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Resisting and justifying changes

How to make the new acceptable in the Ancient,
Medieval and Early Modern world

ed. by

ELISABETTA PODDIGHE and TIZIANA PONTILLO

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ANCIENT INDIA

MARIA PIERA CANDOTTI, CHIARA NERI, TIZIANA PONTILLO

**VEDIC *DĀKṢIṆĀ*/PALI *DAKKHIṆĀ*.
RECOVERING AN ORIGINAL NOTION
BEHIND THE LATER INSTITUTIONAL GIFT***

Abstract

The focus of the present research is to reconstruct the original meaning of the culturally dense term Ved. *dākṣiṇā* / Pa. *dakkhiṇā*, which, in the late Vedic language, specifically means the gift due to the priest who officiates the rite in favour of a patron. The discussed data make it possible to postulate a completely different meaning for this term in the early Vedic texts, where it is used to evoke an ‘auspicious condition’ prototypically proper to a successful leader, both as an effect of previous glorious deeds and as a possible cause of further prosperity. We propose that in the Vedic context this term should be translated as ‘magnificence’, in which we distinguish two facets, namely: a more abstract one, that is magnificence in potency, as a result of past merits and often associated to the gods’ favour, and magnificence in action, i.e. the (sometimes material) outcome of such a condition. The latter may become the crucial ingredient of a simple devotional act of offering. Albeit with the expected differences, we find also in Pali sources a comparable emphasis on such an act of offering, in particular when addressed to a worthy recipient. Indeed, retrofitting the late meaning of *dākṣiṇā/dakkhiṇā* to the earlier cultural and linguistic stages leads to a miscomprehension of many relevant passages and pivotal features of both Vedic and early Buddhist ancient religious and political ideology. This is why we dedicate the last part of the paper to investigating how this assumed notion of ‘magnificence’ matches with what we know about the most ancient Indo-Aryan societal forms and with what is assumed about the evolution of these forms. We hope in this way to be able to add a crucial element to the interpretation of the cultural dynamic at work between the Buddhist and Vedic cultures, a dynamic characterised by some unresolved tensions such as preservation versus innovation and identity construction versus syncretic strategies.

* The present paper is the result of a joint work shared by the three authors. However, Maria Piera Candotti is generally responsible for §§ 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 4.1.3, 6, Chiara Neri for §§ 4, 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, Tiziana Pontillo for §§ 1, 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 5.1, 5.2. All translations from Vedic, Sanskrit and Pali into English are the authors’, unless explicitly stated. We are grateful to Mark Allon for some precious annotations on a preliminary version of the present paper.

1. Introduction

In Indological studies, textual sources dealing with ritual activities are an important, and sometimes unique, instrument to study the history of social and political patterns and the evolution of ritual practices provides evidence of the social relations in progress in the ancient world. The ritual and cultural entity we are focusing on here is designated by Ved. *dákṣiṇā*/Pa. *dakkhiṇā*, a term that denotes the gift due to the priest who officiates the rite on a patron's behalf in the late Vedic language. In this function this gift is highly praised and extolled in late-Vedic texts and is a crucial closing moment of sacrifice. Nevertheless, we have noticed that the term actually conveys some different meanings in the earliest sources and we will show how the (quite common) practice of retrofitting the late-Vedic concept into the more ancient sources often ends up in misunderstanding the old text. Gonda (1965: 19) also noticed that: '[...] the time-honoured translation of *dakṣiṇā* "fee offered to the officiating priest(s)" [...] is not only incorrect, but even deceptive'. We will concentrate on the analysis of the several passages in which this lexeme is involved in the earliest Vedic and Pali texts, in the hope that this will enable us to investigate the dynamic of the social, economic, and cultural breakthrough occurred and brought about the important semantic shift we have noticed after the so-called ancient Vedic history (15th-7th BCE). We will thus compare the most ancient testimony of texts coming from two different cultural traditions, trying thus to dust off the research perspective made up of comparison between Vedic and Pali sources, which 'has, during the past decades, receded more and more from the horizon of scholars, due to the increasing specialization and compartmentalization of Indian studies' (Jamison, Witzel 1992: 83)¹. This because we are convinced that both traditions are deeply involved in the linguistic and semantic history of the term from the beginning and that comparison may help in highlighting some diachronic steps. A crucial facet of this research consists in making an effort to follow these linguistic changes, to link them with the relevant contexts and to understand what might have been the philological and ideological tools that the protagonists adopted to make the slowly emerging new sense acceptable in the later times.

Several scholars have already highlighted the complexity of the semantics of *dákṣiṇā/dakkhiṇā*, but its evolution has mostly been interpreted in terms of a linear increasing importance of the institution of the

¹ They even maintain that such a comparative research has to be revived 'across the Vedic, Pali and Epic texts'.

priestly gift itself². Nevertheless, there are already hints in the scholarly literature of some difficulties arising from a standardization of the later Vedic notion, for instance Oguibénine explicits the need to get rid of the strict perspective of the relationship between the patron and the officiating priest (1982: 394) and also suggests that a parallel of the Vedic *dāksṛiṇā* should be looked for within the Buddhist notion transfer of merit (1982: 402). Significantly, the term *dāksṛiṇā* is quoted among others as one of the Vedic terms in need of a crucial revision in Thomson's controversial yet thought-provoking article (2009: 80).

By 'later Vedic' meaning of *dāksṛiṇā* we are referring to an institution with some specific features. First of all, a late-Vedic *daksṛiṇā* is always the offer of something concrete (food, clothes, other kinds of wealth) and expressly enjoined (in terms of quality, quantity and beneficiary). For instance, the following sentence cannot³ be understood unless we read *daksṛiṇā* as a well-established institutional part of sacrifice, which is expected to be regulated in the description of whatever variety of sacrificial performance:

- [1] [...] *vāsodaksṛiṇāḥ kāmyā iṣṭayo yā anādiṣṭadaksṛiṇāḥ. godaksṛiṇaḥ paśubandhaḥ.* (BŚS 13. 1)

'The optional *iṣṭis* whose *daksṛiṇās* are not specifically taught have clothing as *daksṛiṇās*, the animal sacrifice has a cow as its *daksṛiṇā*'.

Moreover, the act of giving a *daksṛiṇā* involves two actants who have distinct/complementary functions in the sacrificial event (a patron of the sacrifice and an officiant) and, whether it occurs in the middle or at the end of the sacrifice⁴, it is in any case explicitly targeted on the action of 'terminer le sacrifice', to stay with Malamoud (1976), and ensuring its success. The following passage selected from the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* is a good example of these two points:

- [2] *dvyā vai devā devāḥ. āhaivā deva ātha yé brāhmaṇāḥ śruśruvāṃso 'nūcānās té manuṣyadevās téṣāṃ dvedhā vibhaktā evā yajña āhutaya evā devānām dāksṛiṇā manuṣyadevānām brāhmaṇānām śuśruvūṣām anūcānānām āhutibhir evā devān prīṇāti dāksṛiṇābhir manuṣyadevān*

² See also e.g. Heesterman (1959: 241) and Mylius (1979: 144), cf. Gonda (1955: 75) that shows some awareness of the fact that the current interpretation does not match well even with those offered by late Vedic exegetic texts.

³ We have selected these two passages from those which are considered the earliest Śrauta-Sūtras e.g. by Gonda 1977, Brucker 1980, Parpola 2011.

⁴ See ŚBM 11.7.2.4-5.

*brāhmaṇā chruśruviśo 'nūcānāms tā enam ubhāye devāḥ prītāḥ
suhāyām dadhati.* (ŚBM 2.2.2.6)

‘Indeed, gods are of two types: on the one hand the gods who are the celestial (gods), on the other, the brahmins who have studied and teach sacred lore are the human gods. Their sacrifice is divided into two parts: oblations constitute the sacrifice to the gods and *dākṣiṇās* to the human gods, who are the brahmins who have studied and teach sacred lore. By means of the oblations indeed one gratifies the gods, by means of *dākṣiṇās* the human gods, who are the brahmins who have studied and teach sacred lore. Both these types of gods, gratified, place him (i.e. the sacrificer) in a state of well-being’.

In order to retrace the oldest meanings of the term, as regards Vedic sources, we shall exclusively concentrate on *Ṛgveda*- and *Atharvaveda-Saṃhitās*, and, as far as the Pali sources are concerned, we will analyse a selection of *Suttapiṭaka* occurrences in comparison with inscriptional Prakrit materials. The analysis of the history of the *dākṣiṇā* since the *Yajurveda-Saṃhitā* age onward will be object of a next work, while we refer to a previous joint article (Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo 2020) for another crucial step in our broader programme devoted to *dākṣiṇā/dakṣhiṇā*, i.e. as regards the usages of the specific derivative Ved. *dakṣiṇīya* and Pa. *dakṣhiṇeyya*.

The first three sections will be devoted to the linguistic analysis of the mentioned collection of occurrences, while in the last two we will discuss the relevant heroic and ultramundane context in order to focus on the social and eschatological patterns in which the earliest *dākṣiṇā* – as we have tried to reconstruct it – plays a paramount role.

2. *Ṛgveda testimony: dākṣiṇā as an auspicious disposition*

Focusing on *Ṛgvedic* occurrences it is possible to prove how the later, well-established meaning of *dakṣiṇā* as ‘priestly gift’ does not match most of the literary contexts where the term occurs. In the *Ṛgveda* there are 35 occurrences of the term found in all the books and in prevalence in books 1 (hymns 123 [2X], 125, 164, 168, 169) and 10 (hymns 62 [3X], 103, 107 [8X]). The occurrences in the most ancient books are concentrated in books 2 [8X] (but seven out of eight times it is a kind of refrain, closing the hymns)⁵, 3, 6 plus three single occurrences in books 5, 8 and 9⁶. In the *Ṛgveda* the *dākṣiṇā* seems to

⁵ We thus did not count them as separate occurrences.

⁶ There are of course some possible overlappings with both the adjectival meaning ‘dexterous’ and ‘Southern’. In particular, we assign this latter meaning to the occurrence

be chiefly a matter of the gods. Seven times the explicit or implicit agent is Indra (a point we will come back to further on): he is a kind of impeller of the *dākṣiṇā* itself; he sets it in motion and thanks to it he avoids hardship and is in a position to distribute the spoils to the victorious heroes⁷. In its concrete (yet nonetheless divine) form of a cow, he makes it yield its blessings (sg.)⁸; sometimes he makes the *dākṣiṇās* (pl.) abundant⁹. Other gods and goddesses through *dākṣiṇā* are able to bring help to the devotees¹⁰. The *dākṣiṇā* seems thus to be an instrument, a power that the gods typically (even though not exclusively) own and use to favour the mortals. Sometimes Dakṣiṇā herself, when the term is used as a prosopopoeia, makes the paths easy to travel for her devotees¹¹.

Much rarer are the cases where the *dākṣiṇā* pertains to men; they are generally found in what is called the *dānāstuti*-part of the relevant hymns. Even in these contexts, nevertheless, when the term *dākṣiṇā* is used, no common men (bountiful patrons as they may be) are depicted rather semi-divine beings or heroes equated to gods¹². And even taking

of *dākṣiṇā* in RV 10.61.8cd which Jamison, Brereton (2014: 1476) translate as ‘priestly gift’. The context is that of the tentative incest committed by the Sky with his daughter, the Dawn. Her flying away from him is described in the following words *sārat padā nā dākṣiṇā parāvṛṇī nā tā nū me prśanyō jagrbhre* ‘She flew away southward[-oriented] turning around as if on foot, these lures of mine have not reached [her]’.

⁷ RV 6.37.4 *vāriṣṭho asya dākṣiṇām iyartūndro maḡhōnām tuvikūrmítamah | yáyā vajrivah pariyāsy āmho maḡhā ca dhṛṣṇo dáyase ví sūrīn*. As regards the term *sūrī* (hero) interpreted as ‘patron’ see Pinault (1999-2000: 427) and bibliography here quoted.

⁸ RV 2.11.21 [3] (similarly 2.18.8 [9]). No doubt that the verb *duh-* is connected with the action of milking; nevertheless, its usage may be much wider in our sources, without a strict reference to actual and concrete milking; see RV 10.103.8 = ŚS 19.13.9 = VSM 17.40 where it is used in connection with a bull.

⁹ RV 3.36.5 (see [11]).

¹⁰ RV 3.62.3cd *asmān vārūtrīḥ śaraṇair avantv asmān hótrā bhāratī dākṣiṇābhiḥ* ‘Let the guardian goddesses help us by means of shelters; let the goddess of invocation descending from Bharata help us by means of their *dākṣiṇās*!’ Some interpreters see here a dual entity, the pair of goddesses Hotrā and Bhāratī, but the point is not crucial for our demonstration.

¹¹ See RV 1.18.5 *dākṣiṇā pātu āmhasaḥ* ‘Let Dakṣiṇā protect him (i.e. the *martya*-‘mortal man’) from distress’ (invocation of Dakṣiṇā together with some other gods to protect the devotee); RV 6.64.1 *kṛṇóti víśvā supāthā sugāny ābhūd u vásvī dākṣiṇā maḡhōnī* ‘She makes all pathways, all passages easy to travel. She has appeared, the excellent bountiful Dakṣiṇā’. As an abstract divinised concept, it is associated with Yajña: see RV 10.62.1, 10.103.8.

¹² Interesting, for example, is how Manu’s *dākṣiṇā* is described with a terminology that is in tune with god’s *dākṣiṇā*. See RV 10. 62.9cd and 11ab *sāvarnyāsya dākṣiṇā ví síndhur iva paprathe [...]* *sahasradā grāmañīr mā riṣan mānuḥ sūryeṇāsya yátamānaitu dākṣiṇā* ‘The *dākṣiṇā* of [Manu] Sāvarnya spreads out like a river [...] Let Manu, giver

into account the two passages with a definite mundane outlook (i.e. RV 6.27.8 and RV 8.24.29), the word *dákṣiṇā* seems to refer to the power and wealth of the donor (often an outcome of loot), an auspicious state that at the same time is an outcome of past success, a kind of material and immaterial treasure gained by past deeds, and a guarantee for the success of the imminent ritual or heroic action¹³.

There are thus different levels of conceptualisation of *dákṣiṇā*, from the more abstract one (*dákṣiṇā* as a condition or a capacity of the successful leader), which, on the one hand, finds an allegoric image in a goddess taking the form of a celestial cow¹⁴, antecedent of the cow-of-plenty¹⁵, and, on the other, finds its concrete realisation in the booty to be shared among comrades or in the sacrificial matter made available for an act of worship.

In more recent strata of the canon (hymns 51-191 of the first book, and the eighth book), alongside the above-mentioned features one may add a distinctive imagery developing around the concept of a victory-granting chariot that takes the lead of the gods' armies in order to defeat the evil ones¹⁶.

of thousands, leader of the horde, not suffer harm. Let his *dákṣiṇā* go, aligning itself with the sun'. Verses 8-11 are traditionally recorded as a *dānāstuti* (see Pinault 2019: 82, 91, 99; cf. Candotti, Pontillo 2019: 34-35 and fn. 31) in which Manu is the glorified patron. It remains interesting, however, to see how the more heroic dimension (recalled by the cosmic dimension of *dákṣiṇā*) remains present, strictly commixed with a much more ritual and domestic one; in the immediately following 11cd, for example, gods are begged to grant Manu a long life, a typical wish of a human devotee.

¹³ See RV 6.27.8 *durnāśeyāṃ dákṣiṇā pārthavānām* 'difficult to attain/conquer is this *dákṣiṇā* of the Pārthavas' where the term better refers to the booty previously acquired (see Palihawadana 2017: 39); RV 8.24.29 *ā nāryāsya dákṣiṇā vyaśvām etu somīnaḥ sthūrāṃ ca rādhaḥ śatāvata sahāsravat* 'May the *dákṣiṇā* of Nārya, come to the Vyaśvas, practitioners of the Soma cult, and a bulky booty in hundreds and thousands'. In the preceding verse a female deity generally identified with Dawn (but it could be Dakṣiṇā herself) is said to have conveyed wealth (*rayī*) to Varo Suśāman and to the Vyaśvas. Again, the context seems to focus on the division of booty among those partaking of the same faith (cf. *somīn-*) and Nārya's *dákṣiṇā* is instrumental to this end.

¹⁴ RV 10.103.8ab (AVŚ 19.13.9 = VSM 17.40) *indra āsām netā bḥhaspātir dákṣiṇā yajñāḥ purā etu sómaḥ | devasenānām abhibhañjātīnām jáyantīnām marūto yantv ágram* 'Let Indra (go in front) as their leader, let Bḥhaspati, Dakṣiṇā, Yajña, the Soma go in front, let the Maruts go to the forefront of the shattering, conquering armies of gods'.

¹⁵ The imagery of the cow is implicit in all the passages where the verb *duh-* occurs but also probably in the images concerning the act of creating the trail or the path.

¹⁶ See § 2.2.

From here onwards, by looking at the most relevant occurrences, we will put to test the hypothesis that *dākṣiṇā* in fact identifies some kind of ‘auspicious (pre)disposition’ which characterises a god or a man because of his previous deeds or the status he conquered, but that it is, at the same time, a power he has accumulated and can put to use in order to attain a higher good. Given the complexity of the concept and of the associated imagery, finding an unambiguous translation is anything but easy¹⁷. From here onwards we will use the word ‘magnificence’ which seems to match some important features of *dākṣiṇā*, namely a) its being the result of one’s personal attitude and one’s past deeds; b) its being perceptible—and thus easily represented by material goods and opulence; c) its being a crucial feature of the leader, which reverberates on its subjects. This is the main translation we use, apart from in those rare passages where the concrete aspect predominates, and ‘offering’ in the sense of ‘the best we have to offer/ our best’ seemed more appropriate.

Even at first glance, there are a further two strictly connected points that immediately capture the reader’s attention. They may help in dismissing the concept of gift to the officiant that we have seen imposed all too often on the ancient texts by looking at them through the lenses of the late-Vedic texts. First of all, the fact that the action of giving/being given, with the exception of a single, by the way doubtful, occurrence¹⁸, is never involved directly in the passages: the *dākṣiṇā* is not primarily something which is given rather something through which wealth, strength and all kinds of blessings are bestowed on the devotee or on the clan as a whole. In consequence, the beneficiaries of the *dākṣiṇā* are seldom mentioned. Most of the time a generic first person, singular or even plural, is directly or indirectly affected by the situation described by the text: it is a ‘we’ which indicates the participants involved in the ritual or heroic event, which by no means entails that they are ‘officiants’ opposed to a patron, and even less ‘brahmins’ as opposed to *kṣatriyas*¹⁹.

¹⁷ In Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo 2020 we proposed ‘auspicious condition’, which we remain convinced to be correct as far as the interpretation of the term is concerned but without doubt somewhat clumsy in translating the texts.

¹⁸ The mentioned occurrence is RV 1.169.4 *tvām tū na indra tām rayīm dā ójīṣṭhayā dākṣiṇayeva rātim*, translated by Jamison, Brereton (2014: 369): ‘You, Indra, give us wealth, like a present in the form of a most formidable priestly gift cow’. See a possible alternative translation in fn. 33.

¹⁹ In most of the occurrences involving Indra, the ‘we’ seems to denote in fact his comrades (*sákhi*).

