cosmos. Supposedly, the Vedic division of space was twofold: a) vertical, with a world divided into three cosmic layers (heaven, atmosphere, and earth; or later heaven, earth, and hell), and b) horizontal, divided into four (East, West, North, and South) or five (as previous, including zenith) cardinal directions.⁶¹⁹ To make things more complicated, not all of these parts appear in all the textual layers and genres, and it is, therefore, hard to assess how they relate to each other. The RV, for example, mentions heaven as the ultimate destination for meritorious people only in the latest books and does not include the idea of hell at all.⁶²⁰ Other, usually later texts incorporate the various imagery such as Yama's world, the world of ancestors (*pitṛloka*), pits, holes, underworlds, and others.⁶²¹

In general, due to its ritualistic nature, the Vedic literature puts almost all the emphasis on the East as the region of the gods and a desirable posthumous location. Other quarters are enumerated as well: the West is the nether world, the world of the *asuras*, the North the location of human beings, and the South is associated with the ancestors, the *pitṛs*.⁶²² Theoretically, the quarters of space might be mapped onto the vertical cosmic layers – the underworld being associated with the West and South, earth with the North, and heaven with the East – but we should not expect that the cosmology was this seamless in the Vedic times.

In theory, the place where one goes after death, i. e. “the yonder world” (*asau loka*) can be situated in a number of these parts of the cosmos. Bodewitz, when categorising possible afterlives in the Vedic literature, distinguishes between three places where one can find himself after death: “heaven [located in the East], for a very select group [i.e. the institutors of *śrauta* rituals], a *Pitṛloka* for

⁶¹⁸ On the automatism, see JB trl Bodewitz, p. 100.

⁶¹⁹ It is worthy of note that the cardinal directions do not refer to geographical directions but particular spheres. See Bodewitz' paper “Classifications and Yonder World in the Veda” in Bodewitz: 2019, ch. 14.

⁶²⁰ See Bodewitz' paper “Life after Death in the R̥gveda Saṁhitā” in *ibid.*, ch. 8. Cf. his paper “Yonder World in the Atharvaveda”, *ibid.*, ch. 11.

⁶²¹ Cf. Bodewitz' “Pits, Pitfalls and the Underworld in the Veda”, *ibid.*, ch. 12.

⁶²² Bodewitz also notes that the intermediate quarters (SE and SW) “seem to represent the *pitṛloka* and hell, and the totality of the intermediate quarters is also associated with hell.” *Ibid.*, p. 184.

the meritorious deceased (SE) and a nether world for the common people (S).⁶²³ The term *asau loka* implies some sort of a distance from this world: the heaven is most likely situated above the world of men, whereas “going to the nether world implies a downward movement.”⁶²⁴ In the PB 9.8.6, it is said to be located “thitherward from this [world]”. It is also possible – although I have not come across it in academic literature often – that the yonder world is a temporal and not spatial classification, purely describing the inevitable state after death.

The temporal classification aside, which one of these three possible areas is the *asau loka*, the world where humans, animals, and plants act in a remarkably different way than in this world? Bodewitz is of the opinion that “the Bhṛgu story of JB 1.42 forms an exception, since it evidently denotes the underworld or perhaps even hell.”⁶²⁵ I believe that he considers it to be hell because in his reading, Bhṛgu is being punished by Varuṇa: “In the Brāhmaṇa the place of punishment is the *para loka* to which Bhṛgu’s free-soul went after he lost his consciousness.”⁶²⁶

The JB description, however, is far from being this straightforward. Unlike Bodewitz, I do not think that Bhṛgu’s journey is a punishment. Bhṛgu, for one, has nothing to be punished for. According to the Śatapatha versions, he is devoted to learning and his only misdeed is his arrogance towards his father, other gods, and Brahmins. Varuṇa’s intention is not to punish him but to make him understand (*hantainam prajñāpayānīti*, he says in JB 1.42), to explain him the true nature of the world which is unattainable by rational, learned knowledge and can be gained only by direct sensory experience.⁶²⁷ The ŚBM version of the myth suggests this as well:

ŚBM 11.6.1.7

*tām hainam dṛṣṭvā bhūr viveda sa hétya sām̐viveśa
tām ha pitōvācādhīṣva svādhyāyam kásmān nú
svādhyāyam nádhīṣa iti sá hovāca kim ádhyeṣye na
kūṇ canástīti tād dha váruṇo vidām cakārādrāg vā
iti ||*

On seeing him [= Wrath, the black man with a club], terror seized him, and he went home, and sat down. His father said to him, “Study thy day’s lesson [of scripture]: why dost thou not study thy lesson?” He said, “What am I to study? There is nothing whatever.” Then Varuṇa knew, “He has indeed seen it!”