In fact, in only two of the 35 passages a specific beneficiary is expressed. In ṚV 2.11.21 (= 2.18.9 etc.), in a hymn where the heroic and the ritual context are deeply intertwined²⁰ Indra's *dákṣiṇā* is invoked in order to grant back the due reward (*vára*) to the 'summoner' (*jaritr̥*):

- [3] *nūnām sá te práti váraṃ jaritr̥é duhīyád indra dákṣiṇā maghónī |
śikṣā stotṛbhyo māti dhag bhágo no bṛhád vadema vidáthe suvīrāḥ ||
(ṚV 2.11.21 = 2.18.9 etc.)*²¹

'Now, Indra, may this bountiful magnificence of yours yield in its own turn a reward (*vára*) for him who invokes you; be ready to help those who praise [you]: may good fortune not pass us by, may we, having good heroes, speak loftily during the distribution of the booty (*vidátha*)'²².

It is evident that the *dákṣiṇā* is not here the final boon, rather it is an instrument to obtain it in a competitive context characterized by a distribution of booty in which the singers/devotees of Indra hope to have a good share thanks to their warlike powers. Now, the verse is a kind of refrain which closes a consistent number of hymns in the second book but instead of the expected image of a patron giving what is due to an officiant, here we have undoubtedly an altogether different context, considered as being perfectly apt for the closing of the hymn.

The second occurrence, ṚV 1.125, is on the other hand a very complex hymn where some *hapax legomena* make the overall interpretation somewhat faltering²³. The context is established in the first verse in the following terms:

- [4] *prātā rátnam prātarítvā dadhāti táṃ cikityán pratigṛhyā ní dhatte |
téna prajāṃ vardháyamāna áyū rāyás póṣeṇa sacate suvīrah ||
(ṚV 1.125.1)*

'In the early-morning, the early-coming (priest/god)²⁴ establishes a treasure. An observant man, receiving him (as guest), lays it in him-

²⁰ The hymn is analysed in Brereton 1985.

²¹ ṚV 2.11.21 = 2.15.10 = 2.16.9 = 2.17.9 = 2.18.9 = 2.19.9 = 2.20.9.

²² Cf. Jamison, Brereton (2014: 415): 'Now should the generous priestly gift yield your boon for the singer as its milk, Indra.'

²³ Pinault (2019: 84) considers it as a *dānastūti* hymn, i.e. a hymn 'entirely devoted to the praise of the generosity of the patron(s)' together with 1.126, 5.18, 5.27, 8.55. While we agree that the idea of establishing a treasure is crucial in this hymn, we propose a different interpretation of the overall context.

²⁴ Jamison-Brereton's translation intentionally combines the interpretations of the *prātarítvan* either as a priest or as a god into a third one, proposing that this figure is to

self. Increasing his own progeny and lifetime with it, possessing good heroes, he is accompanied by thriving of wealth.’ (transl. Jamison, Brereton 2014: 290)

We have proposed a different interpretation of this first verse elsewhere²⁵, stating that the verb *pratigrah-* is mostly connected with objects and means ‘accepting something’ rather than ‘receiving someone’ and that the masculine pronoun *tām* can, of course, be related to the (implicit) accusative signifying deity/guest—as Jamison, Brereton (2014: 290) did—, but also, just as well if not better, to the explicit accusative *rātnam* ‘treasure’, referring to *cikivān* with more explicit verbal value. We thus propose this alternative translation:

‘An early morning treasure establishes the one who comes early in the morning. He who is attentive to him, after accepting [the treasure], watches over it. Making progeny and life grow with it, the one provided with good heroes, he is associated with abundance of wealth’.

If our interpretation is correct, here we are not confronted with the act of welcoming/gratifying a priest or a god, but rather with the act of establishing ‘a treasure’ and entrusting it to a leader who will somehow make it pay off. In fact, this recalls the main occurrences stating that the prizes are set, except that the context is not so overtly ritualistic. Significantly, in verse 3 the early coming man states his purpose in the following terms:

[5] *āyam adyā sukṛtam prātār ichānn iṣṭéh putrām vāsumatā rāthena |*
(RV 1.125.3)

‘I came today early in the morning, with a chariot full of goods, wishing for a well-doer²⁶, a son of my quest’.

It seems evident that we here do not have a priest looking for a patron in order to receive his future reward. The early coming man himself brings wealth with him and looks for someone who must be skilled in (ritual) action. We are distant from the image of a priest looking for a wealthy patron; the focus of this mysterious hymn might rather be the setting of the sacrificial matter provided by the early coming man

be considered as a priest welcomed by the guest with special consideration, because he might be a god in disguise.

²⁵ See Candotti, Pontillo 2016: 48-51, Candotti, Pontillo 2019: 33 fn. 20.

²⁶ Often used with a definite ritual shade of meaning.

himself, of which the other is a keeper, a supervisor, a ritual expert. He boasts about his chariot full of goods which cannot but remind one of the *dákṣiṇā* chariot mentioned above and which is the prerequisite for the successful outcome of the feat. Thus, we wonder whether Jamison, Brereton (2014: 289) are correct in stating that the second part is disconnected to this first one being ‘an extravagant picture of the rewards that accrue to the generous giver and sacrifice’. It is in this context, where the early coming figure and the thoughtful supervisor cannot be simply identified with the two well-known actors of reformed ritual, that our term *dákṣiṇā* in RV 1.125.5 must be analysed. Here it is said that a glorious destiny awaits the one who fulfils (*yáh prṇāti* 5b):

[6] *nákasya prṣṭhé ádhi tiṣṭhati śritó yáh prṇāti sá ha devéṣu gachati |*
tásmā ápo ghrtám arṣanti síndhavas tásmā iyám dákṣiṇā pínvate sádā ||
 (RV 1.125.5)

‘He stays fixed in the sky vault the one who fulfils, indeed he goes among the gods; to him the waters convey the *ghṛta*²⁷, for him this magnificence always swells’.

The one who fulfils is not the *yájamāna* in the reformed sense of the word. We will see later that a prototypical ‘fulfiller’ is Indra leading his army to victory. The *dákṣiṇā* is not something material, but rather seems to be a condition of grace or bliss, which is not the outcome but the prerequisite of a successful heroic or ritual action. Of course, this does not deny in any way that in the ritual context this abstract principle is often embodied in an abundant offering represented by one or several cows and that part of the metaphoric images comes from this concrete counterpart.

Verse 5 is followed by a praise of those ‘full-of-grace’ (*dákṣiṇāvat-*). Jamison and Brereton (2004: 290) translate it as ‘the givers of *dákṣiṇās*’ which is obviously far from its literal meaning and seems an interpretation forced into the context by the following two assumptions, namely a) that *dákṣiṇā* means a priestly gift and b) that the early coming priest longs for it whereby he *lyrically* (and somehow clumsily) celebrates

²⁷ We prefer to leave this crucial term untranslated since it may have had a more abstract primary meaning, as happened to other terms (including our *dákṣiṇā*) later rendered by tradition as extremely concrete, in the name of their symbolic substitute in the sacrificial arena, cf. Thomson (2009: 70-72) who proposes ‘productivity’.

the giver²⁸. But the perception of clumsiness disappears if we consider that it is the god-to-be/mighty worshipper that is extolled as possessing what is necessary for the successful completion of the undertaking.

2.1. *Indra: the magnificent leader*

In general *dākṣiṇā* seems to be connected much more with the world of divine beings than with men, and among the divine beings a salient place is occupied by Indra²⁹. We can in a sense consider that the representation of the role of magnificence in heroic or ritual contexts in which Indra is the protagonist can help us to understand what role *dākṣiṇā* played in historically determined heroic and ritual contexts.

Indra, a deity with a complex and evolving status, is the prototypical leader of groups of armed men: he is invoked by all the parties before a competition or a battle, he is a guarantee of the success³⁰ of the expedition, a smasher of obstacles, a creator of wide space. In this function, the image of him advancing with his troops closely resembles that of the *dākṣiṇāvata-* in RV 1.125.6³¹:

- [7] *vāriṣṭho asya dākṣiṇām iyartīndro maghónām tuvikūrmítamaḥ |*
yáyā vajrivaḥ pariyāśy āmho maghā ca dhṛṣṇo dáyase ví sūrīn ||
 (RV 6.37.4)

‘Indra, the excellent, he who is the swiftest in action among the munificent ones, sets in motion his magnificence with which (i.e. with *dākṣiṇā*) you, equipped with your club, brave, avoid difficulties and distribute munificence among the heroes’³².

²⁸ RV 1.125.6 *dākṣiṇāvātām id imāni citrā dākṣiṇāvātām divi sūryāsaḥ |* *dākṣiṇāvanto amītam bhajante dākṣiṇāvantaḥ prā tiranta āyuh.* In Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo (2020) we proposed this translation: ‘These shining [prizes/bounties] belong to these who are full of grace, suns in the heaven belong to them who are full of grace. They who are full of grace have a share in immortality; they who are full of grace prolong their own lifetime’.

²⁹ In a few other cases other deities are involved (Soma, all the gods, the two goddesses and, in a more indirect way Agni, who is said to adorn the chariot of magnificence).

³⁰ See RV 4.24.1 (*gōpatir niṣṣīdhām*) and 2 *satyārādhaḥ* ‘whose prize is real/ present’.

³¹ In RV 6.19.11 the divine ruler (*divyā- śasā-*) Indra is also said to be a non-*ka-vāri*, a term of difficult interpretation which, nevertheless, seems to identify someone who does not share the ideology of magnificence and generosity characteristic, in particular, of Indra’s cult.

³² Oguiébine (1982: 399) in his work on *dākṣiṇā* and Buddhist merit—which contains extremely interesting insights yet does not depart from the meaning of ‘priestly gift’ for the first term—considers this verse deliberately obscure: ‘un bel exemple d’obscurcissement voulu, [...] car le vers cité fait croire que c’est Indra qui contourne, ou trompe, la misère humaine, alors que ses actes se réduisent à la faire éviter aux

Indra's magnificence is a crucial part of Indra's paraphernalia³³, it is at the base of his capacity to bring to completion innumerable heroic deeds and thus concretely show his favour to his devotees:

- [8] *yásyámitāni vīryā ná rādhaḥ páryetave |
jyótir ná víśvam abhy ásti dáksīṇā || (RV 8.24.21 = AVŚ 20.65.3)*
'The favour of him, whose heroic deeds are immeasurable, cannot be circumscribed, [his] magnificence, like light, surmounts everything'³⁴.

Indra's magnificence is thus the state of grace entailing a capacity, a dexterity (to maintain the etymon of the term) that guarantees the success of the enterprises in which Indra involves his associates. In fact, a crucial feature of this Indra-like leader is not only his liberality (perfectly consistent with a heroic vision) but, more specifically, the fact that he shares the wealth and benefits conquered by his endeavours with his companions (*sákhi*).

- [9] *ná ma indreṇa sakhyám ví yoṣad asmábhyam asya dáksīṇā duhīta |
úpa jyéṣṭhe várūthe gábhastau prāyē-prāye jigīvāmsaḥ syāma ||
(RV 2.18.8)*
'No one will keep away my companionship with Indra. His magnificence will yield for us. Under his preeminent protection, under his arms, may we be winners in every competition'.
- [10] *nū cin na indro maghāvā sáhūtī dānó vājaṃ ní yamate na ūtī |
ánūnā yásya dáksīṇā pīpāya vāmāṃ nībhyo abhívītā sákhibhyaḥ ||
(RV 7.27.4)*

humans; on fait croire, de plus, que c'est le dieu Indra qui, tout à la fois, gratifie les patrons du sacrifice et fait un geste de générosité envers les destinataires de la dakṣiṇā, mais on sait déjà que cette façon de dire omet, délibérément [...] le rôle de médiateurs normalement attribué aux patrons du sacrifice [...]'. We think, on the contrary, that if the term means a state of grace that is a prelude to success, it is consistent that Indra sets it in motion, puts it to work so to speak, and through it can avoid any pitfalls and arrive at the final distribution of the booty among the heroes.

³³ See in particular the instrumental in RV 6.37.4 fn. 7. The *dáksīṇā* may also be the instrument of other gods and even goddesses, see RV 3.62.3 where it is said: *avantv asmān hótrā bhāratī dáksīṇābhīḥ* 'May Hotrā and Bhāratī help us with [their] *dáksīṇās*'.

³⁴ The link between divine favour and the state of grace/*dáksīṇā* that makes it real is also present in another, unfortunately rather obscure verse: RV 1.169.4 *tvām tū na indra tám rayīm dā ójīṣṭhayā dáksīṇayeva rātīm | stútas ca yás te cakánanta vāyó stánaṃ ná mádhvāḥ pīpayanta vājaiḥ* 'You, o Indra, grant us wealth, like a favour [granted] by the most powerful *dáksīṇā*. And the praised ones [i.e. the Maruts, mentioned in the preceding verses] that please you, may they swell [us] with prizes like Vayu's breast with inebriating [somal]'.

‘Never does bounteous Indra hold back from giving spoils along with help to us, even with a coincident call; he, the dispenser (*dānāḥ*), he whose unfailing magnificence swelled—a thing of value for his men³⁵—desirable for his comrades’³⁶.

The material representation of this dexterity, this capacity to fullfil (oneself and the others) is of course the cow or the cows, the most precious part of the booty, both a sign of opulence and a guarantee of future shared wealth. In the two occurrences where the parallelism between the cow and *dākṣiṇā* is straightforward, the term is better interpreted as an epithet (from adj. *dākṣiṇa-*) identifying the ‘most able’ cow, that is the cow producing abundant milk and thus granting life to its calf:

- [11] *mahāṃ ugró vāvr̥dhe vīryāya samācakre vṛṣabhāḥ kāvyaena |*
indro bhāgo vājadā asya gāvah prā jāyante dākṣiṇā asya pūrvīḥ ||
 (ṚV 3.36.5)

‘Great, formidable, he has grown by heroism: he has made himself a bull by poetic inspiration. Indra is a munificent lord. His cows are givers of prizes, his magnificent (ones) propagate, abundant’.

Also Dawn, again in the form of the milk-cow, in a verse that evokes the incest with her father (the sky) is thus described:

- [12] *dhenūḥ pratnāsya kāmyaṃ dūhānāntāḥ putrās carati dākṣiṇāyāḥ |*
 (ṚV 3.58.1)

‘The milk-cow is yielding what is desired by the old one (i.e. the sky); the son that was inside moves around coming from that magnificent (one)’³⁷.

2.2. *The bright chariot conquering the sky*

In the later strata of the ṚV the image of the *dākṣiṇā* as a victorious chariot, often in connection with that of Dawn’s journey through

³⁵ The *nṛ-* were the young adult members of the communities who assured the victory to their *viś* and were compared with the Maruts (ṚV 7.56.5), who commonly fought alongside Indra (Maggi 2019: 37).

³⁶ Jamison, Brereton (2014: 916) translate ‘(previously) enclosed’ with a more direct relationship with the preceding verse describing the Vala-myth. Nevertheless the meaning ‘enclosed’ for *abhāvīta-* does not seem to be attested elsewhere.

³⁷ Jamison, Brereton (2014: 548) translate: ‘The milk-cow (= Dawn) is yielding the desirable milk of the age-old (semen); the son (= Agni) of the priestly gift (gen. sg.) acts as go-between’ but, to our knowledge, this would be the only reference to *dākṣiṇā*’s son.

the sky and the lighting of the early morning fire, is crucial³⁸. Some hints of such a link are also found in the family books, but the mutual dependence of the two elements is less strongly emphasised³⁹. One hymn in particular, ṚV 1.123, is devoted to the goddess Dawn represented as a leader about to set out to defeat darkness in order to secure life and wealth for mankind. The hymn begins with the powerful image of gods mounting the chariot of magnificence⁴⁰ directed towards the earth:

[13] *prthú rátho dáksināyā ayojy aīnaṃ devāso amṛtāso asthuḥ |*
kṛṣṇād úd asthād aryā vihāyās cikitsantī mānuṣāya kṣāyāya || (ṚV
 1.123.1)

‘The broad chariot of magnificence⁴¹ has been yoked, the gods, immortals, have mounted it. From darkness the noble one (i.e. dawn) has arisen, she of ample power, caring for the human dwelling’⁴².

It seems clear from the second hemistich that the driving agent of the hitched chariot is indeed Dawn, who transports the gods from heaven to the world of men and in particular, as it appears from the following verses, to a place where a ritual event is happening⁴³. In the following verses she is addressed as winner of prizes (*vājam* [...] *sānutrī*) who is in charge of the distribution of the portions (*bhāga*)⁴⁴;

³⁸ The link between dawn and *dāksinā* has long been noted. It has often been explained by assuming that the distribution of sacrificial goods took place, in archaic times, in the early morning, as opposed to the so-called classical rite that provides for such distribution at midday. We agree with Heesterman (1959: 255) that the link between *dāksinā* and the dawn can be otherwise explained even if, more than on Heesterman’s concept of cyclicity we focus on the initial role of the state of grace/*dāksinā* of the promoter of sacrifice. It might even be that this idea of distribution of priestly gifts in the morning was a sort of misunderstanding of this very bond between Dawn and *dāksinā*.

³⁹ See ṚV 6.64.1 where the simultaneous appearance of the two, Dawn and *dāksinā*, is emphasised.

⁴⁰ The image is strongly reminiscent of a triumph chariot.

⁴¹ We prefer the occurrence in the genitive. Jamison, Brereton (2014: 286) translate it as dative ‘the chariot for the *dāksinā*’.

⁴² Jamison, Brereton’ translation (2014: 286): ‘A broad chariot has been yoked for the priestly gift’ with *dāksināyā* [*ayojy*] taken as a dative form is unconvincing: one wonders, on the one hand, in which sense the priestly gift is the beneficiary of the yoking of the chariot, on the other hand what exactly is the role of the gods mounting it.

⁴³ ṚV 1.123.2cd *oṣā agan prathamā pūrvāhūtau* ‘Dawn has come here, the first in the first summoning’.

⁴⁴ ṚV 1.123.3ab *yād adyā bhāgām vibhājāsi nṛbhya uṣo devi martyatrā sujāte* and also v. 4cd [...] *id bhajate vāsūnām*. This image looks like a female version of Indra.

she is said to be eager to win (*śiśāsantī*) and flashing (*dyotanā*). Nevertheless, it is always through the chariot of magnificence, as if it were some kind of secret weapon, that she can ensure success for her devotees:

- [14] *bhāgasya svāsā varuṇasya jāmir ūṣaḥ sūnṛte prathamā jarasva |
paścā sā daghyā yó aghāsya dhātā jāyema tāṃ dākṣiṇyā ráthena ||
úd iratām sūnṛtā út púramdhīr úd agnāyaḥ śusucānāso asthuḥ |
spārhā vásūni támasāpagūlhāviṣ kṛṇvanty uśāso vibhātīḥ ||* (RV
1.123.5-6)

‘Sister of Bhaga, relative of Varuṇa you, joyful Dawn wake up as first. May he who set up straits fall behind, may we defeat him with that chariot that is magnificence [itself].

Up the joys of the excited ones, up the munificence, up be the blazing fires
The shiny dawns make the desirable riches, hidden by darkness, manifest’.

The hymn cleverly mixes the ritual and the natural worlds: the success granted by Dawn who is represented both as the riches of the earth, revealed by her natural capacity to dispel darkness by rising to the sky in her chariot, and as the chariot of magnificence, by means of which she leads the gods to the ritual assembly at the early summoning. The two dimensions somehow echo each other. *dākṣiṇā* is a crucial instrument of dawn, connected with her capacity to bring light and to guarantee success to the point that the two are sometimes hardly distinguishable⁴⁵.