⁶²³ Ibid., p. 179

⁶²⁴ Ibid., p. 204.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., p. 162, n. 1.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

⁶²⁷ Bodewitz notes: “Bhṛgu now has discovered that more study is superfluous. This does not imply a rejection of wisdom and a preference for ritual. As a student Bhṛgu had only learnt ritual details. Varuṇa now made it clear to him that knowing the important implications and background of the rather simple agnihotra ritual secures immortality.” JB trl Bodewitz, p. 109, n. 28.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that the whole myth would describe a single hell-like world. There are obvious stages in the journey of Bhṛgu: in the JB, they are enumerated; in the ŚBM, they are distinguished according to their cardinal direction. Varuṇa himself states that the places Bhṛgu saw were “his worlds” (*mamaivaite lokā abhūvant iti*), using a plural form of the word *loka*.

As far as the hell-like quality is concerned, this seems to be a simplification on Bodewitz’ side. One of the worlds through which Bhṛgu travels indeed seems to be akin to hell, namely the fifth world where he sees the naked black man, called by Varuṇa Anger (*krodha*). Many scholars agree that this is the world of Yama, i.e. the world of the dead.⁶²⁸ The other worlds, however, are largely different from it. In fact, the first three places visited by Bhṛgu are reversals of this world, in particular of its usual food habits: substances which are eaten in this world devour their eaters there (we will discuss this principle in more detail shortly). The last world, in contrast, does not resemble hell in the slightest: its colours, fragrances, and groups of singing *apsaras* are closer to descriptions of heavenly worlds more than anything else, and Varuṇa himself identifies it as his own. It lacks the catchwords identified by Bodewitz as characteristic of the underworld: “pit, hole, abyss, depth, down, darkness and distance.”⁶²⁹

I would argue that Bhṛgu’s journey to the other world is not a punitive odyssey through hell but rather a journey of an initiative character, perhaps a gap year in the Brahmanical education. Bhṛgu, a devoted but arrogant student, is taught that knowledge itself does not suffice but has to be accompanied by a bodily experience, a daily ritual practice. In itself, the ritual practice is not enough either: one has to understand the esoteric meaning of the ritual acts and gestures to be able to profit from them. Thus, theory and praxis must couple.

As noted, some scholars see the yonder world to be a pure reversal of this world. The postulate is that when Bhṛgu, and with him the sacrificer, understands the all-inclusive and automatic reversal principle, he will access the esoteric knowledge which will help him to overcome the given posthumous destiny. Without a doubt, this and the yonder world are intrinsically connected: what happens in one brings about an effect in the other. The reversal, however, is not a symmetrical mirroring, showing the sacrificer an exact opposite of the world that he knows. It is more complex and metaphorical than that, illustrating to Bhṛgu – and through him, to the sacrificer – the *true* complex nature of this world, explained through the relationships between individual actors. For the sacrificer as well as Bhṛgu, it is a means of understanding the world from a different perspective and, eventually, applying this knowledge to the ritual action.

⁶²⁸ JB trl Bodewitz, p. 109, n. 24.

⁶²⁹ Bodewitz: 2019, p. 162.

The different perspective is, nevertheless, hard to attain. “How can we know something that doesn’t let itself be known?”, asks Calasso in *Ardor*. “In one way: by becoming to some extent that thing itself.”⁶³⁰ In the world of Vedic literature, otherwise relatively rigid, there are a few approaches on how to, to a certain degree, assume an identity of something else, to equate oneself with another (after all, Renou once wrote that the “Vedic thought [...] defines itself as a system of equations.”).⁶³¹ There is the idea of substitution which implies that the subject acquires the identity of the substituted object, as we discussed in § 3.3. Furthermore, the notion of *bandhus* (linkages between various elements in the universe) is another complex notion, partially presupposing a sort of shared identity amongst certain ritual actors and objects.⁶³² Perhaps, the idea of the yonder world might be yet another strategy for assuming the identity of another subject in order to understand it and the world better.

What is then the true nature of relationships between various actors that Bhrgu and the sacrificer have to explore? As Stephanie Jamison and Michael Witzel suggest, it is the principle of reciprocity, of mutual exchange and sharing between all kinds of agents: human and non-human animals but also deities, ancestors, and others.⁶³³ Most often, the principle of reciprocity is formulated in the language of food (*anna*, or *annādyā*, “food to eat”) and its eaters, a principle that I have repeatedly alluded to in the previous paragraphs. As Jamison and Witzel note, “*anna* is much more than actual food; it can stand for a variety of substances, especially those that are exchanged among men and gods.”⁶³⁴ It is not only a substance – rice cakes, porridge, animal meat – but it also encompasses all the possible subjects who are intrinsically part of the food chain. The more powerful actor in the relationship is said to be the “eater”; its less powerful counterpart the “food”. In one relationship, the human can be the eater; in another, for example in relation to Prajāpati, it becomes the food. In any way, everyone seems to wish to become the eater, to be the apex predator in the world of Vedic ritual.⁶³⁵ In the ŚBM, for example, the participants of the *pravargya* wish to increase their strength with the words: “May we attain excellence, [...] become glorious, may we become eaters of food”.⁶³⁶

The postulate of Brāhmaṇical cosmology is, as I have noted above, that the substance the human eats in this world will eat him in the next world. This is *condicio sine qua non*, the nature of the world which cannot be changed. Many Brāhmaṇas state it matter-of-factly. Francis Zimmerman

⁶³⁰ Calasso: 2014, p. 67-8.

⁶³¹ Renou: 1946, p. 55. Translation of the quote is taken from Smith: 1989, p. 31.

⁶³² On *bandhus*, see Smith: 1989.

⁶³³ Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 63-5.

⁶³⁴ Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 63.

⁶³⁵ E.g. TS 1.6.2; ŚBM 4.2.1.3-4. Cf. Smith: 1990.

⁶³⁶ ŚBM 14.1.1.3, *tā āsata | śrīyaṃ gachema yāsaḥ syāmānnādāḥ syāmēti* [...] ||

summarises it in brief: “What Europeans called ‘the great chain of being’ was in India a sequence of foods.”⁶³⁷ The following Brāhmaṇa passages are clear examples of this axiom.⁶³⁸

ŚBM 12.9.1.1

etāsmād vai yajñāt pūruṣo jāyate | sā yād dha vā asmīṇ loké pūruṣó 'nnam ātti tād enam amuṣmiṇ loké prātyatti Verily, from this sacrifice the man is born; and whatever food a man consumes in this world, that [food], in return, consumes him in yonder world.

KB 11.2.29-37⁶³⁹

tad yathā ha vā asmiṇl loke manuṣyāḥ paśūn aśnanti, yathā ebhir bhuñjate, evam eva amuṣmiṇl loke paśavo manuṣyān aśnanti, evam ebhir bhuñjate, sa ya enān iha prātaranuvākenāvarundhe, tam iha avaruddhā amuṣmiṇl loke na aśnanti, na enena pratibhuñjate, yathā eva enān asmiṇl loke aśnāti, yathā ebhir bhuñkte, evam eva enān amuṣmiṇl loke aśnāti, evam ebhir bhuñkte | Just as in this world men eat cattle, just as they enjoy them, so in yonder world cattle eat men, so they enjoy them. He wins them here with the morning litany; won here they eat him not in yonder world, they enjoy him not in requital. Just as he eats them in this world, just as he enjoys them, so in yonder world he eats them, so he enjoys them.

Since in the language of the Brāhmaṇa prose “the eater of food and food are indeed everything”,⁶⁴⁰ it is unsurprising that if Bhṛgu (and through him, the sacrificer) wants to understand the world in its whole breadth, he has to assume the position in the chain that he experiences less often. From the eater, he has to become the food or, in the case of Bhṛgu, at least witness the change.

The human’s new position in the food chain does not seem to imply a change in form. Whilst the food, animal- or plant-based, assumes the form of the human in the yonder world, the human stays the same. We read, for example, about one man cutting another man into pieces (JB 1.42) – the tree assumes the form of the human whilst the human stays the same. This suggests that the human form is seen as the default one. This notion is remarkably like some of the stories which we saw in previous chapters, according to which in the past, animals used to be much more akin to the human than at present. Back then, all *paśus* were upright-walking bipeds with human skin; but then an evolution occurred, and things changed. The mythical past as well as yonder world seem to be zones where the human and the domestic animal share more than just a bodily shape.

⁶³⁷ Zimmermann: 1988, p. 197.

⁶³⁸ Cf. JB 1.26 and MDŚ 5.55. The MDŚ passage contains the famous popular etymology of the word *māmsa*, meat, here in Olivelle’s translation: “Me he (*māṇ sa*) will eat in the next world, whose meat (*māmsa*) I eat in this world’—this, the wise declare, is what gave the name to and discloses the true nature of ‘meat’ (*māmsa*).” MDŚ 5.55 trl Olivelle, p. 140.

⁶³⁹ In Keith’s translation, this section is numbered 11.3 (KB trl Keith, p. 409). For the sake of space, I am using commas in lieu of line brakes in the digital edition.