The ritual fire lit in the early morning, on the other hand, is a sort of inferior image of this celestial happening: fire, sometimes called the son of Dawn, strives towards its mother, thus creating a contact between heaven and earth. The following [15] is a stanza in a hymn devoted to Agni, exactly in the form of the morning sun and the morning ritual fire:

- [15] *yád īm ganāsya raśanām ājṅgaḥ śúcir ankte śúcibhir góbhīr agnīḥ |
ād dākṣiṇā yuyjate vājayānty uttānām ūrdhvó adhayaj juhúbhiḥ ||* (RV
5.1.3)

⁴⁵ Compare with RV 1.164.9 *yuktā mātāsīd dhurī dākṣiṇyā ātiṣṭhad gārbho vṛjanīṣv antīḥ | amīmed vatsó ānu gām apaśyad viśvarūpyam triṣū yójaneṣu* ‘The mother [Dawn] was harnessed to the yoke-pole of *dākṣiṇā*; her child stood in the enclosures. The calf (= Agni) bellowed and followed with his gaze the cow of every colour (Dawn), for three measures’.

‘Once the blazing Agni [Sun] has awakened this trail of the troop⁴⁶, he anoints it with blazing cows⁴⁷; then magnificence is harnessed, racing forward; the fire, upraising with its tongues, sucks her who spread herself [in the sky]’.

All these occurrences show that it is hard to imagine that the *dākṣiṇā* is here divinised only in order to magnify the priestly gift. From the beginning, *Dakṣiṇā* belongs to the domain of heaven: she is the instrument that brings the gods to the sacrifice and efficient sacrificial matter to the sacrifice, in other words that assures the final success of the endeavour. This does not exclude that her material representation in the ritual context may have been that of a cart, loaded with spoils or herds, which were undoubtedly the most precious part of those spoils of war, placed at the disposal of the community to be shared ritually. In fact, if it is true that the sacrifice tends towards future success, it cannot but be based on a favourable condition derived from past successes, in a cyclical dimension already highlighted by Heesterman (1959).

2.3. *The fecund thundercloud*

Another image, again found in the later strata of the text helps us in understanding the abstract dimension of the concept. In RV 1.168.7, in the context of a hymn dedicated to the Maruts as thunderstorm gods, the ‘magnificence of the fulfiller’ is the standard of comparison of the thunderstorm brought about by the Maruts, violent and enlivening at the same time:

⁴⁶ We interpret it as referring to the troop of the gods (gods mentioned in the previous stanza): we saw in [13] that the gods themselves mount the chariot of magnificence. *raśanā* is a complex term, whose primary meaning may be that of rope/track and bridle; it is often used to convey the rays of light and also the fingers. In our interpretation the sun (Agni in the sky) illuminates the celestial track (of his own daily journey) that *dākṣiṇā*’s chariot will follow. Of course, the density of the passage leaves the door open for other interpretations. See e.g. Jamison, Brereton (2014: 663): ‘When he has awakened the bridle (= the hymn) of the (priestly) troop, blazing Agni is anointed with blazing cows (= milk)’. This is a much more ritually oriented picture where the priests, awakened by Agni chant hymns and pour milk on the fire to make it blaze. Nevertheless, some elements make, in our opinion, this interpretation less convincing: apart from the somewhat clumsy metaphor of the hymn as a bridle (it is more commonly matched to a chariot), also the passive meaning assigned to the *Ātmanepada* verb is also not fully convincing.

⁴⁷ The blazing cows are a well-known metaphor for the bright and ruddy clouds stretching across the early morning sky. The sun illuminates its own usual track in the sky and makes it visible through the illuminated clouds that spread over it like a troop of cows.

- [16] *sātīr ná vó 'mavatī svàrvatī tveṣā vipākā marutaḥ pīpiṣvatī |
bhadrá vo rātīḥ pṛṇató ná dākṣiṇā pṛthujrāyī asuryēva jāñjatī ||*
(RV 1.168.7)

‘Impetuous like your winning of spoils, o Maruts, bright, sparkling, ripening and swelling: your favour is blessed, it is like the magnificence of the fulfiller and like the widely extended lordly one [Rodasī]’.

More than rain, which is of course what is ultimately desired by men, it is the thundercloud which is here depicted, with its fascinating contrast between darkness and the lights sparkling within. It is the thundercloud which is said to be broad and glittering like Rodasī; these attributes are less significant if attributed to the rain. Again, magnificence is an instrument of success, rather than the success itself, fecundity more than offspring⁴⁸.

In another passage, where the principal imagery revolves around the figure of a cosmic king who uses different atmospheric phenomena as components of his attire, it is explicitly stated that it is magnificence that first sets in motion the march of a king towards his throne:

- [17] *ā dākṣiṇā srjyate śuṣmy āśadaṃ véti druho rakśasaḥ pāti jāgrviḥ |*
(RV 9.71.1ab)

‘Thanks to [?its] magnificence [the Soma] flows in, the flushing one sets itself in motion to take the seat; he protects from evil, from the demon, watchful’⁴⁹.

2.4. ‘Extravagant praises of the dākṣiṇā’ in the Ṛgveda?

RV 1.125 is not the only hymn where it is difficult to match the supposed function of the *dākṣiṇā* as a priestly gift with the praises addressed to it and to those endowed with it (*dākṣiṇāvat-*). Very famous and controversial is the later hymn RV 10.107 that Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1571) consider a series of ‘extravagant praises of the *dākṣiṇā* [...] clearly in the poet’s interest’. We will go through all the occur-

⁴⁸ For a similar image see RV 9.100.3 *tvāṃ dhiyam manoyújam srjá vrṣtīm ná tanyatūḥ* where the same role is attributed to *dhī* generating poetic inspiration.

⁴⁹ Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1303) prefer to interpret the occurrence as a comitative instrumental: ‘The tempestuous one is sent surging along with the gift-cow, to take his seat here’. In fact, a comitative interpretation is possible, meaning that soma flows in together with its magnificence (just like Dawn with magnificence’s chariot). We consider that it is however possible, although not compelling, to give this instrumental a more causal turn, highlighting the role of magnificence itself as an instrument of success—as it surely is e.g. in RV 3.62.3 (fn. 10) and 6.37.4 (fn. 7).

rences of *dákṣiṇā* in 10.107. The term is introduced from the beginning as a crucial theme of the hymn:

- [18] *āvīr abhūn máhi māghonam eṣām víśvaṃ jīvám támaso nír amoci |
máhi jyótiḥ pitṛbhir dattám āgād urúḥ pánthā dákṣiṇāyā adarśi ||
(RV 10.107.1)*

‘The great liberality of these ones here has become evident, their whole life has been freed from darkness; a great light, given by the ancestors has come, the wide path of magnificence has become visible’.

As seems clear from v. 2 ‘these ones here’ are some *dákṣiṇāvat-*, in the plural, leaders ‘full of grace’ to which a firm abode in heaven is promised⁵⁰. An interesting subdivision among these heroes full of grace is to be found in the following verses which indirectly oppose the ‘warrior-men’ (*náraḥ*) to ‘guardians of men’ (*nṛcákṣasas*), an attribute often characterising gods in their specific capacity of watching over men but which we consider as referring to leaders here⁵¹:

- [19] *daivī pūrtīr dákṣiṇā devayajyá ná kavāribhyo nahī té pṛṇánti |
áthā nárah práyatadákṣiṇāso ’vadyabhiyá bahávaḥ pṛṇanti ||
śatádhāraṃ vāyúm arkám svarídam nṛcákṣasas té abhi cakṣate haviḥ⁵²*

⁵⁰ As we discussed in Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo (2020: 150), these leaders ‘full of grace’ are identified in the same verse by three compounds ending with *-dā* as givers of horses, gold and garments. This passage clearly shows how the shift from the idea of being endowed with (natural and supernatural) blessings to that of offering them might have been at hand inasmuch as the blessed condition must be shared with others to be effective. This becomes even more evident if we compare the occurrence of *dákṣiṇāvat-* in v. 2 with the occurrence (in the singular) in v. 5, which we will discuss below.

⁵¹ Jamison, Brereton (2014: 1571) translate this as ‘[t]hose with manly sight’ and justify their choice in the online notes to RV 3.53.9-10 (see <http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/III-7-15-20.pdf>) by the fact that this epithet is mostly attributed to a god whose sight is upon humans or whom humans look at (in adoration). Jamison considers this meaning somehow awkward in the context since it is attributed to the great seer Viśvāmitra (said in the same verse also to be *devajá* ‘born from god’ and *devájūta* ‘god sped’). She records the same usage denoting human beings in the following verse and in RV 3.53.9-10. We would like to add the present one to these occurrences and two more where the attribute is referred to the plural implied composers of the hymn (RV 8.43.30, 10.158.5). More than a hint of a divine status, it is the kingly status of the leader which is entailed in the epithet. Moreover, a strict separation between epithets proper to gods and epithets of men does not seem entirely appropriate, given the fluidity of the two categories in ancient Vedism.

⁵² Interestingly ŚS 18.4.29b has *rayim* (wealth) instead of *haviḥ* (oblation).

yéprnānti prā cayāchanti sarvadā té duhrate dākṣiṇām saptāmātaram ||
(RV 10.107.3-4; 4 = AVŚ 18.4.29)

‘The celestial fulfilling, the magnificence in honour among the gods is not for the *kavāris*⁵³ since they do not fulfil. Certainly, those men who proffer [their] magnificence (i.e. their best)⁵⁴ many of them fulfil with fear of disgrace. The guardians of men they look upon oblation as the wind streaming by hundred, as the heaven-finding hymn. Those who fulfil and proffer continuously they make yield the *dākṣiṇā* of seven mothers⁵⁵.

Interestingly, v. 4 is also found in a funeral hymn of the *Atharvaveda*. The immediate context (v. 28) is that of a priest making offerings, through the seven invocations (*ānu saptā hōtrāḥ*), in the name of the dead man to strengthen his life (v. 27 *ākṣitiṃ bhūṣyāsīm*). Thus, the hymn is somehow concerned with the ultramundane fate of the participants. The following verses are devoted to the heroic leader:

[20] *dākṣiṇāvān prathamó hūtá eti dākṣiṇāvān grāmañír ágram eti |*
tám evá manye nrpátim jánānām yáḥ prathamó dākṣiṇām āvivāya ||
tám evá řṣim tám u brahmāṇam āhur yajñanyam sāmagaṃ ukthasāsam |
sá śukrāsya tanvò veda tisoró yáḥ prathamó dākṣiṇayā rarādha || (RV
10.107.5-6)

⁵³ The term *kavāri* is generally interpreted as meaning a stingy or mean *ari* (a dense and tricky term for which see Paliawadana 2017: 111). See also Pinault 1999-2000: 441-442. Nevertheless, we consider it relevant to suggest another possible interpretation, indirectly pointed out by Parpola (2015a; 2015b: 229) while discussing the Skt. *kaparda* (Rudra’s characteristic bun): ‘This Sanskrit word is likely to be derived from the Proto-Dravidian root **kavar*, ‘to bifurcate, be divided into two’, and the Proto-Dravidian noun **kavaram* / **kavari*, ‘braided hair,’ which became a loanword in Sanskrit, *kabara-* / *kabarī-*, ‘plaited hair’ (first attested in Pāṇini’s grammar)’.
⁵⁴ This occurrence of *dākṣiṇā* (together with other two) in concomitance with verbal forms of *yach-* shows how the magnificence may be envisioned in some contexts as the concret outcome of magnificence, put at disposal of the community. See RV 1.31.15 where Agni is asked for every man who has proffered the *dākṣiṇā* to be protected on every side and 6.53.2 where Puṣan, harnessed like a prize-winning wagon, is requested to lead the devotees to manly wealth, to a hero who has proffered his magnificence, to a fair householder (*abhi no nāryam vāsu vīrām prāyatadaṁṣiṇam | vāmām grhāpatiṃ naya*). As we already see in [5] the implied context is the setting of the prizes as a prerequisite of the ritual action.

⁵⁵ ‘The priestly gift is the divine bestowal, a sacrificial offering to the gods; it is not for the stingy, for they do not bestow. But many men who present priestly gifts bestow through fear of disgrace. Those with manly sight see (it as) the wind with its hundred streams (of rain), (as) the chant that finds the sun; they see (it as) the oblation. Those who bestow and present at the (sacrificial) assembly, they milk the priestly gift with its seven mothers’ (tr. Jamison, Brereton 2014: 1571).

‘He who is full of grace, summoned first, he goes; he who is full of grace, the leader of the caravan, he goes ahead. I honour as ruler of the people only he who first achieved magnificence⁵⁶. They say that only he is the seer (*ṛṣi*) only he the *brahmán*, only he the leader of the worship, the singer of chants, the reciter of sacred words. He knows the three bodies of the blazing (fire) he who first thrived by means of magnificence⁵⁷.

Here the link between being endowed with magnificence and political success is clearly stated: only he who first found the grace (and shared it with the members of his sodality, as we will see) deserves to be a leader of men (*nṛpáti*). By finding the way to thrive *through the dáksīṇā* such a leader acquires a sight of wisdom covering the three worlds. The counterpart of this successful leader is none other than Indra, together with Dakṣiṇā herself and other gods, leading the divine army⁵⁸. The verse which follows gives a much more concrete dimension of this success and could be one of the steps that justify the shift from the *dáksīṇā* as magnificence leading to success and thus to (material and immaterial) benefits to the *dáksīṇā* as the concretization of that success, i.e. the benefits themselves, the best the members of sodality have to offer and share.

[21] *dáksīṇāśvaṃ dáksīṇā gāṃ dadāti dáksīṇā candrám utá yád dhīraṇyam |
dáksīṇānnaṃ vanute yó na ātmā dáksīṇāṃ vārma kṛṇute vijānán ||
(RV 10.107.7)*

‘His magnificence⁵⁹ offers a horse, his magnificence [offers] a cow, [offers] what is silvery and what is golden. His magnificence wins the food that is our very body: he who knows makes magnificence an armour’.

⁵⁶ tr. Jamison, Brereton (2014: 1571): ‘The provider of the priestly gift goes as the first invited; the provider of the priestly gift goes to the front as the leader of the horde. I think just he is the lord of peoples – the one who first sought out the priestly gift’.

⁵⁷ This, together with other instrumentals, underlines how the *dáksīṇā* is the means of success [see fn. 32].

⁵⁸ RV 10.103.8ab = ŚS 19.13.9 = VSM 17.40. See fn. 8: ‘Let Indra be their leader, let Bṛhaspati, the *dáksīṇā*, the sacrifice, the Soma come as the vanguard! Let the Maruts come as the front of the destructive and victorious divine hosts!’.

⁵⁹ It is possible that the four occurrences of *dáksīṇā* are to be interpreted with an instrumental, meaning ‘by means of his magnificence’ and the agent would be the *dáksīṇāvat-* mentioned in the previous stanzas. In any case, whether a nominative of agent or an instrumental, it is clear that in the passage the *dáksīṇā* is an instrument of success.

Yet, again, the mass of the glorious ones, the warrior-men, needs to be reassured that the endeavour they began relying on the magnificence of their leader will have a successful outcome:

- [22] *nā bhojā mamrur nā nyarthām t̄yur nā riṣyanti nā vyathante ha bhojāḥ |
idāṃ yād vísvam bhúvanam svás caitát sárvaṃ dākṣiṇaibhyo dadāti ||*
(RV 10.107.8)

‘The glorious ones have not died, nor have they fallen into ruin, the glorious ones are not harmed, they have not gone astray. What is this whole world and this sun here all this magnificence gives to them’.

Verse 9 elaborates on the theme, presenting the success as already achieved: the glorious ones have won, in particular over those who come without being summoned (*bhojā jigyur yé áhūtāḥ prayánti*). The glorious leader (singular) is again the protagonist of the last two verses: v. 10 presents him as he is leaving for another conquest again, as v. 11 underlines, accompanied by the chariot of magnificence, the symbol of success:

- [23] *bhojám ásvāḥ suṣṭhuvāho vahanti suvīd rátho vartate dākṣiṇāyāḥ |
bhojám devāso ’vatā bhāreṣu bhojāḥ sátrūn samanīkeṣu jētā ||*
(RV 10.107.11)

‘The steadily conveying horses convey the glorious one. Rolling easily, the chariot of magnificence rolls on. O gods, help the glorious one in the raids. The glorious one will win against his rivals at the encounters’.

Together with the interpretation of *dākṣiṇāvat-* as ‘giving a gift’, the interpretation of *bhojā-* as ‘benefactor’ in Jamison, Brereton 2014 also shows how the overall interpretation of this hymn as a praise of the priestly gift entails some definitely unconvincing lexical choices. The two terms, on the contrary, seem to highlight two different aspects of successful men: their dexterity, state of grace and their being glorious conquerors, bound for victory⁶⁰.

We consider that what is at stake here is rather a gathering of men, skills (dexterity) and wealth, whose successful ending is foreshadowed from the very first verses by the appearance of the liberality of those endowed with dexterity, blessings, and an auspicious condition. Among these glorious men a single leader (the one who first found success)

⁶⁰ See Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo 2020.

emerges, who guarantees that success will be achieved: they, on the other hand, accompany him and favour his endeavour, probably also contributing to the common wealth (if he is *dákṣiṇāvat*- they are called both *dákṣiṇāvat*- and *práyatadákṣiṇa*-)⁶¹. The glorious leader seems to have a more heroic and selfless attitude in the endeavour while his companions appear in some way to be more reluctant or afraid and need reassurance [6].

3. Atharvaveda *testimony*

Our general hypothesis that the sense of ‘priestly gift’ is not appropriate for the earliest Indo-Aryan sources seems to be confirmed by most of the *Atharvaveda* occurrences. Only five of the twenty-nine occurrences of *dákṣiṇā*⁶² in the *Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā* are shared with the *Ṛgveda-Saṃhitā*, namely ŚS 9.9.9 = ṚV 1.164.9; ŚS 18.2.17 = ṚV 10.154.3; ŚS 18.4.29 = ṚV 10.107.4; ŚS 19.13.9 = ṚV 10.103.8; ŚS 20.65.3 = ṚV 8.24.21. Our survey will concentrate solely on the Atharvavedic occurrences and will mainly be divided into two parts, which match the two meanings we tentatively assign to the term, respectively ‘magnificence’ and ‘magnificence made an offering’. In this latter meaning, the *dákṣiṇā* boils down to being an offering / sacrificial substance (Gonda 1965: 19), but it is no trivial offering since it represents the best a sacrificer can offer to the point where, in terms of human after-death destiny, the individual himself becomes the very last offering warranting access to the world of merit. A third paragraph will be devoted to a few occurrences that we consider inconclusive.

3.1. *Atharvavedic* *dákṣiṇā* as *magnificence*

Here, we shall concentrate on some passages where – as we have analogously seen in the *Ṛgveda* – the new meaning we have postulated, namely ‘magnificence’ seems to confirm our reading.

⁶¹ The picture of the gathering of princes, in which one comes ‘invited’ while another comes ‘uninvited’ is found in ṚV 10.107 (5 and 9) as well. The invited one is welcome and, when a generous giver, he is one who ‘gains eminence’.

⁶² We collected these occurrences on the basis of the survey of the *Śaunakīya* recension but we often signalled the matching PS passages. Of course, we excluded from the count the seven occurrences of *dákṣiṇā* used as a cardinal point (‘South’) or as a space indication (‘on the right, from the right’), namely ŚS 4.40.2, 5.10.2, 18.1.42, 52, 18.4.8, 9, 46, even though it is important to bear in mind that the Southern cardinal point is tightly associated with the forefathers and the after death world, which plays a significant role in the present *Atharvaveda* survey. As regards the link between the *dákṣiṇā* and the homonymous cardinal point, see Malamoud (1976: 172).

In the following short hymn, the relationship of the ‘glory’ (*yāśas*) of a man with his ‘magnificence’ (*dākṣiṇā*) is without doubts closer than that supposed with a ‘sacrificial gift’ or ‘priestly gift’, which is completely out of context, and merely taken into account mechanically. The role of gods, especially of god Indra, as impellers of the *dākṣiṇā*, which we have already emphasised above (§ 2.1), reinforces here our hypothesis that the hymn is a prayer to obtain what are considered the leader’s prerequisites.

[24] *yāśasaṃ méndro maghāvān kṛṇotu yāśasaṃ dyāvāpṛthivī ubhé imé |*
yāśasaṃ mā devāḥ savitā kṛṇotu priyó dātúr dākṣiṇāyā ihá syām ||
yáthéndro dyāvāpṛthivyór yāśasvān yáthāpa óśadhīṣu yāśasvatīḥ |
evā víśveṣu devéṣu vayám sárveṣu yāśasaḥ syāma ||
yāśá índro yāśá agnír yāśáh sómo ajāyata |
yāśá víśvasya bhūtásyāhám asmi yāśástamaḥ || (ŚS 6.58.1-3)

‘Let the bountiful Indra make me glorious, let both these heaven and earth [make me glorious]! Let the god Savitṛ make me glorious; may I be dear here to the giver of magnificence (i.e. Indra). As Indra is a possessor of glory in heaven and earth, as the waters are possessors of glory in the plants, so among all the gods may we be glorious among all. Indra [was born] glorious, Agni [was born] glorious, Soma was born glorious; I, glorious, will be the most glorious of the whole creation’.

Analogously in ŚS 5.7, after realizing that the term *árāti*, occurring eight times in ten verses, might have conveyed the feared attitude of the opponents of the Soma cult⁶³, we are persuaded that the translation ‘magnificence’ we adopted for *dākṣiṇā* can really help us to grasp the whole hymn better. Within a euphemistic or apotropaic homage to misfortune and to its causes, alongside nouns such as *vaní-* ‘acquiring’ which occurs three times (vv. 2, 3, 6), *dākṣiṇā* seems to be employed as an antonym of the word *ásamṛddhi-* ‘ill-success’ (occurring twice, vv. 1, 7). The targeted success presumably consists in outstanding oratory skills and social prestige among the members of the community of men and gods (see e.g. v. 6ab *mā vanīm mā vācam no vīrtsīr ubhāv indrāgnī ā bharatām no vásūni* ‘Do not baffle our acquiring or speech! Let Indra and Agni both bring good things to us!’), as would be expected in a society grounded on an eminently competitive access to every form of power:

⁶³ See Palihawadana (2017: 109-111).

[25] *ā no bhara mā pári śthā arāte mā no rakṣīr dākṣiṇām nīyāmānām |
nāmo vīrtsāyā āsamṛddhaye nāmo astv arātaye ||* (ŚS 5.7.1)

‘Bring us ahead⁶⁴, do not stand in our way, o enviousness! Do not frustrate the magnificence we are leading! Homage be paid to the adversity! To ill-success! Homage to enviousness!’⁶⁵.

Within a comparable climate of competitiveness, but on a divine level, in ŚS 5.11, an eminent god is once again the *dākṣiṇā*-giver, namely Varuṇa, and the beneficiary is Atharvan. The latter is commonly considered as a mythical figure, namely the progenitor of the ancient fire priests called Atharvans, and he is mentioned as a forefather and a relative of the gods (*átharvan pitṛ devábandhuḥ*) in other two Atharvavedic hymns (ŚS 4.1.7, 7.2.1) as well as in ours (ŚS 5.11.11)⁶⁶. The advanced interpretation of this dialogue between Varuṇa and Atharvan means that the different lines are even attributed to the two interlocutors in a different way. In Whitney, Lanman (1905: 237), the synthesis of the story is as follows: ‘Varuna has a mind to take back the cow which he gave to Atharvan, but renounces his intention at the request of Atharvan’. Indeed, we shall propose that the action of ‘taking back’ (singled out in the epithet *púnar-magha* used for Varuṇa) be interpreted rather as ‘retracting, revoking’, on the basis of the second part of the hymn, where it is said twice that something is finally given which had not yet been given. Moreover, we will show how the gift at stake, a *dākṣiṇā*, is not a ‘spotted cow’ but rather a kind of immaterial benefit, more specifically, again, an auspicious condition, this time not declined in terms of political and warlike primacy but rather of poetic excellence. As the analysis of the most relevant parts of the hymn will hopefully show, Atharvan coveted Varuṇa’s (poetic) talent or dexterity which would allow the young Atharvan to be invested with the title of sage and poet. Such a (poetic) magnificence is depicted as a speckled [storm cloud] (*pr̥śni*-homonym of the name of the Maruts’ mother), ready to generate the lightnings of poetry⁶⁷:

⁶⁴ Perhaps the object must be taken as understood, on the basis of the comparison with the following phrase *ā bharatām no vāsūni* (v. 6) ‘May (Indra and Agni) bring us wealth!’.

⁶⁵ Cf. tr. Whitney, Lanman (1905: 232): ‘Bring to us, stand not about, O niggard: do not prevent our priestly gift, as led [away]: homage be to baffling, to ill-success, homage be to the niggard’.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Hillebrandt 1899: 174; Keith 1912: 141.

⁶⁷ A similar image was already found in the *R̥gveda* see § 2.3 [and 16] in connection with *dākṣiṇā*, yet not linked with poetic inspiration and RV 9.100.3, see fn. 47.

[26] *kathāṃ mahé āsurāyābravīr ihā kathāṃ pitré hārāye tveṣānṛmṇaḥ*⁶⁸ |
pṛśniṃ varuṇa dākṣiṇām dadāvān pūnarmagha tvāṃ mānasā cikitsīḥ ||
nā kāmēna pūnarmagho bhavāmi sām cakṣe kām pṛśniṃ etām ūpāje |
kēna nū tvām atharvan kāvyena kēna jātēnāsi jātāvedāḥ || (ŚS 5.11.1-2)

‘[Varuṇa] How did you speak here to the great Asura, how to your gold-hued father? You are one whose manly spirit is vibrant.

[Atharvan] O Varuṇa, after bestowing [me] a speckled [storm cloud/cow]⁶⁹ as magnificence, o you who revoke bounties, you started thinking about [this] with your mind⁷⁰.

[Varuṇa] Not out of desire do I become one who revokes bounties. I am examining who is the one to whom I drive this speckled [storm cloud/cow], by which kind of poetical inspiration, o Atharvan, by means of which kind of offspring you are the *jātā-vedas* “knowing all generated beings”⁷¹.

It is clear that the image of a dappled cow milking poetry overlaps that of the cloud, as it often does in other kinds of imagery, but in our opinion this is a secondary re-interpretation due to the parallel advancement of the dominating meaning of *dākṣiṇā* as ‘priestly gift’ and

⁶⁸ The usage of nominatives in the place of vocatives is not thoroughly excluded—see Gonda (1956-1957). Nonetheless, we consider that the final compound has to be read as a sort of nominal sentence and that it could be an allusive reference to a circulating epithet of Indra, occurring in RV 10.120.1; (=) VSM 33.80; (≡) ŚS 20.107.4ab *tād id āsa bhūvaneṣu jyēṣṭham yāto jajñā ugrās tveṣānṛmṇaḥ* | *sadyo jajñāno nī riṇāti śātrūn ānu yām viśve mādayanti ūmāḥ* ‘Just this was the foremost among living beings, from which the mighty one of vibrant manly spirit was born. As soon as he is born, he melts down his rivals, while all his helpers cheer him on’ (tr. Jamison, Brereton 2014: 1591). In fact, like Atharvan, Indra is born from *brāhman*, and he often uses his verbal skills to conquer his enemies, so that the reader is led to believe that Varuṇa was telling the young Atharvan that his daring behaviour was similar to that of other audacious heroes.

⁶⁹ The story is also resumed in the one-verse hymn ŚS 7.104.1, where a *pṛśni-dhenú-*, i.e. a ‘speckled milch-cow’ instead of a non-determined feminine entity poetically called the *pṛśni* is mentioned: *kāḥ pṛśniṃ dhenūṃ varuṇena dattām átharvane sudūghām nityavatsām* | *bṛhaspátinā sakhyām juṣaṇó yathāvasām tanvāḥ kalpayāti* ‘Who, enjoying companionship with Bṛhaspati, shall shape at his will from his body the speckled milch-cow, well-milking, always possessing a calf, given by Varuṇa to Atharvan?’. Be it a cow or a cloud, the image of the feminine *pṛśni-* is in our opinion targeted on the notion of the auspicious condition for successful poetry in both these quoted hymns.

⁷⁰ Cf. tr. Whitney, Lanman (1905: I, 237): ‘Having given, o Varuṇa, a spotted [cow] as sacrificial fee, thou hast with the mind intended re-bestowal(?)’.

⁷¹ We assume that this is an example of paretyymology, playing with the two constituents of the compound *jātā-vedas*, hinting at them respectively by mentioning *jātā-* and *kāvya-*.

‘gift-cow’. There is indeed no reason to assume a priestly gift in such a context and, above all, the relationship between Atharvan and Varuṇa cannot be equated to that between an officiant priest and a patron in the sacrificial arena. On the contrary, every line impels us to think that this hymn still documents the etymologically well-grounded meaning of ‘magnificence’, in particular here being ‘dexterity’ in wisdom-inspired poetry: it is Atharvan’s *kāvya* which is at stake. The following five verses (ŚS 5.11.3-7) are devoted to a sort of self-promotion on the part of Atharvan, aimed at persuading Varuṇa that he actually deserves the magnificence that Varuṇa can assign him. He defines himself as profound in poetical inspiration (*gabhīrāḥ kāvyena*) and really *jātavedas*- and he adds that neither a *dāsá* nor an *árya* transgress the observance he establishes (v. 3), but furthermore he humbly admits that Varuṇa is indeed unsurpassed in poetic inspiration and wisdom (v. 4 *ná tvád anyāḥ kavítaro ná medháyā dhīrataro*). At last, he even goes so far as to threaten him with the spectre of a bad reputation as an illiberal (*arādhása-*), similar to that of the deprecated *pañís* (v. 7), forcing the god to assign again the bounty he had promised (v. 8ab *mā mā vocann arādhásam jānāsaḥ púnas te pśśniṃ jaritar dadāmi* ‘Let not people call me illiberal; o singers, I am bestowing on you again the speckled [storm-cloud/cow]’). Thus, Atharvan promises him to sing his glory in all the directions of the human world and proposes himself as Varuṇa’s companion (v. 9). It is at this point that we noticed that neither Atharvan nor Varuṇa speak about something to be given back, but rather about something which has not been given:

[27] *ā te stotrāny údyatāni yantv antár vísvāsu mánuṣīṣu dikṣú |*
dehí nú me yán me ádatto ási yújyo me saptápadaḥ sákhāsi ||
samā nau bándhur varuṇa samā já védāhām tád yán nāv eṣá samá já |
dádāmi tád yát te ádatto ásmi yújyas te saptápadaḥ sákhāsmi ||
 (ŚS 5.11.9-10)

‘[Atharvan] Let uplifted hymns of praise of you come, in all the human directions! Bestow on me now that of which you have not been the bestower for me; you are my suitable comrade of seven steps!

[Atharvan] Our (du.) kinship is the same o Varuṇa, our (du.) birth is the same.

[Varuṇa] I know that we have the same birth. Now I am giving you that of which I have not been the bestower for you. I am your suitable comrade of seven steps!’.

All in all, this hymn seems to describe a dialogic legitimation of Atharvan as a sort of younger Varuṇa, on the basis of shared abilities,

kinship and sodality ties. Varuṇa bestows on Atharvan the magnificence which allows him to become the god-like sage poet called ‘Atharvan’. No sacrifice is performed and there is no reason to mention a cow in flesh and bone as a sacrificial gift. As Singh (1997: 130) concludes, Atharvan perhaps ‘challenges Varuṇa’ and this is why their common descent and their common skills and authoritativeness are at last emphasised.

Also in ŚS 4.11 (≅ PS 3.25), a hymn that thanks to Acharya (2013) has been reinterpreted as referring to the vow (*vratā*) of the draft-ox (*anaḍūh*) observed by Indra and all the gods in order to attain immortality, v. 4 could be better accommodated if we translate *dākṣiṇā* as magnificence:

[28] *indro jātó manuṣyèṣv antár gharmás taptás carati śósucānaḥ |*
suprajāḥ śánt sá udāré ná sarṣad yó nāśnīyād anaḍūho vijānán ||
anaḍvān duhe sukṛtásya loká aīnaṃ pyāyayati pávamānaḥ purástāt |
parjányo dhārā marúta údho asya yajñāḥ páyo dākṣiṇā dóho asya ||
 (ŚS 4.11.3-4)⁷²

‘Indra is born among human beings, the heated *gharma* moves keeping on glowing. He who, being one of good offspring, thus knowing would not eat of the draft-ox, he shall not run into a cleft⁷³. The draft-ox yields in the world of merit; the purifying one fills him up from in front; the rain-cloud is his streams, the Maruts are his udder; the worship is his milk; his magnificence is the action of milking from it’.

In the last hemistich, we propose that a parallelism should be recognized between two distinct relationships. On the one hand, the rain-cloud, which ensures life with its water, is linked to the Maruts, i.e. to the lightning, which seems to be the means through which life can start to freely flow. On the other hand, the worship (*yajñā*), which ensures life (lit. *pāyas* ‘water’) to the community, is connected with the auspicious condition of the one who makes the *yajñā* itself affordable. This interpretation will be even better tuned to the association advanced by Selva (2019: 374) between the draft-ox vow made by Indra, consisting in assuming the behaviour of a draft-ox ritually envisioned as the *gharma*-pot full of milk put on the fire and the heroic and ascetic broth-

⁷² PS 3.25.2 perfectly overlaps this ŚS verse except for *pyāyeta* instead of *pyāyayati*.

⁷³ This cleft has to be intended as antinomic with respect to the world of merit (*sukṛtásya loká*) mentioned both in v. 4 and in v. 6.

erhood choice to adopt a lifestyle aimed at attaining the world of merit (*sukṛtāsya lokāṃ*), and ultimately immortality.

Thus, the ascetic vow that is only observed indirectly by just one individual becomes the cause of common welfare but also the means by which the one who practices the observance achieves immortality:

- [29] *yéna devāḥ svār āruruhúr hitvā śārīram amṛtasya nābhim |
téna geṣma sukṛtāsya lokāṃ gharmāsya vraténa tápasā yaśasyávaḥ*
|| (ŚS 4.11.6)

‘By means of that observance through which the gods ascended to heaven, to the navel of immortality, having abandoned their bodies, by that [observance] of the *gharmā*, by that asceticism, may we, eager for glory, go to the world of merit’.

The image of milking (*dóha*) returns in v. 9, where the deverbal noun inflected as a plural is explicitly associated with the draft-ox, so that it is clear that the notion of *milking* conveyed by the verb *duh-* is more generally that of *yielding*, be the agent of this action envisioned as a male or as a female entity.

- [30] *yó védānadúho dōhān saptānupadasvataḥ |
prajāṃ ca lokāṃ cāpnoti tāthā saptarṣāyo viduḥ* || (ŚS 4.11.9)
- ‘The one who knows the seven unexhausted milkings of the draft-ox⁷⁴, obtains both offspring and this world: this is what the seven seers know’.

Once again, it is the whole context of the hymn which seems to point to a non-orthodox historical and social milieu within which it is difficult to assume that the institution of the priestly gift might have played a role.

Our translation also works well in some other passages⁷⁵ like the following one, both because of the declared competitive aim of the hymn,

⁷⁴ This could be another version of the notion of the seven mothers seen above [19].

⁷⁵ Analogously, we consider that magnificence is a better translation of *dākṣiṇā* than ‘priestly gift’ in the following two passages: *dyauś ca ma idāṃ pṛthivī ca prācetasau śukró brhān dākṣiṇayā pipartu | ānu svadhā cikitāṃ sómo agnir vāyúr naḥ pātu savitā bhāgāś ca* (ŚS 6.53.1) ‘Let both the sky now and the earth be attentive, let the bright Soma help me through (his) magnificence let the *svadhā* remember, let Soma, let Agni! Let Vāyu protect us, let Savitṛ and Bhaga!’ (as far as the verb *piparti* is concerned, see Narten 1969: 144-151); *nindās ca vā ānindās ca yac ca hantéti néti ca | śārīram śraddhā dākṣiṇāśraddhā cānu prāviśan* (ŚS 11.8.22) ‘Both reproaches and non-reproaches, both do’s and don’ts, faith, magnificence and want of faith entered the

namely the achievement of pre-eminence, and the difficulty of linking an amulet with the priestly gift:

- [31] *yáthā bījam urvárāyāṃ kṛṣṭé phālena róhati |
evá máyi prajā páśávó 'nnam annaṃ ví rohatu ||
yásmai tvā yajñavardhana máṇe pratyámucaṃ śívám |
tám tvám śatadakṣiṇa máṇe śraīṣṭhyāya jinvatāt ||* (ŚS 10.6.33-34)

‘As seed in fertile soil, in cultivated ground, thrives with fruit⁷⁶, so, may offspring, cattle, food upon food grow out in me; o jewel that strengthens worship, may you, jewel of a hundred magnificences, impel to the pre-eminence him to whom I auspiciously fastened you!’.

This is the penultimate verse of a hymn entirely dedicated to illustrating the innumerable benefits that the amulet here praised determines, so that the *śatadakṣiṇa-māni* as a jewel which confers a hundred auspicious (pre)conditions is perfectly consistent with the context, while the phrase in the standard translation as an ‘amulet of a hundred sacrificial gifts’ (Whitney, Lanman 1905: 588-589) is substantially incomprehensible.

3.2. Magnificence as ritual substance

A peculiar occurrence of *dākṣiṇā-* takes place in the so-called *pañcaudana-sava* hymn (ŚS 9.5), which is a ‘*sava*-hymn’ (also later called ‘*dākṣiṇā*-hymn’), in other words a hymn accompanying a mere offering, symbolical of the Soma sacrifice⁷⁷, namely the offering of a goat supplemented by five dishes of mashed rice (*odaná-*) or by five balls of cooked rice according to Shende (1985: 194). *dākṣiṇā* occurs in ŚS 9.5.14 (≡ PS 16.98.4), but there are another eight occurrences of *dākṣiṇājyotis-* in ŚS 9.5.22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 31, 33, 35 (≡ PS 8.19.11).

Let us analyse the first passage, where it is clear that here the term *dākṣiṇā-* stands for something material, namely clothing or gold. Nevertheless, as the use of *ápi* in ŚS 9.5.14 suggests, clothing and gold are a side-offering that accompanies the principal offering; such an offering is not a closing ritual action, rather it is the exclusive focus of the whole

body’. The latter is a hymn of 34 verses entirely devoted to listing the items that contribute to the constitution of human beings.