⁶⁴⁰ ŚBM 11.1.6.19, ‘*nnādās ca vā idaṇi sārvaṃ ānnaṇi ca [...]* ||

Due to its length, wealth of detail, and its captivating narrative, the myth about Bhṛgu has been a favourite of Western scholars for a long time. Its interpretations differ wildly, usually motivated by whatever theoretical approach is in fashion at that time. In that, my reading, focused around ideas influenced by Multispecies Anthropology, is no exception. Unlike others, I understand the myth to be a journey of exploration: Bhṛgu, and through him the sacrificer, is learning about the nature of this world. The world, I argue, is based in a reciprocal relationship between various species and expressed in the language of food.

The myth is centred around a handful of crucial points, I believe. Let me summarise them, before I conclude this subchapter by transposing some of the findings onto the myth about the origin of human skin. First, the myth about Bhṛgu explores the idea of causality: any behaviour in this world automatically leads to a replay in the yonder world. When zoomed out, the causality shows not only the intrinsic connection between the different parts of the universe but also the intrinsic entanglements between communities of various species, plant and animal alike. Second, it illustrates, I believe, that despite the deep ties between various species, the anthropomorphic point of view is the primary one. In the yonder world, almost every aspect of life in this world changes into a human, be it an abstract quality (Anger, Faith), or a plant.⁶⁴¹ Third, although the lives of human and non-human, domesticated animals are conjoined, their entanglements are continued literally in the yonder world. Four, the myth insists on the importance of the direct sensory experience which fuels the ritual practice, provides a full understanding of the state of things, and delivers a favourable post-humous fate.

Lastly, the myth about Bhṛgu shows a peculiar feature of the Vedic ritualism: the fact that the ritual intervention changes the otherwise prevailing nature of things. Provided one has the correct knowledge of the ritual practice (“one knows thus”, as the prose texts often say), he can tilt the world against its tendency towards his own benefit. Upon experiencing the various yonder worlds, Bhṛgu receives an explanation of the ritual from his father Varuṇa. The direct experience and the extra knowledge assure that Bhṛgu’s post-humous faith is agreeable and he will not be taken advantage of by the substances which he consumed in this world. That the ritual has the power to change the course of things is a feature that was developed in the middle-Vedic period. At that time, the ritual ground became the wheelhouse of the whole cosmos: through ritual, the macrocosmos could be controlled through the system of identifications. This is a general power of ritual: everyone who performs it

⁶⁴¹ One of the only exceptions are the stream full of blood and the stream full of ghee. These are not human but ritual aspects.

benefits from its power, be it a man, a prepubescent girl, gods, or cattle. In that sense, ritual stands above any distinction between human and non-human species.

In conclusion, the Bhṛgu myth enables us to map out topics that we find in the myth about the origin of the human skin but on a much larger scale. In particular, it broadens our understanding of the idea of the yonder world: the causal chain of events that inevitably leads to the fate that awaits the human there. Furthermore, just like the Bhṛgu myth, the myth about the origin of the human skin explores the idea of the entanglement of the *paśu* group. Whilst the myths are separate, they speak of the same topics, in a similar language.

§ 4.4 A STUDY IN “ONTOLOGICAL PROXIMITY”: A CONCLUSION

The last chapter of this thesis has taken us to two ends of the Vedic timeline: the mythical past when once upon a time (*agre*), people and domesticated animals exchanged their skins, and to the mythical future, the yonder world, where people will be eaten by the *paśu* to pay of their debts from this world. With its focus on a single mythical cluster, the chapter has allowed us to closely explore a number of themes, crucial for the understanding of the concept of “ontological proximity” in Vedic literature. These include ideas such as reciprocity, entanglement and companionship, and the primacy of the anthropocentric view in describing the domesticated animals.

First, the chapter discussed the mythical narrative, found in the JB, ŚBK, and ŚBM (and to lesser extent in the KB and PB) and described its ritual context. Building on a detailed reading, it introduced two lines of interpretation. In the first, I discussed the symbolism of skin (*tvac*, *chaviṣ*, *carman*) and its usage in Vedic literature. I compared our myth to the mythical story about Apālā, a girl with an unspecified skin problem who is cured by Indra. Building on Hanns-Peter Schmidt’s interpretation of the story, I argued that Apālā’s skin is an outward form of her social position, the boundary between her and her community. Her original, problematic skin symbolises incompleteness in the social setting; cured, sunned skin (*sūryatvac*) her role as a marriable woman. Transposing this interpretation to the myth about the origin of human skin, I argued that after the skin barter, the human is considered naked, and therefore incomplete. To prop up his completeness, he has to engage in ritual activity with the right intention and knowledge. For that, he needs to use animal materials, such as the hide of a red cow; and to access that, he needs to establish a relationship of care which allows him to use the material; i.e. to domesticate livestock and care for it. In that sense, the myth and its ritual context show the entanglement of species in the sphere of ritual, and the fact that ritual itself is embedded in the pastoralist care process.

In the other line of interpretation, focused around the notion of the yonder world (*asau loka*), the idea of the entanglement of species is equally important, although it is placed in the future. In this subchapter, I discussed the metaphysical consequence of the skin barter, that is, the promise that in the yonder world, the livestock will eat people unless they possess the correct ritual knowledge. To explore the concept of the yonder world in broader terms, I introduced the myth about Bhṛgu and his travels to the yonder world where he is sent by his father Varuṇa. In the yonder world, Bhṛgu experiences first-hand that everything that is used or eaten by humans in this world will use or eat the humans in the next. This myth thus helps us deduce that the idea of the repercussions in the yonder world is not intrinsically tied to the skin exchange but applies automatically, and to all. Furthermore,

the myth about Bhṛgu reinforces the idea of the reciprocity and shared community of human and non-human species.

These two interpretative approaches and the plethora of topics that they cover – reciprocity, multispecies entanglements situated in the mythical past and future, direct experience, and the primacy of anthropomorphism – are the building blocks of what I call “ontological proximity”. In my reading, the myth about the origin of human skin (and to a certain extent the myth about Bhṛgu) speaks to the closeness of people and domesticated animals. It shows that the category of *paśu* is much more tight-knit and intertwined than a superficial first glance would suggest. People are said to exchange their bodily covers with *paśu*, an act which influences their lives and post-humous fates and clearly shows their entanglement.

The American author Joan Didion once wrote that “we tell ourselves stories in order to live.”⁶⁴² The Vedic prose, it seems, tells stories in order to understand not only how and why to do rituals, but more generally to find out why Vedic people live the way they do. The more I think about the stories explored in this chapter, the more I am inclined to argue that they seem to be coming to grips with the process of domestication: with complex human-animal relationships and closeness between the species.

Domestication, as the archaeologists Ajita Patel and Richard Meadow write, is a lengthy and complex process of developing human-animal relationships.⁶⁴³ The process is bilateral: it produces human domesticators and domesticated animals.⁶⁴⁴ Since the process began, they have become inseparably intertwined and must care for each other. In a way, as the philosopher Vinciane Despret notes, the process of domestication involves a certain amount of violence, as it “has been guided by principles that are not necessarily the criteria that animals would apply if they were left free to make their own decisions”.⁶⁴⁵

I believe that Vedic literature, and the prose in particular, recognises the violent streak in the human-animal relationship, and the need for reciprocal care.⁶⁴⁶ To make up for the sadness this induces (Roberto Calasso uses the word “guilt” when he refers to this feeling but to me, “guilt” strongly revokes a Christian worldview), it recognises the entanglement and the reciprocal relationship with

⁶⁴² Didion: 1979, p. 14.

⁶⁴³ Patel & Meadow: 2017, p. 297.

⁶⁴⁴ Despret: 2016, p. 30.

⁶⁴⁵ Despret: 2016, p. 64.

⁶⁴⁶ Whilst I am speaking of “violence”, I am not referring to the ritual theories by Jan Heesterman (see Heesterman: 1985) who distinguished between the violent and bloody pre-Classical Vedic ritual and “non-competitive” Classical ritual. As Jamison & Witzel: 1992, p. 42, note, Heesterman’s theories are provocative but essentially anecdotal.

domesticated species; it allows for a retribution in the yonder world; and it gives the domesticated animals a sense of agency, albeit mostly in the mythical past. Although focused on and around the human experience, it recognises the importance of domesticated species for life and gives them a (limited) opportunity to communicate and act in their own will. In short, the mythical stories and ritual practices in the Brāhmaṇa literature suggest a certain degree of a close way of being; of “ontological closeness”.

§ 5 Conclusion

“The cow looked at me, and I looked at the cow, and whenever I stirred the cow gave over eating.”

– Dorothy Wordsworth: *Grasmere Journal*, 18 March 1802⁶⁴⁷

On the preceding pages, I have explored the complex Vedic axiom which states that the human being is one of the five domestic animals, *paśu*. Before I offer some concluding reflections on the nature of the human-animal relationship in Vedic India and what to take from it, let me summarise the findings of the individual chapters.

The first chapter, named “Animal Terminology in Vedic Literature”, reconstructed the history of semantics of the three most common animal categories in Vedic Sanskrit: *paśu*, *mṛga*, and the dichotomy of *grāmya* and *āraṇya paśu*. I dedicated a lengthy textual-historical discussion to each of the terms, tracing their evolution from their Indo-European and Indo-Iranian past to their usage in the Brāhmaṇa prose literature.