⁷⁶ An analogous image directly connected to the *dakkhiṇā* occurs in [51].

⁷⁷ This elementary version of sacrifices attested in the Atharvavedic sources was clearly singled out by Gonda 1965 (in particular 11-30) – see also Shende (1985: 190); and for the later concept of *dākṣiṇā* as mere appeasement, i.e. ‘transfer of sin’ in the offering, see Geslani (2018: 166-167).

elementary sacrificial performance which takes place with the accompaniment of these verses⁷⁸.

[32] *ajó hy àgnér ajaniṣṭa sókād vípro víprasya sáhaso vipascít |*
iṣṭám pūrtám abhípūrtam váṣaṭkṛtam tát devá ṛtuśáh kalpayantu ||
amotám vāso dadyād dhiraṇyam ápi dáksīṇām |
táthā lokánt sám āpnoti yé divyá yé ca pārthivāh ||
etás tvājópa yantu dhārāh somyá devír ghr̥tápr̥sthā madhuścútaḥ |
stabhān(a) pṛthivím utá dyám nákasya pr̥sthé 'dhi saptáraśmau ||
 (ŚS 9.5.13-15)

‘The goat indeed was born – the inspired from the flame of the inspired – mighty, wise fire; may the gods shape what has been sacrificed, granted, fulfilled, accompanied with *vaṣaṭ* at the right time! He should also give a home-woven garment and gold as a magnificence made an offering; thus, he fully obtains the heavenly and earthly worlds. Toward you, o goat, let these divine, ghee-backed, honey-dripping streams of soma go! Let earth and sky be established, upon the seven-rayed back of the firmament’.

The whole hymn ŚS 9.5. concentrates on a specific after-death doctrine. Its kernel seems to adopt the iconic value of this special offering in order to represent the psychophysical individuality with its five organs of sense, which has to unite with the body, entirely made of light, arisen from the sacrifices performed during one’s life and stored in heaven until the death of the sacrificer⁷⁹. The primeval idea of such a human rejoining in heaven with what of excellence was accomplished on earth, such a sublimation—*via* sacrifice—of accumulated merits, could plausibly have originated from the experience of watching what happened to a victim burned in the sacrificial fire and to the body of a deceased man put on the funeral pyre. This text, which is not a funeral hymn, but rather ‘a notable *medium* for the *Atharvaveda* philosophemata’—if we stay with Bloomfield’s (1899: 87) assumptions about the *dakṣiṇā-* or *sava-*hymns in gen-

⁷⁸ The majority of verses which have to be recited during this specific *sava-yajña* involving a male goat with five sacrificial cakes (one for each single foot and the fifth on the animal’s navel) are drawn from ŚS 9.5 and marginally from the broadly coincident ŚS 4.14 according to *Kausika-sūtra* 64 (Gonda 1965: 89-91). The animal is also depicted as a white-footed ram in hymn ŚS 3.29 from which some other verses are selected.

⁷⁹ This concept that the offered victim acts as a kind of provisional substitute for the sacrificer may be read between the lines of a number of passages addressing the sacrificial victim, such as RV 1.162.21 *ná vá u etán mriyase ná riṣyasi devám íd eṣi pathibhiḥ sugebhiḥ* [...] ‘Indeed you are not dying. You are not injured, you shall go to the gods through paths easy to run’.

eral—is focused on the heavenly light gained by the sacrificer during his life⁸⁰, presumably provided that he is conscious of the theosophic meaning of its special (symbolically interpreted) offering. This *ajā* is depicted as a fire who has come into being out of fire and who is invited to conquer the world full of light⁸¹. This special offering is in fact qualified (nine times in ŚS 9.5 and once in PS 8.19) as *dākṣiṇājyotis-*, i.e. as that whose light is the best the sacrificer can offer, in other words the sacrificer’s magnificence transformed into an offering. The first occurrence in ŚS 9.5 is as follows:

[33] *āparimitam evā yajñām āpnóty āparimitam lokām āva runddhe |*
yò₃ 'jām pañcaudanam dākṣiṇājyotiṣam dādāti || (ŚS 9.5.22)

‘The one who gives the goat with its five portions of mashed rice, whose light is his magnificence made an offering, indeed gains an unlimited sacrifice, he takes hold of an unlimited world’⁸².

In this context, the comparison between ŚS 9.5.24 and its shorter PS 16.99.10 version is noteworthy: in the latter, our compound *dākṣiṇājyotis-* does not occur, but in return the imperishableness (*akṣiti*) is explicitly listed among the objects to be achieved. The offering which has characterized one’s life, will remain permanently in heaven as a new celestial manifestation of its possessor:

[34] *idāmidam evāsya rūpām bhavati ténainam sām gamayati |*
iṣam máha ūrjam asmai duhe yò₃ 'jām pañcaudanam dākṣiṇājyotiṣam
dādāti || (ŚS 9.5.24)

⁸⁰ ŚS 9.5.7 (≡ PS 16.97.7) *ajó agnir ajám u jyótir āhur ajám jvatā brahmāṇe déyam āhuḥ | ajás támāmsy āpa hanti dūrám asmiml loké śraddádadhānena dattāḥ* ‘Agni is the goat, they call the goat as “light”, they say that the goat has to be given to the Brahmán by one living. The goat given in this world by one who has faith smites the darkness away’.

⁸¹ ŚS 9.5.6cd *agnér agnir ādhi sām babhūvitha jyótiṣmantam abhi lokām jayaitām* ≡ PS 16.97.5cd *agner agnir adhi sam babhūvitha jyotiṣmān gacha sukṛtām yatra lokah*.

⁸² The second hemistich also occurs in PS 8.19.11cd with an injunctive verbal form instead of a present one: *ajam pañcaudanam dakṣiṇājyotiṣam dadat*, but the remainder occurs elsewhere, namely in PS 16.99.8, which does not include this compound, but adds a secondary more brahmanically oriented perspective. The offering is mentioned twice and the second time, the awareness that makes the offering really effective is needed by the recipient and not the giver: *ēsa vā aparimito yajño yad ajah pañcaudanaḥ | aparimitam lokam jayaty aparimitam lokam āva rundhe | ya evam viduṣe 'jam pañcaudanam dadāti* ‘Indeed, since the goat with five portions of mashed rice is an unlimited sacrifice, he conquers an unlimited world. He who gives the goat with five portions of mashed rice to one who is aware of this takes hold of an unlimited world’.

‘Its visible appearance actually becomes this and that; it (i.e. this offering/*dakṣiṇā*) causes him to unite with this (i.e. with his new visible appearance, entirely made of light)⁸³. It yields strong greatness and strength to him who gives the goat with five portions of mashed rice, whose light is his magnificence made and offering’.

[35] *idam idam asya rūpaṃ tenainaṃ saṃ gamayati |
svadhām ūrjam akṣitiṃ maho asmaī duhe ||* (PS 16.99.10)

‘Its visible appearance becomes this and that; it causes him to unite with this. It yields comfort, strength, imperishableness, greatness to him’.

The Śaunakīya seems to embroider further sentences on sentences around the same poetic intuition. For instance, it plays with further transfigurations of the five dishes of rice, first with five golden dishes, five new clothes, five milch-cows of plenty (ŚS 9.5.25ab *pāñca rukmā pāñca nāvāni vástrā pāñcāsmāi dhenávaḥ kāmādúghā bhavanti*), and then with heavenly benefits, so that the ‘five gold dishes become light and cloths become a coat for the body’ (ŚS 9.5.26ab *pāñca rukmā jyótir asmaī bhavanti várma vāsāmsi tanvè bhavanti*), to conclude that ‘The one who gives a goat whose light is his magnificence made an offering with five rice-dishes and attains the heavenly world’ (ŚS 9.5.26cd *svargāṃ lokām āsnute yò3 ’jāṃ pāñcaudanaṃ dáksīṇājyotiṣam dádati*).

It is tempting to consider the occurrences of *dákṣiṇā* contained in this hymn as a picture that captures the assumed transition from a purely immaterial notion of magnificence gained by an outstanding individual, to a more and more material texture of this in a different socio-religious context, where the magnificence of the sacrificer is actualized in its ritual offering, his best. Thus, the sacrificer is still a successful leader who can afford the goods necessary for this ‘offering’. What is peculiar to this ritual action is instead the fact that the sacrificer’s magnificence is here put at stake and ritually transfigured with the specific aim of accumulating merits in the heaven. The sacrificer wants to be sure that he will enjoy the consequences of his heroic life on the earth. No longer simply an instrumental cause, magnificence becomes the material cause

⁸³ We believe that the verb *sāṃgam-* has to be intended in line with RV 10.14.8 (= ŚS 18.3.58) *sāṃ gachasva pitṛbhiḥ sāṃ yamēṣṭāpūrtēna paramé vyōman | hitvāyāvadyām púnar āstam éhi sāṃ gachasva tanvā suvárcāḥ* ‘Unite with the forefathers, unite with Yama, with what has been sacrificed and bestowed in the highest distant heaven. Having left behind imperfection, come home again. Unite with your body in your full luster’ (tr. Jamison, Brereton 2014: 1392 modified).

of a transformation of the leader's glory in his after-death immortal body. In later Vedic sources in a reformed socio-religious scenario, the risk emerged that a man, when he died, might not be able to match his individuality with his magnificence that had become light⁸⁴. This risk might have arisen when the sacrificer started depending 'on a number of ritual specialists to perform the sacrifice for his benefit', because indeed he 'realized the results of the sacrifice indirectly' (Tull 1990: 35), so that he had to 'ransom the merit of the sacrifice through the giving of sacrificial gifts' to the officiant. But we are convinced that the shift of the meaning of *dāksīṇā* towards an offering that is not so intrinsic to the sacrificer might also have played a role in creating this anxiety.

In order to continue our reflections on the ultramundane context of *dāksīṇā*, we shall now analyse two out of the three occurrences⁸⁵ registered in the *Atharvaveda* funeral hymn ŚS 18.4, which again is strictly connected with the after-death destiny of human beings. The hymn, as expected, concerns a solemn public funeral in which all the prayers are uttered for a successful man who deserved the gratitude of the participants in the event: their auspicious condition descended from that man, whom they hope may easily reach heaven after his death. In particular, ŚS 18.4.50-51 proposes the insightful image of the deceased man as an offering placed on the sacrificial grass, ready to be grasped by the gods.

[36] *éyám agan dāksīṇā bhadrató no anéna dattá sudúghā vayodhāḥ |*
yaúvane jīvān upapṛñcatī jarā pitṛbhya upasampárāṇayād imān ||
idám pitṛbhyah prá bharāmi barhír jívam devébhya úttaram ṣṭṛṇāmi |
tád ā roha puruṣa médhyo bhávan práti tvā jānantu pitáraḥ páretam ||
 (ŚS 18.4.50-51)

'His magnificence made an offering, well-milking, vigour-bestowing, has auspiciously come to us, given by him (i.e., by the deceased man)⁸⁶; may old age lead them away together to the forefathers, when

⁸⁴ Sakamoto Goto (2000) masterfully shed light on this anxiety in a paper devoted to *iṣṭāpūrtám*. Cf. Pontillo 2019.

⁸⁵ ŚS 18.4.7, 29, 50. The second one (ŚS 18.4.29) matches RV 10.107.4 (see [19]). Only the last word of the first hemistich is *rayim* instead of *haviḥ*.

⁸⁶ This function of 'bestower' of the auspicious condition which is assumed by the deceased man to the advantage of his community is also recalled in the previous verse: *ā prá cyavethām ápa tán mṛjethām yád vām abhibhá átrociḥ | asmád étam aghnyau tád vásīyo dātúḥ pitṛśv ihábhajanau máma* 'You who are here my sustenance, move forward and backward, sweep away what of ill-omen they have spoken here about you, go from here, o bulls (du.), toward the best of the giver, among the forefathers'.

it reaches them who are [now] living in youth! First of all, I am placing this layer of grass for the forefathers: for the gods I strew a fresh one on top; ascend this, o man, becoming fit for the oblation; may the forefathers recognise you deceased!'.⁸⁷

The magnificence of which the deceased man has been the bearer for the whole community during his life seems to transcend the boundaries of existence on earth and expand to the other world in terms of destiny shared in heaven by members of the same clan, who at the due time will join him in the forefathers' world. Here we find for the first time a collective dimension of merits collected on earth and stored in heaven to be shared by the whole clan, as already hinted at in verse 37cd: *mártyo 'yám amṛtatvám eti tásmāi grhān kṛṇuta yāvatsābandhu* 'this mortal goes to immortality; may you (pl.) make houses for him as big as his clan is'.

ŚS 18.4.7-9 on the other hand occurs in the section of the hymn which Whitney considered devoted to the fire of the pyre (verses 1-15), the so-called *Ignis Rogalis*⁸⁷. Our occurrence takes place within an etymological explanation of the name *dakṣiṇāgnī* indicating the Southern fire of sacrifice, which occurs twice in the following verses:

[37] *tīrthāis taranti pravāto mahīr iti yajñakṛtaḥ sukṛto yēna yānti |
ātrādadhur yājamānāya lokām diśo bhūtāni yād ākalpayanta ||
āṅgirasām āyanam pūrvo agnir ādityānām āyanam gārhapatyo
dākṣiṇānām āyanam dakṣiṇāgnih |
mahimānam agnēr vihitasya brāhmaṇā sāmangaḥ sārva ūpa yāhi
śagmāh ||
pūrvo agniḥ tvā tapatu śam purāstāc chām paścāt tapatu gārhapatyah |
dakṣiṇāgniḥ ṭe tapatu śarma vārmottaratō madhyatō antārikṣād
diśōdiśo agne pāri pāhi ghorāt || (ŚS 18.4.7-9)*

'Through the fords they cross the so-called "great slopes"⁸⁸ by means of the [way] that the ones who perform sacrifices and well-doers go through; there they set this world for the sacrificer, when they arranged

⁸⁷ See Whitney, Lanman 1905: 871, but let us recall with Bhattacharji (1970: 192) that 'It is chiefly through his *Ignis Rogalis* aspect (of ŚS 18.4.1-15) that Agni belongs to the gods of the Śiva group, and is a link in the chain of Pitryāna (RV 10.3.7)'.

⁸⁸ The same suggestive phrase occurs in RV 10.14.1ab *pareyivāmsam pravāto mahīr ānu bahūbhyah pānthām anupaspāśānām* 'the one who has departed along the great slopes, having spied out the path for many' (tr. Jamison, Brereton 2014: 1391) ≡ SS 18.1.49ab (with *iti* instead of *anu*).

the cardinal points, the beings. The Aṅgirasas's path is the Eastern fire; the Ādityas' path is the Gārhapatya; the *dākṣiṇās'* path⁸⁹ is the *dakṣiṇāgni* (i.e. the Southern fire); you, with your limbs, whole, powerful, step into the might of the fire which has been arranged by the *brahmán*. Let the Eastern fire auspiciously burn you from the front; let the Gārhapatya auspiciously burn you from behind; let the *dakṣiṇāgni* burn your shelter, your armour! From the North, from the midst, from the atmosphere, from each cardinal point, o fire, protect him all around from what is frightful'.

The ultramundane destiny of the dead, rather than some other ritual feature of the pyre is the actual focus of these verses. If the *dakṣiṇāgni* is generally considered a fire which wards off evil imagined as coming from the South, we are also crucially conscious that the *dakṣiṇāgni* is a fire associated with the 'other world'. Bodewitz (1983: 44) especially connects this fire with the figure of the *brahmán* and maintains that both the *brahmán* and this fire distinctly symbolise the South and that, within a cosmologic perspective, the *dakṣiṇāgni* even represents the *antárikṣa*, i.e. the space between heaven and earth. All the three fires mentioned are inserted here within a passage where other implements of the sacrifice are depicted as a part of a huge cosmic image, for instance the curved wooden spoon (*juhú*), the offering spoon (*upabhṛt*) and the ladle (*dhruvā*) which are said respectively to sustain the sky, the atmosphere and the earth (v. 5). Such a giants' perspective (which reminds us of a part of the *róhita*'s sacrifice—see below [40]) seems appropriate for the insightful image of the deceased's journey from the earth to heaven, inaugurated by the funeral ceremony⁹⁰.

Now, what etymological explanation does *dākṣiṇānām áyanam dakṣiṇāgniḥ* actually propose? The idea of a celestial path trodden by the priestly gifts from the earth to heaven is far from convincing: as we have already seen in the RV occurrences, the *dākṣiṇā*'s path is most often in the opposite direction. Furthermore, while explaining the essence of the two other fires, the genitive plural is referred to two groups of divine be-

⁸⁹ This is a provisional translation we will discuss and modify below.

⁹⁰ Another sacrificial triad in v. 15 seems to superimpose the image of the ascent of the deceased man from his funeral pyre on that of the more common transfer of the oblation from the sacrificial fire towards the heaven: *agnir hótādhvaryuṣ te bṛhaspátir indro brahmá dakṣiṇatás te astu | hutó 'yám sámsthito yajñá eti yátra pūrvam áyanam hutánām* 'May Agni be your *hótr*, Bṛhaspati your *adhvaryú*, Indra your *brahmán* standing at your right; this offered sacrifice, being brought about, goes where is the ancient road of offerings'.

ings, respectively the Aṅgirasas and the Ādityas⁹¹. If *dākṣiṇānām* is taken here as the genitive of the masculine noun *dākṣiṇa-* lit. ‘dexterous’, the *dākṣiṇāgnih* might have been explained here as the path trodden by ‘the dexterous men’, i.e. those who on the earth had been in that auspicious condition which allowed them to perform meritorious actions—including sacrifices—and who consequently heroically earned access to heaven. In this ŚS hymn, in fact, both the *pitṛyāna* (vv. 1, 62) and the *devayāna* (vv. 2, 14) are mentioned, and immediately after their respective first occurrence, a third way which gives access to heaven is illustrated. Aṅgirasas, Ādityas and the well-doers are linked to this road:

[38] *rtāsya pānthām ānu paśya sādhu aṅgirasas sukṛto yēna yānti |*
tēbhir yāhi pathibhiḥ svargām yātrādityā mādhu bhakṣáyanti tṛtīye
nāke ādhi vi śrayasva || (ŚS 18.4.3)

Look (sg.) happily along the road of Rta through which the Aṅgirasas, the well-doers, go! Go through these roads to heaven, where the Ādityas feed on honey! Settle (sg.) down in the third firmament!

An interesting case is also ŚS 11.7, which is a long list of items that have to be put in the renowned effective ‘remainder’ of the sacrifice from which ‘in heaven were born all the gods, who settled in the heaven’ (*úcchiṣṭāj jajñire sārve divi deva diviśritah*)—as the refrain repeats five times from verse 23 to 27. The *úcchiṣṭa* is mentioned in each of the twenty-seven verses. The list of what has to be gathered within the *úcchiṣṭa* starts from a well-known late Vedic binomial, i.e. *nāma* and *rūpá*, and then mentions the *loká*, and encompassing several names of gods and demi-gods (Indra, Agni, Prajāpati, Soma, Gandharvas and Apsarasas), ritual performances (e.g. *rājasūya*, *vājapēya*, *agniṣṭomá*, *aśvamedhá* in v. 7), cosmic entities (v. 2) and textual compositions (v. 24). Other verses focus on human achievements (v. 22)⁹² and vital features (v. 25)⁹³, the one that specifically interests us (v. 9) focuses on the religious and ritual sphere:

[39] *agnihotrām ca śraddhā ca vaṣaṭkāró vratām tāpaḥ |*
dākṣiṇeṣṭām pūrtām cócchiṣṭé ’dhi samāhitāḥ || (ŚS 11.7.9)

⁹¹ This is also due to the suggestion coming from a Suttapitaka passage—see below § 4.2: A 4.41–46, where the triad of fire consists of the *āhuneyyaggi*, the *gahapataggi*, and the *dakkhineyyaggi* instead of the expected *dakkhinaggi*.