Paśu, the most common of these three expressions, was originally an Indo-European term for moveable chattels. In Vedic, it was adopted as a general term for five species of domestic livestock: cattle, horses, goats, sheep, and human beings. The primary literature shows, however, that in the prose period of Vedic literature, the word was being applied to a larger array of animals which were further distinguished between “domestic”, *grāmya*, and “wild”, *āraṇya*. The increased usage of this pair of terms coincides with two changes:

a) First, with the evolution of the word *mṛga*, a term of Indo-Iranian provenance. Whilst the Iranian cognates of the word commonly mean “bird”, in early Vedic poetry the word signifies a “wild animal”, a terrifying beast which lives outside of the areas dominated by humans. Although greatly

⁶⁴⁷ Wordsworth: 1941r, p. 126.

feared, *mṛga* can be hunted down and killed. In the Vedic prose, however, the meaning of the word evolves to describe an animal which is hunted for sport (usually a deer or an antelope), possibly following a societal change during which hunting changed from a necessary means of subsistence to a relatively privileged past-time activity.

b) Second, the heightened usage of the dichotomy *grāmya* and *āranya paśu* is a part of the evolution of Vedic ritualism. In the middle Vedic period, the importance of Vedic ritual increases. The ritual activity becomes the activity *par excellence*, with the power to influence the whole world, including natural phenomena. The ritual ground becomes the place from where ritualist specialists control the whole world by a system of identifications and correspondences between macrocosmic and microcosmic phenomena. With the system of identifications and correspondences comes the need for a clearer system of classification of worldly phenomena into distinct groups.

From the discussion about the history of semantics of the respective terms, we can conclude that Vedic does not use a single category akin to the general English word “animal”, but at least two. It distinguishes between animals that live close to people – animals that are mostly domesticated and dependant on pastoral care – and wild or feral animals.⁶⁴⁸ Much more is known, at least in the Vedic period, about the former group: the Vedic texts, although focused on ritual, are occasionally peppered with facts about characteristics and behaviour of domestic livestock. The preponderance of knowledge of one group over the other points at the close relationship which allows people to experience the lives of domestic animals and vice versa.

Although the terminology which helps to differentiate between the two animal categories is based on a geographical distinction (village versus wilderness),⁶⁴⁹ the essence of the differentiation lies in the closeness to people and the care established by the lengthy and transformative process of domestication.⁶⁵⁰ Domestication, I believe, is the key to understanding not only the term *paśu* but also the place of the human within the *paśu* group.

If the first chapter helped to delineate between different animal terms, trace the history of their semantics, and establish their meaning in the various genres of Vedic literature, the second chapter, called “The Unusual Suspect”, built on this basis. Its focus was to explore the ways in which the human is and is not like a *paśu*. First, the chapter explored the standard “Vedic taxonomy” which

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. Russell: 2002, especially p. 295: “when ancient peoples domesticated plants and animals, among other things they created a category of the Wild. The Wild cannot exist until there is a Domestic.”

⁶⁴⁹ In reality, the geographic boundary between the village and the wilderness must have been rather seamless, with both people and animals moving constantly back and forth. On the artificiality of the distinction between human and animal land in contemporary India, see Mathur: 2021, p. 151-2.

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. Despret: 2016, p. 30.

classifies the *puruṣa* among the *paśus*. Furthermore, it dealt with the bodies and characteristic behaviours of people, comparing them to the bodies of other *paśus*. I argued that the bodies of *paśus* differ in terms of extremities such as hands and feet; in terms of structure, however, they are essentially built from the same blocks (hair, skin, flesh, bone, and marrow). People, nevertheless, move through the world in a vertical position, two-footed and upright. This constitutes one of the main bodily differences between them and the rest of the group.

Several mythical narratives in the Vedic prose state, nevertheless, that in the mythical past (*agre*) people and the domestic animals used to be much closer in terms of both body and mind. Just like humans, *paśus* used to walk two-footed and upright, until the gods introduced the *yūpa*, the sacrificial post, to which animals were tied during the sacrifice since then. Fear of the *yūpa* made the *paśus* bend down on all four. Equally, in the mythical past, *paśus* used to possess the ability to perform rituals.

Lastly, the chapter explored the idea of sacrificability, the fitness of an animal or a human to be sacrificed. This is a characteristic feature that is used relatively commonly to distinguish domestic animals from wild animals by both primary and secondary literature. Domestic animals are the ones that can be sacrificed, whereas the wild cannot, otherwise the consequences would be terrible. If the human is truly a *paśu*, it should be fit to be sacrificed as well, at least theoretically. The primary literature sometimes toys with the idea that the human is sacrificed; more often, however, it is substituted for with another oblation. The possibility of being substituted, I have argued, exhibits a shared essence of the *paśu* group.