⁹² ŚS 11.7.22 *rāddhiḥ prāptiḥ sámāptir vyāptir máha edhatúḥ | átyāptir úcchiṣṭe bhūtiś cāhitā níhitā hitā* ‘Success, attainment, obtainment, permeation, greatness, prosperity, over-attainment and growth are put in, put down, put in the remainder’.

⁹³ ŚS 11.7.25 *prānāpānaú cákṣuḥ śrótram ákṣitiś ca kṣitiś ca* ‘the vital airs *prāṇá* and *apāná*, sight and hearing, imperishableness and perishableness’.

‘Fire-offering and faith, the *vāṣaṭ*-exclamation, the observance, austerity and the magnificence (made offering), what is sacrificed, and what is bestowed are set together in the remainder’.

This line reminds us strongly of ŚS 9.5.13 where the set of ritual elements was *īṣṭā*, *pūrtā*, *abhipūrtā*, *vāṣaṭ* to which *dākṣiṇā* was added through *api*. Here again *dākṣiṇā* is included in the list of terms referring to the sacrificial substance and its ritual transformation; consequently, although in a much less decisive context than the previous passage, the interpretation of the term as indicating the best one has to offer seems to be preferable to a ‘priestly gift’ which is completely out of context.

At last, the imagery of the occurrence ŚS 13.1 has to probably be inscribed within a possibly pre-classical framework: an imposing sacrifice is depicted as performed by the so-called *rōhita*, i.e. the famous exclusively Atharvavedic⁹⁴ allegorical representation of the sovereignty⁹⁵, here and there envisioned as the Sun high in heaven, due to both his role of watching over people and nature⁹⁶ and his immortal destiny⁹⁷. The entire universe becomes the sacrificial arena for the sacrificer *rōhita*:

[40] *védim bhūmim kalpayitvā divam kṛtvā dākṣiṇām |*
ghraṃsām tād agnim kṛtvā cakāra vīśvam ātmanvād varṣeṇājyena
rōhitaḥ || (ŚS 13.1.52)

‘After preparing the earth as sacrificial altar, after turning the sky into his magnificence (made offering), then after turning the sun’s heat into this fire, the *rōhita* made all endowed with a self, by means of rain as clarified butter’.

The homology may at first sight be bewildering particularly because of the presence of the concrete elements of the ritual (altar, fire, clarified butter). This might be an occurrence of the late meaning of the

⁹⁴ Srinivasan (1978: 215 f.) noticed that *rōhita*- also occurs in the R̥gveda but only to denote the colour of the mantle of some horses, while the *rōhita* ‘appears to be an independent invention of the poets of the Atharvaveda to advance their inquiries into the nature of supreme power’.

⁹⁵ See Bloomfield (1891: 413); Dore (2015a: 41; 2015b: 54).

⁹⁶ See e.g. the expressions *viśī rāṣṭrē jāgrhi rōhitasya* ‘watch over the people in the kingdom of the *rōhita*!’ (ŚS 13.1.9); *sūryo dyām sūryaḥ pṛthivīm sūrya āpō ’i paśyati* ‘The sun overlooks the sky, the sun the earth, the sun the waters’ (ŚS 13.1.45ab).

⁹⁷ See ŚS 13.1.44: *vēda tāt te amartya yāt ta ākrāmaṇam divi | yāt te sadhāstham paramē vyōman* ‘I know this of you, o immortal one, namely your stepping upon the sky, your place of meeting in the highest heaven’.

term as the extremely concrete gift to the officiant. Nevertheless, any association between the priestly gift and the sky remains problematic since the sky is typically something that is promised to the *yájamāna*. By contrast, if we focus on the typically Atharvavedic notion of a magnificence made sacrificial substance, i.e. on the materialisation of one's magnificence, the image becomes clearer. The *róhita*'s best offering lies on the altar just like the sky lies on earth and the clarified butter pours down on him like rain.

A last probably late occurrence has a long commentarial tradition in which the effort made in order to interpret our term as a priestly gift can be seen between the lines. On the contrary, the following passage might be comparable with RV 1.125.1 (see above [4]) as far as its lexicon and context are concerned: someone brings a *dákṣiṇā* and looks for someone else who can accept it. The ones who bring the *dákṣiṇā* are the Ādityas and the ones who accept it are the Aṅgirasas.

[41] *ādityā ha jaritar aṅgirobhṃyo dákṣiṇām anáyan |*
tām ha jaritaḥ práty āyaṃs tām ú ha jaritaḥ práty āyan ||
tām ha jaritar naḥ práty agrbhṇaṃs tām ú ha jaritar naḥ práty
agrbhṇan |
*áhā néd asann na ví cetánāni yajñā néd asann na púrogávāsaḥ*⁹⁸ ||
 (ŚS 20.135.6-7)

‘O Singer, the sons of Aditi had brought their magnificence (made offering) to Aṅgirasas. O Singer, indeed they received (lit. went to meet) it. O Singer, indeed they received it. O Singer, indeed they accepted it for us. O Singer, they indeed accepted it for us. Without this (i.e. without the Sun), the days were undistinguished, and sacrifices without it (i.e. the *dákṣiṇā*) were destitute of that which leads them’.

These verses are quoted in several Vedic and late Vedic sources, but in AB 6.35.8 and ŚSS 12.19.1 the phrase *naḥ práty agrbhṇan* ‘they ac-

⁹⁸ Cf. the text of the hemistich 7cd in Vishvabandhu's edition: *áhā netarasam na ví cetánāni yajñā nētarasam na púrogávāmaḥ*. In v. 7 we are indeed following the emendations that Weber (1865: 306-307) proposed for the text of the AB which quotes this ŚS text, namely twice *néd asann* instead of the two occurrences of *nētarasam* and *púrogávāsaḥ* instead of *púrogávāmaḥ*. The last hemistich of the partly matching RVKh 5.20.2cd also seems to be corrupted: *ahā neta sann avicetanāni yajñā neta sann apurogavāsaḥ*, Bhise (1995: 223) translates it in the following manner: ‘Do not go when the days are dark. Do not go to sacrifices which are without leader’. Moreover, we have replaced *agrbhṇaḥ* of Vishvabandhu's edition with *agrbhṇan* on the basis of the testimony of some manuscripts and correlated texts.

cepted it from us' is replaced in both occurrences by a variant reading, namely *na prāty agrbhñan* 'they did not accept', and another negation is also added before the verbal form *prāty āyan* (while *ha* is cancelled). Moreover, in ŚSS 12.19 the word *aśva* is added before the object of the verb *nī-* (*aṅgīrobhṃyo 'śvaṃ dakṣiṇām anayan*). In R̥VKh 5.20.1-2 there is a pair of additional negations, one before *prātyāyan* and one before *praty agrbhñan*. The GB version (2.6.14) adds a negative prefix *a-* to *dakṣiṇā* at the beginning: *ādityā ha jaritar aṅgīrobhṃyo adakṣiṇām anayan*. Patyal (1975: 421) discusses these two readings of the ŚS version and decides in favour of the negation, even though *naḥ* is the *lectio difficilior*, because he considers that the latter reading goes against the context of the whole story. Nonetheless, the story that he hints at mainly depends on the AB version, and it is probable that all the aforesaid texts considered the verses focused on here as problematic and tried to solve the relevant problems by means of the negation device. The AB in brief tells that the Ādityas asked the Aṅgīrasas to officiate at one of their sacrifices, but this *dakṣiṇā* was refuted (i.e. 'not accepted') by the Aṅgīrasas, and secondly the Ādityas gave them a white horse, which the Aṅgīrasas eventually accepted. Therefore, the ŚS verse is quoted and thus reinterpreted by the AB as follows:

[42] [...] *tām ha jaritar na praty agrbhñann iti. na hi ta imām praty agrbhñamṣ tam u ha jaritaḥ praty agrbhñann iti. prati hi te 'mum agrbhñann [...]*. (AB 6.35)

'O Singer, they indeed did not accept that (f., i.e. the earth), they indeed did not accept this (f.). In fact, they accepted this (m., i.e. the white horse), they accepted this (m.)'⁹⁹.

Of course, this story might have been completely invented as an *a posteriori* explanation for the traditional verses, on the basis of another couple of almost obscure verses contained in this hymn (and also in R̥VKh 5.20 in an extremely similar version), where a horse seems to be mentioned:

[43] *utā śveta āśupatvā utó pádyābhir yáviṣṭhaḥ |*
utém áśu mánam piparti ||
dévā dadatv ásuram tád vo astu sūcetanam |
yúṣmām astu dívedive pratyéva grbhāyat || (ŚS 20.135.8, 10)

⁹⁹ Keith 1920 translates the verbal forms of *prati-i-* as 'to approach' and the forms derived from *prati-grah-* as 'to accept'.

‘And the white one is swiftly running and most quick by means of its paces, and indeed the swiftly running promotes the honour. Let Gods give gifts! Let this wealth, which is worthy of Asuras, be significant for you! May it be yours! Day by day may you accept [it] indeed!’.

Thus, this *Atharvaveda* passage might have actually been clumsily allusive and refer to a story that resembles the one told by AB 6.35, but it could also merely recount an episode similar to that of RV 1.125 (see above § 2). The role played by the ‘early coming figure’ carrying the wealth which will be possibly used as sacrificial matter could have been assumed by the Ādityas and the ritual experts that they were looking for could be the Āngirases. It is clear that a relationship between the candidate patrons of the sacrifice and the candidate officiant priests is also found in the original *Atharvaveda* hymn, but it is beyond dispute that the *dákṣiṇā* in this source is something led in order to start with a sacrifice and it is neither something which brings about the complete achievement of a sacrifice, nor a sacrificial fee due to the officiant because of his ritual service.

3.3. Dubious occurrences of *dákṣiṇā*

In some occurrences the postulated original meaning of ‘magnificence’ / ‘one’s best offer’ is acceptable but it is not possible to get rid of the later meaning of ‘priestly gift’ since the context (often a list or a homology) does not allow one of the two to be identified as clearly disadvantageous.

A first case occurs in a section of the *Vrātyakāṇḍa* entirely devoted to identifying the limbs and faculties of the superhuman being called *vrātya* with cosmic entities and capital elements in a sacred conception of the universe, where worship and asceticism are strictly associated as a rule. The meaning of this plural occurrence might have been both the *Atharvavedic* sense of ‘offerings’ or even ‘priestly gifts’. All the seven verses of ŚS 15.16 indeed identify the seven breaths called *apānā* with a series of sacrificial idionyms, in particular proper names either of specific sacrifices or of essential parts of whatever kind of sacrifice. The whole series might represent the necessary prerequisites for the success of the *vrātya* warrior-ascetic. These seven sentences all have the same structure, except for the final predicate.

- [44] *tāsya vrātyasya* | *yó śya prathamó ’pānāḥ sá paurṇamāsī* ||
 [...] *dvitīyo* [...] *sāṣṭakā* ||
 [...] *trītyo* [...] *sāmāvāsyā* ||
 [...] *caturthó* [...] *sá śradadhā* ||

[...] *pañcamó* [...] *sā dīkṣā* ||
 [...] *ṣaṣṭó* [...] *sá yajñāḥ* ||
 [...] *saptamó* [...] *tā imā dākṣiṇāḥ* || (ŚS 15.16.1-7)

‘That which is the first *apānā* breath of this *vrātya* is the day of full moon.
 [...] the second [...] is the day of the moon’s quarter.
 [...] the third [...] is the day of new moon.
 [...] the fourth [...] is the faith.
 [...] the fifth [...] is the (*yājamāna*’s) consecration.
 [...] the sixth [...] is the worship/sacrifice.
 [...] the seventh [...] are these offerings/priestly gifts’.

The *dākṣiṇās* could be the earliest immaterial means to obtain well-being and to perform a sacrifice that can ensure it for the community, as we have seen above in the majority of *R̥gveda* occurrences, or mere offerings, as we have seen in some other Atharvavedic passages, and there is nothing to stop us from assuming that they were the ‘priestly gifts’ (as Malamoud [1976: 161] also maintains), as parts of an orthodox sacrifice, compared and equated to the *vrātya*-leader’s asceticism perhaps represented by his breath control. However, the text bears all the hallmarks of an inclusivist attempt to merge marginal conceptions, namely the *vrātya* one, in a more sacrificially oriented culture.

In ŚS 19.19, the last three *pādas* of all the eleven verses are repeated in each verse, while the first *pāda* of each changes. Every time there is an explanation of ‘who ascended’, i.e. the imperfect of the verb *úd-kram-* always agrees with a different agent, namely with the names of gods, that is *mitrá*, *vāyú*, *sūrya*, *candrāmas*, *sóma*, *indra*, *prajāpati*, with the group of all the gods in general (*devāḥ*), and also with *yajñā*, *samudrá* and *brāhman*. Moreover, a noun, which is different each time and inflected in the instrumental case, combines with such phrases. The meaning of this instrumental is not homogeneous in all verses. Sometimes it denotes what makes someone or something who/what they really are, in other words the precondition for being such. Thus, earth, atmosphere, and sky are connected with the first three mentioned gods, heroism with the god Indra, non-death with the gods, creatures with the creator, the god Prajāpati. The meaning in these cases seems to be that they ascended through or thanks to the specific element mentioned. Nevertheless, there are some other associations which seem rather to connect a sort of king with his entourage, namely the moon with the asterisms, Soma with the other plants, the ocean with the other waters, the *brāhman* with the ones engaged in the *brāhman* (*brahmacārīn*) and in these cases a comitative instrument would better apply. Coming to the occurrence which interests us it is said that:

- [45] *mitráh prthivyód akrāmat tām púram prá ṇayāmi vaḥ |*
tām ā viśata tām prá viśata sá vaḥ śárma ca várma ca yachatu ||
 [...] *yajñó dáksīṇābhir úd akrāmat tām [...] (ŚS 19.19.1, 6)*
 ‘Mitra ascended with the earth: to that stronghold I am leading you
 (pl.) forward; may you (pl.) settle into it! May you (pl.) attain it! May
 it proffer shelter and armour to you (pl.)!’
 [...] The act of worship ascended with *dáksīṇā*¹⁰⁰.

The text may tell us that the act of worship ascended by means of its essential prerequisite, that is the crucial offering. But since a comitative interpretation is also possible, we cannot rule out the possibility of the image being that of a reformed sacrifice ascending together with its cohort of sacrificial gifts.

In another case the term occurs as a predicative form in sentences involving Vedic identifications and homologies. The *dáksīṇā* constitutes a standard of comparison (*upamāna*) in a complex metaphor (*samastavastuviṣayarūpaka*) where, among the other standards, something such as sacrifice (*yajñá-*), fire (*agní-*), altar (*védi-*), sacrificer’s consecration (*dīkṣā-*), sacrificial butter (*ájya-*) are mentioned, so that we are inclined to recognise a later notion of *dáksīṇā* at least as ‘offering’ in the Atharvavedic sense we already saw above in ŚS 9.5, but perhaps even a reformed meaning of the term is conceivable. In ŚS 9.6, no less than sixty-two verses are devoted to the comparison between a Soma-sacrifice and a reception of guests and, almost at the end, we read the following identification regarding the *átithipati* ‘the entertainer of guests, the host’:

- [46] *yát sabhāgáyati dáksīṇāḥ sabhāgayati yád anutiṣṭhata udāvasyaty*
evá tát. (ŚS 9.6.54)
 ‘When he shares [among the guests], he shares the *dáksīṇāḥ*; when he accompanies [them], he is indeed concluding [the sacrifice].’

It is sure that the banquet in question is by no means a trivial one, but rather it is a special gathering of officiants both friends and rivals who make the host to go to the heavenly world when they play the role of

¹⁰⁰ See ŚS 19.19.2-5, 7-11 *vāyúr antárikṣeṇód akrāmat [...] sūryo divód akrāmat [...]. candrá mā náksatrain úd akrāmat [...]. sóma óśadhībhir úd akrāmat [...]. samudró nadībhir úd akrāmat [...]. brahma brahmacāribhir úd akrāmat [...]. indro víryeṣṇód akrāmat [...]. devā amītenód akrāmaṃs [...]. prajāpatiḥ prajābhir úd akrāmat [...].*

guests (v. 23)¹⁰¹ and it is even emphasised that the host ‘whose food is eaten by his guests’ (v. 26 *yásyā́nnam aśnánti*) ‘has his sin devoured’ (v. 26 *jagdhápāpman*). This seems to resemble the so-called ‘pre-classical sacrifice’, based on a competitive mechanism of conflict and complementarity between hosts and guests, i.e. protagonists and antagonists, as reconstructed by Heestermann since 1962 onward, in which the king-legitimation was a crucial purpose. Thus, it is probable that the earliest ‘potlach’, reconstructed as an ancient Indo-Aryan institution, but possibly in decline, was matched with the prevailing socio-religious organisation grounded on sacrifice in order to both legitimize it and to absorb it in a new culture.

4. dakkhiṇā in the Pali Suttapiṭaka

The word *dakkhiṇā* in the Pali Buddhist canon is generally used to indicate a gift for a worthy person and for the Sangha, the community of monastics¹⁰². This word is employed, for example, in the *Pattakammasutta* in a verse in which Anāthapiṇḍika, a wealthy and famous lay follower of the Buddha, mentions his duties:

[47] *bhutta bhogā bhatā bhaccā vitiṇṇā āpadāsu me,
uddhaggā dakkhiṇā dinnā atho pañca baliṃkatā,
upaṭṭhitā sīlavanto saññatā brahmacarayo.* (A 2.68)¹⁰³

‘I’ve enjoyed wealth, supported my dependents, | and overcome adversities.

I have given an uplifting offering | and performed the five oblations.

I have served the virtuous monks, | the self-controlled celibate ones’.

(tr. Bodhi 2012: 452)

¹⁰¹ ŚS 9.6.23 *eté vai priyās cāpriyās ca rtvijah svargam lokam gamayanti yad ātithayah.*

¹⁰² Sometimes this word, like in the Vedic texts, is a geographical indication, i.e. the South, such as in S IV 218 *yathāpi vātā ākāse, vāyanti vividhā puthū | puratthimā pacchimā cāpi, uttarā atha dakkhiṇā | sarajā arajāvāpi, sītā uṇhā ca ekadā | adhimattā parittā ca, puthu vāyanti mālutā* ‘Just as many diverse winds, | Blow back and forth across the sky, | Easterly winds and westerly winds, | Northerly winds and southerly winds, | Dusty winds and dustless winds, Sometimes cold, sometimes hot, | Those that are strong and others mild, | Winds of many kinds that blow’ (tr. Bodhi 2000: 1272). See also e.g. A 4.166ff. and D 3.1888.

¹⁰³ The Pali texts are commonly quoted by indicating the volume of the text with Roman numerals and the pages of the European edition (Pali Text Society) with Arabic numerals e.g. A I 68. Here the first number after the siglum is digitized as an Arabic numeral due to editorial requirements.

Moreover, when *dakkhiṇā* is employed in contexts which involve brahmanical rituals, which were probably contemporaneous with the Buddha, the term sometimes denotes a type of simple offering similar to that mentioned for instance in the sacrificial environment of ŚS 9.5.25 (see above § 3.2) in which a goat with five rice-mashed dishes is offered (thus including an animal killing). For example, in the *Maccharisutta* (S 1.18-19), some deities (*devatā*) approach the Buddha and utter verses on giving and its benefit. One of the deities then asks the Buddha:

[48] *ken'esaṃ yañño vipulo mahaggato, samena dinnassa na aggham eti sataṃ saḥassānaṃ saḥassayāgināṃ, kalam pi nāgghanti tathāvidhassa te ti.* (S 1.19)

‘Why does their sacrifice, vast and grand, | not share the value of the righteous one’s gift?

Why are a hundred thousand offerings | of those who sacrifice a thousand, | not worth even a fraction | [of the gift] of one like him?’. (tr. Bodhi 2000: 108)

He answers:

[49] *dadanti eke visame niviṭṭhā, chetvā vadhitvā atha socayitvā, sā dakkhiṇā assumukhā sadaṇḍā, samena dinnassa na aggham eti. evaṃ saḥassānaṃ saḥassayāgināṃ, kalam pi nāgghanti tathāvidhassa te ti.* (S 1.19)

‘Since they give while settled in unrighteousness, | having slain and killed, causing sorrow, |

Their offering – tearful, fraught with violence – | shares not the value of the righteous one’s gift. |

That is why a hundred thousand offerings | of those who sacrifice a thousand, | are not worth even a fraction | [of the gift] of one like him’. (tr. Bodhi 2000: 108)

Here clearly the grand sacrifice (*yañño vipulo mahaggato*), a hundred thousand offerings (*sataṃ saḥassānaṃ saḥassayāgināṃ*) and *dakkhiṇā* refer to sacrificial rituals involving Brahmans, which the Buddha considers to be ineffective because they involve killing and cause suffering (*chetvā vadhitvā atha socayitvā*).

In this section, continuing the work already begun in Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo (2020), we will analyse the term *dakkhiṇā* in the Pali Buddhist *Suttapiṭaka* (with some references to inscriptional material), to verify whether *dakkhiṇā* is merely a practice of *dāna* as it is

commonly understood. In order to do this, we will investigate the usage of the Pali word *dakkhiṇā* in early Buddhist texts in the light of its assumed connection with the ancient Indo-Aryan culture more generally. We aim to understand whether, beyond the undeniable influence of the brahmanical notion of *dakṣiṇā* which was contemporaneous with early Buddhism, these usages of the word as they appear in Pali sources can be reasonably compared with the ancient pre-Buddhist Vedic usage. In particular, we will investigate the hypothesis that Pali *dakkhiṇā* might have denoted ‘a means’ to achieve well-being both for the recipients and for the donor, be it a material or immaterial factor that ensured it.

In the following passage for instance, the term *dakkhiṇā* occurs in a context where its potentiality surpasses the limits of a unidirectional giving relationship and ensures benefits all around, being a means to gain a greater profit that is shared by several people. The relevant *sutta* describes how King Pasenadi was grateful to the monk Ānanda for the extraordinary teachings he had imparted to him and wanted to give him a valuable gift. However, since the king was informed that some gifts cannot be accepted by monks, he offered Ānanda a magnificent and very large cloak (*bāhitikā*) which King Ajātasattu had given him. At first Ānanda was not willing to accept even this gift, but the king persuaded him to accept it by noting that Ānanda could give his old robes to the other monks, thereby benefiting the monastic community. When Ānanda reports this event to the Buddha, the Buddha concludes that it was actually the king who had a great gain on that occasion:

[50] [...] *taṃ, bhante, āyasmā ānando paṭiggaṇhātu anukampam upādāyāti alaṃ mahārāja paripuṇṇaṃ me ticīvaraṃ ti ayaṃ bhante aciravatī nadī diṭṭhā āyasmatā c’eva ānandena amhehi ca yadā upari pabbate mahāmegho abhippavutṭho hoti, athāyaṃ aciravatī nadī ubhato kūlāni saṃvissandantī gacchati, evaṃ eva kho bhante āyasmā ānando imāya bāhitikāya attano ticīvaraṃ karissati, yaṃ paṇ’āyasmato ānandassa purāṇaṃ ticīvaraṃ taṃ sabrahmacārīhi saṃvibhajissati. evāyaṃ amhākaṃ dakkhiṇā saṃvissandantī maññe gamissati. paṭiggaṇhātu bhante āyasmā ānando bāhitikaṃ ti. paṭiggahehi kho āyasmā ānando bāhitikaṃ. [...] atha kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi lābhā, bhikkhave, rañño pasenadissa kosalassa, suladdhalābhā bhikkhave rañño pasenadissa kosalassa yaṃ rājā pasenadi kosalo labhati ānandaṃ dassanāya labhati payirupāsānāyā ti. (M 2.116-117).*

‘[...] Venerable sir, may the Venerable Ānanda please accept it out of compassion! Great King, it is not necessary! My triple robe is complete. Venerable sir, both Ānanda and I have seen the river Aciravatī.

When a great cloud has rained abundantly on the mountains, as a consequence the river Aciravatī proceeds overflowing both its banks. So, venerable sir, the venerable Ānanda will be able to make a triple robe for himself out of this cloak. He will be able to share his old triple robe with his fellows engaged in the *brahmacariya*. In such a way, our offering surely will proceed overflowing. Venerable sir, let the venerable Ānanda accept the cloak! The venerable Ānanda accepted the cloak. [...] Then the Blessed one addressed the monks: Monks, it was a gain for King Pasenadi of Kosala. Monks, it was a profitable gain for King Pasenadi of Kosala that King Pasenadi of Kosala obtained to see and to pay homage to Ānanda’.

As far as the imagery of the overflowing *dakkhiṇā/dakṣiṇā* is concerned, a recent analysis of the allusion to the episode of the Buddha’s victory over Māra described in a set of the Godavari copper plates (EIAD 186) proves most intriguing. Indeed, Tournier (2018) suggests that this detail connects the water used by the Buddha-to-be Śākyamuni in his previous lives with a flood that drove away Māra’s army before the Buddha awakening episode, i.e. with *dakṣiṇāmbhas*, which he translates as ‘the water of those gifts’ (p. 70ff.). Tournier (2018: 72) explains:

‘Water, besides belonging to the gift’s ritual framing, serves also as its very metaphor. This is a means to allude to the countless gifts made by the Bodhisattva in former lives’.

Nonetheless, it is tempting to take into account the possibility that Tournier’s fascinating reconstruction of the notion of *dakṣiṇāmbhas* could be linked to the earliest concept of *dakṣiṇā* we assumed above. The mentioned water might have simply designated the Buddha-to-be’s ‘auspicious condition’ instead of the generous gifts he gave in his former lives.

The image of the productivity and fertility of *dakkhiṇā* is quite common and the fact that it is compared with a natural element is also testified by means of the agricultural metaphor of the fruitful seed S 1.21= Ja no. 424 3, 472:

[51] *viceyyadānaṃ sugatappasatthaṃ, ye dakkhiṇeyyā idha jīvaloke,
etesu dinnāni mahapphalāni, bijāni vuttāni yathā sukhette ti.*

‘A gift (given) with discrimination is praised by the Sugata. (Gifts) given to *dakkhiṇeyyas* here in the world of the living are of great fruit, like seeds sown in a good field’.

A similar image (*yáthā bījam urvárāyām kṛṣṭé phālena róhati* ‘As seed in fertile soil, in a cultivated ground, thrives with fruit’) is found in the *Atharvaveda* (see [31]) as referring to the *śatádakṣiṇa- máni* i.e. the amulet which confers a hundred auspicious conditions.

4.1. *dakṣhiṇā* and *puñña* in the Pali Suttapiṭaka

It is important to understand the relationship between *dakṣhiṇā* and the result it produces, which is generally associated with the term *puñña* ‘merit’. Several scholars have already analysed various aspects of this complicated question, but here, we shall, in particular, focus our work on Egge’s theory (2002), according to which, the act of giving is either a devotional or sacrificial action that ensures a good rebirth, or an act of compassion and detachment that leads to *nibbāna*. Indeed, he identifies the first with *dakṣhiṇā* and the second with *puñña*. It is well known that the sacrificial discourse of giving is subsequently replaced with the karmic discourse within a more complex pattern. This pattern is also suitable for explaining the ultramundane effects of gifts and an analogous later development of a brahmanical doctrine, including an ultramundane effect of donations (secondarily called *pūrta* and *pūrti-* in Sanskrit), which has been recently postulated by Pontillo (2019) on the basis of the history of the Vedic compound *iṣṭāpūrtá*. Egge (2002: 55) claims that ‘[a] few passages explicitly identify *puñña* as the cause or effect of attaining *nibbāna*’. We think that this interesting reading can be extended. In particular, in some cases we have found evidence that *puñña* is taken to be the result of *dakṣhiṇā*¹⁰⁴, while in other passages the two words seem to have a similar meaning. However, in the case of the former, the merit resulting from the action depicted as *dakṣhiṇā* is not enough to achieve the *nibbāna*, although in some Buddhist traditions, as can be witnessed in many inscriptions, *nibbāna* is an aspiration of the donor allocating the *dakṣhiṇā*.

In the following passage it is also stated that the merit is associated with other merits (*saṃsandamānā puññena puññaṃ*), as if they had become interconnected with each other:

¹⁰⁴ Egge (2002: 21) also underlines this element: ‘The immediate result of an act of giving, which produces its final effect, is usually called *puñña*. In canonical non-narrative verse literature, use of this term correlates closely with other features of sacrificial discourse. In these verses, *puñña* usually means “auspiciousness” or “merit”: the potential to produce a good effect that is created by a sacrificial act.’

- [52] *susaṅkhatam bhojanam yā¹⁰⁵ dadāti sucim paṇītam rasantā upetaṃ,
sā dakkhiṇā ujjugatesu dinnā caraṇopapannesu mahaggatesu,
puññaena puññaṃ saṃsandamānā mahapphalā lokavidūna vaṇṇitā.
(A 2.63)*

‘When one gives well-prepared food, | pure, delicious, and flavourful, |
To the upright ones who are, | Exalted and of excellent conduct, |
That offering, which links merit with merit, | is praised as very fruitful
by world-knowers’. (tr. Bodhi 2012: 447).

In other cases, because of the close link between the two elements of the gift (or offering) and the merit, according to a use that at a stylistic and literary level we can define as ‘metonymy’, *dakkhiṇā* sometimes comes to represent the merit itself. However, it is the tool and the means that first of all makes merit possible and then allows it to move towards an auspicious after-death condition. This is particularly evident in the context of the so-called ‘transfer of merits’, or ‘directing merit’, expressed by the formula *dakkhiṇā- ādis-* (Skt. *daṣṣiṇā- ādis-*), which consists of the word *dakkhiṇā*, generally in the accusative case, and the verb *ā-dis-* with the meaning ‘to announce, to refer to, to dedicate’. We (Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo 2020: 154-156) “like many other scholars”¹⁰⁶ have written about this controversial topic. This phrase is not frequent in the Pali canon¹⁰⁷, but a particularly prominent example is:

- [53] *yasmim padese kappeti vāsam paṇḍitajātiko¹⁰⁸
sīlavant’ ettha bhōjetvā saññate brahmacārayo¹⁰⁹,
yā tattha devatā assu¹¹⁰ tāsam dakkhiṇam ādise
tā pūjitā pūjayanti mānitā mānayanti naṃ.*

‘In whichever place the wise man makes his dwelling, having fed the
virtuous and restrained *brahmacārins*,
let him dedicate the merit/gift to those deities that live there.

¹⁰⁵ The structure of the Pali verse is a little unusual: *yā* of the relative clause seems to refer to the female donor, while the subject of the main clause is her offering (*sā dakkhiṇā*).

¹⁰⁶ See Gombrich (1971), Aggase (1978), Schmithausen (1986), Bechert (2020: 103ff.), etc.

¹⁰⁷ See for example A 3.43, 4.64; Thī v. 307 p. 153 and Pv v.8 p. 12, v.11 p. 17, etc. For an account on this expression in other Buddhist sources see Schopen 1997: 229-230 fn. 34.

¹⁰⁸ D 2.88 *paṇḍitajātiko*; Ud 89 and Vin 1.229 *paṇḍitajātiyo*.

¹⁰⁹ D 2.88 *brahmacārayo*; Ud 89 and Vin 1.229 *brahmacariye*.

¹¹⁰ D 2.88 *assu*; Ud 89 and Vin 1.229 *āsum*.

Honoured, they (will) honour (him), revered, they (will) revere him'.
(D 2.88 = Ud 89 = Vin 1.229)

In the first verse the act of giving is feeding (*bhojetvā*) holy men, while in the second part the *dakkhiṇā* has the new meaning of the merit that is assigned to the deities (*devatā*). Masefield (1994: 177) translates this as 'he then assigns that merit-offering' with a note (fn. 85, p. 190) on *dakkhiṇam ādise* that Horner, Woodward and Ireland in their translations of this passage "all take this as making offering(s)", which obscures the fact that it is the benefits stemming from feeding those possessing morality that are transferred to the household *devatās*'. Moreover, the commentary on the *Udāna* (Ud-a 423) claims:

[54] *tāsaṃ dakkhiṇam ādise ti saṅghassa dinne cattāro paccaye tāsaṃ gharadevatānaṃ ādissa pattiṃ dadeyya.*

"let him dedicate the gift to them", means, having allocated to those house-deities the four conditions given to the *saṅgha*, he should give the merit (*patti*)'.

The commentary glosses *dakkhiṇam ādise* with *pattiṃ dadeyya*, taking *dakkhiṇā* to be a synonym for *patti*, which the PED *s.v. patti* defines as 'merit, profit, in special sense of a gift given for the benefit of someone else (as a "*dakkhiṇā*"), accrediting, advising, transference of merit, a gift of merit'¹¹¹. Thus, in some cases *dakkhiṇā* means 'merit', generally conveyed by the word *puñña*.

Interesting insights into the meaning of Skt. *dakṣiṇā*/Pa *dakkhiṇā*-as linked to the meaning of 'merit' in the Buddhist context are also provided by Buddhist Prakrit and Sanskrit inscriptions. An example is a Gāndhārī inscription, dated to around the second half of the first century BCE or later (see Baums 2012: 204 fn. 10), which involves the wish on the part of the donor that his establishment of a *stūpa* will be for *aghadakṣoṇa*-¹¹², translated by Baums as the 'highest reward', the equivalent of Sanskrit *agra-dakṣiṇā*-:

¹¹¹ See also Senart (1905-1906: 64): '*patti* in the Buddhist Pāli, i.e. *prāpti*, is a technical term denoting the application to another of the merit acquired by good works, by a gift, by a foundation (Childers, *s.v.*). It is probably through the intermediate meaning "a part, participation," that the word has come to be used in that way.'

¹¹² For other occurrences of this word in Gāndhārī inscriptions, see Baums 2012: Gāndhārī 247 fn. 99.

- [55] ? ? ? + + *meri[a]kheṇa sabhayakeṇa thubo pra[ti]stavito matapitu puyae aghadakṣaṇayae.*

‘[...] by the meridarch together with his wife is established (this) stūpa, in honor of mother and father (and) for the highest reward’. (CKI 33, ed. and tr. Baums 2012: 205).

Therefore, the donation, in this case the action of establishing a *stūpa*, is made with the specific aim of acquiring a profitable reward¹¹³, which here is probably for the donor’s mother and father.

Another is a Sanskrit inscription from Mathurā (no. 44 K 174, Lüders 1961: 80):

- [56] *[d]ā[na]ṃ bh[ik]ṣus[y]a B ... + .. m[i]trasya V[o]jya + [vaśi]kasya – [mātap]i + [tṛ]ṇa [abhyat]itaka + laga[tā]nām pujāy[e] + bhavatu sa[dh]yivi + harīśya Dharma[d]ev[a]s[y]a + ar[o]g[a]dākṣiṇ[ā]y[e] [bha]vat[u]*

‘The gift of the monk m[i]tra, the Vojyavaśika (?). Let it be for the worship of (his) deceased parents. Let it be for the bestowing of health on (his) companion Dharmadeva’. (ed. and tr. Lüders 1961: 80)

Schopen (1997: 35) translates this inscription as: ‘This the gift of the Monk... mitra, the Vojyavaśika (?) May it be an act of *pūjā* for his deceased parents. May it (also) be for the granting of health for his companion Dharmadeva’.

Both Lüders and Schopen take this to be a *tatpuruṣa* compound and as a dative of purpose: *ar[o]g[a]-dākṣiṇ[ā]y[e]* ‘for the bestowing/granting of health’. As a consequence, the *dākṣiṇā-* (here spelt *dākṣiṇā*) is the element that allows something to be achieved, it is not a gift in itself, but a means of obtaining a gift, namely as a reward¹¹⁴.

It is interesting that the following inscription also preserves a lexical trace of Brahmanical culture precisely in relation to merit, see e.g.:

- [57] *ime bhagavato śakyamuṇisa śarira pradīḥaveti thīae gabhirae apradīḥavitaprave pateṣe brammapuṇ[o] prasavati sadha maduṇa rukhuṇakaa jiputrae apracarajabharyae.*

¹¹³ Baums 2012: 205, and also 228, 247.

¹¹⁴ Baums (2012: 237, 244, 245) translates this compound as ‘reward of health’. For other examples of *arogyadākṣiṇāye* in the Mathurā inscriptions, see Lüders 1961: 83 § 46 and Schopen 1997: 36.

‘He¹¹⁵ establishes these relics of the Lord, the Śākya sage, in a secure, deep, previously unestablished place. He produces Brahman merit together with his mother, Rukhuṇaka, who has a living son (Vijayamitra II), the wife of the king of Apraca (Viṣuvarma)’. (CKI 242 ed. and tr. Baums 2012: 207-208)

This inscription describes the deposit of the relics of the Buddha, most likely also in this case in a *stūpa*. The expression *brammaṇṇ[o] prasavati*, ‘he produces *brammaṇṇa*’, translated by Schopen (1994: 21) as ‘the merit of Brahmā’, is also discussed by Salomon and Schopen (1984: esp. 116-122). They argue that this expression is canonical, stating: ‘We have here a case where canonical material has – as in the Kurram casket inscription and the two inscriptions from Ajaṅṭā – been more or less directly transferred into an epigraphical text’ (120) and that ‘The idea that establishing relics on a previously unestablished site results in *brāhma-puṇya* – has an old and continuous textual authority: the *Ekottarāgama*, the *Vibhāṣā*, the *Abhidharmakośa*, the *Sphuṭārthā* and the *Pratītyasamutpāda-sūtra* all refer to it’ (117). They also report Vallée Poussin’s translation: ‘Heureux dans les cieux pendant un *kalpa*. Le mérite de telle mesure qu’on est heureux dans les ciel pendant un *kalpa*, c’est le mérite brahmique, car la vie des *Brahmapurohitas* est d’un *kalpa*’ (116).