The second chapter opened two themes in particular. First, the similarities between people and other *paśus* are far more common than the differences. These similarities are found on the bodily and cognitive level as well as within the notion of ritual substitution. In brief, the Vedic narratives, I argue, suggest a certain shared essence of the whole group, a feature which I call “ontological proximity”: a related way of being, shared characteristic features and behaviour, and an overall affinity. Second, this shared ontology is, however, placed in the mythical past or future, and re-enacted within the ritual.

The third core chapter, called “Skin”, further developed the theme of the *paśus*’ shared essence by detailed reading and interpretation of two mythical prose narratives. According to one of these mythical stories, human bodies used to be covered in the hide that covers the bodies of livestock today and vice versa. The domestic animals, however, struggled to live with human skin, being constantly hot or cold or bothered by insects. To solve their annoyance, they approached people to swap their skin with them, offering their own meat and leather as an extra. As a payback for this

disadvantageous barter, however, they promised to devour people in the yonder world. I argue that this story, too, indicates the idea of the “ontological proximity” – a shared essence, affinity, and cooperation between the species – which is located in the mythical past.

The retribution in the next world, furthermore, is comparable to the other story treated in this chapter: the story about Varuṇa’s arrogant son, Bhṛgu, who travelled in the yonder world where he observed, among others, plants and animals devouring people as a retribution for their way of life in this world. In this story, all people are devoured indiscriminately, unless they have the knowledge of this automatic outcome when they perform the *agnihotra*. Knowledge of the possible fate serves almost as a shield; if one knows “thus”, nothing can happen to him. In the case of this story, the idea of a shared essence is suggested by the fact that in the yonder world, almost all the entities will acquire a human form.

This last point indicates a certain anthropocentrism in the idea of the shared essence of the *paśu* group. If we hypothetically collate the mythical narratives, it seems that all sentient beings started off in the human form but slowly diverged to other bodily compositions. In the yonder world (i.e. the future), they will regain their human shape yet again. The present is, thus, the only time frame in which people and domestic animals differ.

These chapters lead directly to the core question of this thesis. In what sense is a human a *paśu*, and what does it mean to say so? I will list a few possible solutions to the question before discussing my own answer.

Possibly the easiest answer to this question is the one anchored in historic-comparative linguistics. The human is said to be a *paśu* because of the historic value of the term. The word, as I discussed in chapters § 2.1.1 and § 3.1, goes back to the Indo-European form **peku*. In IE, this term signified probably any movable wealth, including animals as well human beings, perhaps domestic personnel, bondmen, or enslaved people. Whilst this is most likely the underlying cause for the association of the human beings with the four other domestic species, the Vedic sources seem to have adapted it creatively.

With advances in modern biology, namely the Darwinian theory of evolution, the idea of the association of the human with domestic animals might not sound preposterous. Perhaps we could assume that the human is categorised as a *paśu* because it is literally a domesticated animal: a primate which has undergone a lengthy process of transformation.⁶⁵¹ This explanation, however, does not seem

⁶⁵¹ On humans as domesticated species, see Leach in Cassidy & Mullin: 2007.

to lie within the bounds of possibility of Vedic literature. Although the idea of animal transformation is present in Vedic texts, it nevertheless almost never applies to people. As I argued, the human form seems to be the “gold standard” for the Vedas: in the past, domestic animals used to look like people but slowly diverged towards other shapes.

Furthermore, the human might be a *paśu* because in the Vedic prose, the term seems to designate a ritual category rather than a zoological description. It is a word which signifies the fitness of a sentient being to be sacrificed. The human, as I discussed, is one of the sacrificable species, albeit frequently substituted for another one.

In my reading, however, the human is classified as a *paśu* not only because of etymology and ritual. The classification, I would argue, equally mirrors the socio-economic context: the semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle of Vedic people. The human is a *paśu* because his life is inextricably entangled with his livestock through the medium of mutual care, rooted in domestication.

Let me shortly diverge to touch upon the notion of domestication which is crucial to my understanding of the category of *paśu*. Traditionally, anthropologists and archaeologists speak of domestication as a single “event” which took place between 10 and 12 thousand years ago. For many, it presents the hallmark moment when people transcended their primitive way of life and became “civilised”.⁶⁵² In this reading, domestication is understood to be a definite and unidirectional process that involves ownership of nature and its control.

In my understanding, however, domestication is best viewed as an ongoing process of co-evolution between various species. The relationships that this process establishes are almost always “fragile and constantly shifting”,⁶⁵³ as Radhika Govindrajan says. Whilst domestication can be described as a process of exploitation of various sentient beings, it is equally a process of mutual care, cooperation and generosity.⁶⁵⁴ “Care, in both the emotional and the practical sense, is an essential part of both kin relations and animal husbandry,” writes the anthropologist Nerissa Russell,⁶⁵⁵ and we could continue this thought with what David Haberman writes in his book on tree-worship in contemporary India:

“By caring for, making offerings to, and interacting with trees in intimate ways, many tree worshipers explain that they come to see trees in a new way; through these physical acts they better perceive the special nature or divinity of a tree. [...] In the end it comes down to what kind of relationship we

⁶⁵² For the collection of various opinions on the revolutionary potential of domestication, see Cassidy & Mullin: 2007, p. 1-2.

⁶⁵³ Govindrajan: 2018, p. 136.

⁶⁵⁴ David Haberman calls this “mutually beneficial relationships”, see Haberman: 2013, ch. 7. Cf. Clark in Cassidy & Mullin: 2007, p. 51.

⁶⁵⁵ Russell in Cassidy & Mullin: 2007, p. 35.

humans chose to have with nonhuman beings; the world one perceives is the world one inhabits. And the world may turn out to be more “peopled” than we ever imagined.”⁶⁵⁶

Perhaps, a similar line of thinking about mutually beneficial care between human and nonhuman beings could be transposed onto the relationships between people and their livestock. The human has domesticated certain animal species for many reasons – nutrition, traction, warfare, and others – but through the process of domestication, the way of life, behaviour, and form of both have been transformed. The human requires, in the broadest sense of the word, the “care” of the animals and vice versa. They, quite literally, depend on each other: they become “companions”, “kin”, to use Donna Haraway’s terminology.⁶⁵⁷

The ideas of “companionship” and “care” are, I believe, key concepts of the category of *paśu*. Not every being is a *paśu* – although as I have suggested, the category opens up to subsume other animal species with time. Only the animals of the village are *paśus*, the beings which have been transformed by the process of domestication. The Vedic sources clearly value them: not only they are a part of everyday life, but they also participate in the ritual, i.e. the activity *par excellence* which is reserved for specific inhabitants of the world.

There is something cyclical about the explanations in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. It almost seems as if people and the rest of the domestic animals are related because they participate in a ritual – and at the same time, they are ritual participants because they are related. Their relationship is, as I have suggested a number of times, explained by the fact that they once looked and behaved alike. This similarity is re-enacted within several rituals and will be automatically regained again in the yonder world, provided that the sacrificer does not possess the transformative knowledge that will spare him from his fate.

In conclusion, although at the first glance, the human might seem to be the unusual suspect in the group of *paśus*, the detailed reading of the Vedic sources suggest that the category is relatively tight-knit. People might be two-footed and speak a language which is intelligible, but in the mythical past, all other *paśus* were quite the same. In the yonder world, they will once regain their original form.

I have spent a considerable part of my Introduction by writing about the challenges of the climate crisis and Anthropocene, arguing that research in Humanities might contribute towards the reimagination of human relationships with the natural world. Here is a place to ask whether Vedic

⁶⁵⁶ Haberman: 2013, p. 193.

⁶⁵⁷ “Companion species” – Haraway: 2003. “Kin” – Haraway: 2008; 2016.

literature might be an inspiration for this process of reimagination? Whilst this is obviously a subjective matter, I would argue so.

Vedic literature values domestic species over wild animals. It fears the wilderness but hints at the idea of companionship and closeness with the *paśu*. The mythical narratives, I believe, identify a sense of agency: domestic animals can organise rituals, decide to exchange skin, have emotions, speak, and take revenge on people in the next world. Although animal agency is localised in the mythical past and future, it is mentioned often enough to be taken seriously as a notion.

Some scholars view the notion of non-human agency, akin to what I have just described, as one of the possible solutions to the challenges of life in Anthropocene. For example, in his newest book *Down to Earth*, Bruno Latour argues that one of the possible root causes of the climate crisis is the idea of nature as an indifferent entity.⁶⁵⁸ With nature being symbolically differentiated from our everyday lives, it has become difficult to perceive the complex relationships between people, living beings, and the Earth. Latour suggests that instead of delineating between humans, animals, microbes, *et cetera*, we should call people as well as non-humans by the general term “terrestrials”. This general term might, according to Latour, enable us to grasp the Earth as a whole, to reimagine the multiple networks of relationships in which we are all entangled to survive. In short, he proposes a broader change in the symbolic system.

Vedic literature obviously does not have such connotations; nor does it offer broad, planetary solutions of the character that Latour proposes. Its mythical narratives that perceive the somewhat close relationship between humans and their livestock, and the agency of non-human animals might, however, serve as a reminder that our outlook on the natural world is not given. Other worlds are possible.

⁶⁵⁸ Latour: 2018.

§ 6 Bibliography

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