Referring to this and other inscriptions, Tournier (2018: 36) states: ‘The *brāhmapuṇya*, appropriating the achievement of pre-existing meditative practices (*dhyāna* or *brahmavihāra*), entails a rebirth among the Brahmakāyika gods for an entire *kalpa*’. In a nutshell, this expression is generally connected with the foundation or a repairing of a *vihāra* and generates different types of this Brahmā merit that bring a rebirth in Brahmā heaven¹¹⁶. It is evident that early Buddhist literature is rich in expressions involving the theme *brahma-*, such as *brahmacariya*, *brahmavihāra*, *brahmabhūta*, etc.¹¹⁷, and that these lexical items shared with Brahmanical culture have assumed very particular and different meanings in the Buddhist context, but they also testify to an antecedent background and for the purposes of our argument, it is significant that in the Buddhist donative inscriptions there is this clear reference to the production of merit linked to the Brahmanical world¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ The subject of this sentence is the Prince Imḍravarma.

¹¹⁶ For some connection of this Brahmā-merit with the *brahmavihāra* practice see Martini (2011: 84), and esp. 158 fn. 83.

¹¹⁷ See Neri, Pontillo 2015; Neri, Pontillo 2016.

¹¹⁸ However, we can make some important distinctions; for instance, despite its different meaning, the compound *brahmacariya/brahmacarya* is an expression that is

In several of his publications, Schopen discusses at length the expression *dakṣiṇā- ādiś-* (Pa *dakkhiṇā- ādis-*) and instances of compounds involving the term *dakkhiṇā*, including examples from inscriptions. First, contrary to Fussman, Schopen argues that the doctrine of the transfer of merits was already present in early Buddhism and is therefore not a peculiarity of the Mahāyāna¹¹⁹. Moreover, he subsequently makes a distinction, arguing that the formulas¹²⁰ associated with the early tradition do not express the intention of religious donations, stating ‘The actual transference in the doctrine of the transference of merit associated with the Sarvāstivādins, Mahāsāṅghikas, and so on, is, therefore, not consistently oriented toward one specific goal. In most cases, it seems to simply involve the assignment of merit by one individual (the donor) to another (the expressed beneficiary) for no specific purpose other than, presumably, the increasing of the recipient’s store of merit. When a more specific purpose is also stated, it is, on occasion, the attainment of *nirvāṇa*’ (Schopen 1997: 39). Instead, in the supposed Mahāyāna inscriptions, while retaining this early general meaning, there is frequently a tendency to expand this benefit to include ‘all beings’ and to the attainment of supreme knowledge (*anuttarajñā*)¹²¹. Schopen (1997: 79) further maintains that ‘Although not frequently the expression used here to refer to “transfer of merit”—*dakṣiṇā- ādiś-*—does occur in the Pali Canon, and there, as here, is also associated with the recitation of verses’.

Bechert (2019: 106), in partial disagreement with Schopen, claims that the theory of the transfer of merit is not so early, but belongs to the transition state that scholars call semi-Mahāyāna (even if these terms did not exist and this movement is not strictly defined). The context in fact is that of a donative gift for the deceased parents which, in Bechert’s opinion, is used to replace the early brahmanical ritual, as has

common to both traditions, while *brāhmapuṇya* does not seem to be found in the Vedic-Brahmanic literature.

¹¹⁹ Schopen (1997: 38) claims: ‘I think that, in light of this material, Fussman’s remarks on the possible Mahāyāna character of his inscription must be put aside. But in the process of testing his hypothesis, we have discovered at least one very important fact: we know now, beyond any doubt, that virtually all of the Hīnayāna schools mentioned in inscriptions accepted gifts that were given with an implicit doctrine of the transference of merit explicitly attached to them, that they accepted gifts that were expressly stated to have been made, for example, “as an act of *pūjā* for one’s dead parents”’.

¹²⁰ Schopen (1997: 38) described this formula as: ‘An act may be undertaken “for the welfare and happiness of all beings” or “as an act of *pūjā* [...] (deceased) parents”, or more specifically “for the granting of health” to one individual or another’.

¹²¹ See Schopen (1997: 39).

also been suggested by Gombrich. In fact, Gombrich himself thinks that the idea of the transfer merit was not originally Buddhist but part of a ritual background common to many cultures which the Buddhists inherited along with the doctrine of rebirth. He states ‘We come, here, to a complex of ideas centring on those funeral feasts for dead relatives which are common to so many cultures. *Prima facie* they are perhaps an unexpected phenomenon in a religion which preaches constant rebirth, but Buddhism inherited them from its Indian Hindu background at a time when the re-birth doctrine was new’ (Gombrich 1971: 207)¹²².

The above research suggests that *dakkhiṇā* in the sense of ‘merit’, conceived of as a transferable and shareable good, was present in the early phase of Buddhist thought. It can also be emphasised that this transfer of merit could be—as Gombrich argues—a way to incorporate earlier rituals in order to attract devotees for whom this was a common practice. In addition to this we can speculate that the use of the word *dakkhiṇā* in the formula of the transfer of merit by early Buddhist communities may therefore be quite deliberate, being a remnant of an older *dāksīṇā* as a medium to achieve well-being, which is affirmed in the most ancient Vedic collections. Furthermore, the Vedic hints at a clan-based notion of the merit stored in heaven, as we saw above (§ 3.2) in hymn ŚS 18.4, could be a crucial key to better understanding a plausible origin of the doctrine of the transfer of merit.

4.2. The ultramundane sphere of *dakkhiṇā*

In fact, in early Buddhist texts the *dakkhiṇā* generates merit which can bring both worldly and otherworldly positive results. In some Gāndhārī inscriptions the two levels can occur as a reward:

- [58] *teṇa ime pradistavita bhagavato dhatuo dhamara [3] ie takṣaśi<*la> e taṇuvae bosiatvagahamī maharajasa rajatirajasa devaputrasa khuṣaṇasa arogadakṣiṇae [4] sarva[bu]dhaṇa puyae pracagabudhaṇa puyae araha(*ta)ṇa pu[ya]e sarvasa(*tva)ṇa puyae matapitu puyae mitramacañātisa [5] lohī(*ta)ṇa [pu]yae atvaṇo arogadakṣiṇae ṇivaṇae hotu a[ya] desamaparicago [pu]yae atvaṇo arogadakṣiṇae ṇivaṇae hotu a[ya] desamaparicago.*

‘He establishes these relics of the Lord [3] in the Dharmarajika (*stūpa*) in Takṣaśilā in (his) personal bodhisattva-womb (*stūpa*) for the reward of health of the great king, chief king of kings, son of the gods, the Kuṣāṇa, [4] in honor of all buddhas, in honor of solitary buddhas, in

¹²² Gombrich’s use of the word ‘Hindu’ for this period is problematic.

honor of saints, in honor of all beings, in honor of mother and father, in honor of friends, intimates, relatives, [5] and blood relatives. May this giving of a donation be for (his) own reward of health and nirvana'. (CKI 60, ed. and tr. Baums 2012: 237)

- [59] *igagamigami bhagavada śakyamuṇaṣa śarira pariṭhida imeṇa kuśalamuleṇa madapiteṇa puyaye bhavadu haṣṭhunaḥmaregaṣa puyaye bhavatu vagamarigaṣa agrabhagadae bhavadu maheya ca dhidae arogadakṣiṇae bhavatu agrabhaga sarvasatvaṇa ca [3] <*a> [gra]bhagadae bhavatu ṇ<*i>rvanaparayana ca aviyaniragaparyata yava bhavagra yo atra aṃtara aḍaja jalayuga śaśv<*e>tiga aru[v]i ova<*va>tiga saha sarviṇaṇa ṇirvaṇaeda nirvaṇadae naye bhavatu mahiya ca rohaṇa agrabhagadae bhavatu bahulamithyagaṣa ca agrabhagadae bhavatu.*

‘In each of them relics of the Lord, the Śākya sage, are established. By this root of good may it be in honor of mother and father, may it be in honor of Haṣṭhunaḥmarega, may it be for the best lot of Vagamarega, and may it be for the reward of health of me the daughter (and for) the best lot; [3] may it also be for the best lot of all beings and conducive to (their) nirvana; and may it be for the attainment of nirvana of all, whoever there is here in between, from the Avīci hell at one end to the top of existence, (whether) egg-born, womb-born, moisture-born, formless, (or) spontaneously arising; and may it be for the best lot of my horse-men(?); and may it be for the best lot of the one who holds many wrong views’. (CKI 509, ed. and tr. Baums 2012: 245)

Schopen (1997: 39) claims that the inscriptions that mention the attainment of *nirvāṇa* (as a specific goal such as health) is more commonly mentioned in inscriptions belonging to what is called the Hīnayāna tradition, also if it is occasional and just a traditional religious goal. In any case, such a hope for *nirvāṇa/nibbāna* is framed in a different perspective in the *Suttapiṭaka* where the merit of giving seems to produce inferior attainments. In the *Suttapiṭaka*, the *nibbāna*, which is the most highly valued attainment, can only be achieved when is achieved the destruction of the defilements (*kilesa*) of lust, hatred and delusion (*rāga, dosa, moha*) etc. and other elements, etc. are achieved as is explained in these verses of the *Cundasutta*:

- [60] *dadato puññaṃ pavaḍḍhati, saṃyamato veraṃ na cīyati kusalo ca jahāti pāpakaṃ, rāgadosamohakkhayā sanibbuto ti. (Ud 85)*

‘Merit increases for the one who gives, enmity is not amassed for the one practising control; whilst the skilled one forsakes that which is evil – he is, through the destruction of lust, hatred and delusion, one who has attained nibbāna’. (tr. Masefield 1994: 172)

Thus, we see that *nibbāna* is achieved by the destruction of the three defilements not through merit. In the *Suttapiṭaka* giving and generosity are said to result in rebirth in heaven and other happy destinations. For example, in the *Suppavāsāsutta* (A 2.63), previously discussed in the investigation of the relationship between *puñña* and *dakṣhiṇā* [§ 3.1], we can read the following verse:

[61] *etādisaṃ yaññaṃ anussarantā, ye vedaḥjātā vicaranti loke*
vineyya maccheramalaṃ samūlaṃ, aninditā saggam upenti thānan ti.
 (A 2.63)

‘Those recollecting such generosity dwell in the word inspired by joy. Having removed the stain of miserliness and its root blameless, they go the heavenly abode’. (tr. Bodhi 2012: 447)

In this case, heaven (*sagga*) is the same reward which in texts such as the A 4.59-63 is said to be rebirth in the Brahmaloaka¹²³.

We can conclude that generosity and giving are commonly presented as improving the donors’ lot as a whole and enabling them to work their way to finally attaining *nirvāṇa*. Although in the Gāndhārī inscriptions the donor expresses the hope that the merit of his or her gift will contribute to his/her or other people’s attainment of *nirvāṇa*, this is only a wish of these ancient Gandhāran donors; it is unlikely that it was understood that giving directly resulted in *nirvāṇa*¹²⁴. *dakṣiṇā/dakṣhiṇā* clearly involves worldly (good health) and otherworldly dimensions (rebirth in heaven or the Brahmaloaka and more generally an improvement in the already mentioned dynamic of the transfer of merit).

Thus, this word comes to designate more properly the means through which welfare can be obtained and shared, as we have also seen in the earliest Vedic sources. Probably the early Buddhist communities’ choice to adopt the word *dāksṣiṇā/dakṣhiṇā* (despite its evolution in Brahmanical culture), because in its ancient meaning it was part of a

¹²³ For a more complete account of the rebirth destinations resulting from giving, see A 4.239-241, cf. 3.39-42.

¹²⁴ The aspiration to attain *nibbāna* through merit is expressed as well in the funeral ritual formulas described by Langer 2007: 13ff.

common background as testified by the older Vedic texts. In particular, within the after-death framework, it denoted a means to have access to the heaven (even though the *nirvāṇa/nibbāna* was considered something higher) which sometimes could even be assigned to someone else with respect to the one who gained this means. This was the mechanism of the so-called transfer of merits (see above § 3.1), which is also well-documented in the form of the offering to the *Petas*, depicted as ‘hungry ghosts’ especially in the *Petavatthu* (e.g. vv. 14-25), and also in the *Nikāyas* (see Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo 2020: 143-145).

4.3. Vedic pūnya: some hints

A thorough recension and discussion of Vedic occurrences of *pūnya* might offer some interesting insight, but we will not address the matter here. We consider it nevertheless important to highlight some important points which should show how, at least in some Vedic cultures, *pūnya* may be akin to the concept of *dākṣiṇā*, as well as in the Pali texts that we have just seen. First of all the term *pūnya* in early Vedic culture is strongly shifted to the Atharvavedic sphere, with only two occurrences of the term in the ṚV (to which three more can be added in the Khilāni) as opposed to fifteen in the ŚS. Its usage as an attribute is quite common and in some frozen phrases it becomes quite clear that the (lately frequent) meaning of ‘pure’ does not match with the occurrences which, on the contrary, consistently refer to something which is auspicious or even meritorious. This is particularly true for the syntagms *pūnyā lakṣmī* and *pūnyaḥ lokāḥ*. The former one is found in contexts where an “auspicious” sign is opposed to an evil one, namely in ŚS 7.115 (=120).4: *rāmāntāṃ pūnyā lakṣmīr yāḥ pāpīs tā anīnaśam* ‘let the auspicious signs stay, those that are evil I have made disappear’, and in ŚS 12.5.6 *āpa krāmati sūnītā vīryāṃ pūnyā lakṣmīḥ* ‘[from him] the happiness, the heroism, the auspicious sign moves away’. A similar context is found in ŚS 19.8.5, where an inauspicious sneezing (*kṣāva*) is opposed to an auspicious one. More telling are the occurrences of *pūnya* used as a qualifier for the noun *lokā*, be it a singular or plural form: the *pūnya-lokā*- represents without doubt a specific condition in the after-death geography of the Atharvaveda, which at least partly overlaps with the *sukṛtā-lokā*-, the world of the well-done, i.e. of merit and *sukṛtām lokā*-, the world of the well-doers. Interestingly, in ŚS 15.13.1-5, where it is repeated 5 times in sentences with a parallel structure, the term identifies a condition offered as a reward for an action of hospitality and which is realised at different, increasing, cosmic levels until it reaches

an absolute and ‘unlimited’ state in terms of time and space (*áparimitā rātrī, áparimitāḥ púnyā lokās*)¹²⁵:

- [62] *tád yáasyaivám vidván vrātya ékām rātrim átithir grhé vásati |*
yé pṛthivyām púnyā lokās tán evá ténáva rundhe ||
 [...] *dviṭyām rātrim [...] | yé 'ntárikṣe púnyā lokās [...] ||*
 [...] *ṭṛṭyām rātrim [...] | yé divi púnyā lokās [...] ||*
caturthīm rātrim [...] | yé púnyānām púnyā lokās ||
tád yáasyaivám vidván vrātyó 'parimitā rātrīr átithir grhé vásati |
yá eváparimitāḥ púnyā lokās tán evá ténáva rundhe || (ŚS 15.13.1-5)
 ‘Now, [he] in the house of whom a thus-knowing Vrātya stays one night as a guest, he obtains, by this, those auspicious/meritorious worlds on the earth.
 [...] a second night [...] those auspicious worlds in the atmosphere [...].
 [...] a third night [...] those auspicious worlds in the sky [...].
 [...] a fourth night [...] | those auspicious worlds of auspicious people [...].
 Then, in the house of whom a thus-knowing Vrātya stays unlimited nights as a guest, he obtains, by this, those auspicious worlds, truly unlimited’.

The term is also found in some interesting compounds, such as *púnyagandha*, and *púnyajana*. The latter compound is of difficult interpretation. It is found in lists consisting either of names invoked in the combat against death (Gandharvas, Apsaras, snakes, deities, *púnyajana* and ancestors, visible and invisible beings)¹²⁶ or distress (the evil ones, demons, snakes, *púnyajana*, ancestors and the hundred-and-one deaths)¹²⁷ or as apparitions to frighten the enemy (forest trees, forest dwellers, herbs, plants, Gandharvas, Apsaras, snakes, deities, *púnyajana* and ancestors). These mysterious people are identified in various ways, but one element that at least emerges from these lists is the strong link with the afterlife and the ancestors.

The most intriguing occurrences are those of the compound *púnyagandha* in the meaning of ‘one of auspicious/sweet scent’. The term appears in very stereotypical contexts. A first time it appears in

¹²⁵ Analogously in the *pañcaudana-sava* hymn, the *áparimita loká* is mentioned in ŚS 9.5.22ab = PS 16.99.8ab (see above [33]) associated with the ‘unlimited sacrifice’ (*áparimita yajñá* ŚS 9.5.21cd = PS 16.99.7cd; ŚS 9.5.22 = PS 16.99.8ab), both gained by the one who offers the *ajā pañcaudana*.

¹²⁶ ŚS 8.8.15.

¹²⁷ ŚS 11.8.16 (= 11.6.16 Whitney).

a kind of “sleeping spell” that is also found with a few variations in the *R̥gveda*¹²⁸. In another hymn, focused on extolling the Vedic metre Virāj and its ascent to different levels of power, the *púnya gandhá* is linked with the celestial beings Gandharvas and Apsaras and is spilled from the Virāj—acting as a new version of *dákṣiṇā* and the cow of plenty—and bestowed on the divine beings at stake and, indirectly, on each devotee ‘who knows thus’:

[63] *sód akrāmat śá gandharvāpsarása āgachat tām gandharvāpsarása
úpāhvayanta púnyagandha éhīti [...]
tām vásuruciḥ sauryavarcaśó 'dhok tām púnyam evá gandhám adhok |
tām púnyam gandhám gandharvāpsarása úpa jīvanti púnyagandhir
upajīvanīyo bhavati yá evám véda. (ŚS 8.10.27)*

‘She ascended; she came to the Gandharvas and Apsaras; the Gandharvas and Apsaras summoned her: come here o you with auspicious scent! [...] Vasuruci son of Suryavarcaś milked her [i.e. the virāj]; he spilled her for the auspicious scent; upon that auspicious scent the Gandharvas and Apsaras subsist; he who is aware of this becomes one of auspicious scent, one to be subsisted upon’.

It is quite evident, from the context that this auspicious scent is not a trivial, sweet or pleasant smell. In fact the stanza is inserted in a series where, coming near the Asuras, the Virāj bestows magic power (*māyá*) (v. 22), coming near the ancestors, it bestows self-power (*svadhá*) (v. 23), near the men, agriculture and crop-growing (v. 24), near the seven *ṛṣis*, the sacred formula and ascetic heat (v. 25) and near the *devas*, strength (26). After our verse, the Virāj comes to the ‘other people’¹²⁹ to whom it yields secrecy (v. 28) and finally to snakes that receive the benefit of venom (v. 29).

The *púnyagandha* is thus a typical feature of specific semidivine beings (Gandharvas and Apsaras) and at the same time an outward sign of their auspicious condition and an instrument of their power, something upon which they can subsist. Not surprisingly, men also covet this capacity and it is one of the leaders’ paraphernalia in the collection of powers proposed by this hymn.

¹²⁸ ŚS 4.5.3 *proṣṭheśayás talpeśayá nārīr yá vahyaśívarīḥ | strīyo yāḥ púnyagandhas tāḥ sárvaḥ svāpayāmasi* ||≈ RV 7.58.8 *proṣṭheśayá vahyeśayá nārīr yás talpaśívarīḥ | strīyo yāḥ púnyagandhās tāḥ sárvaḥ svāpayāmasi*. It is in any case hard to identify who these ladies of sweet/auspicious perfume are.

¹²⁹ Possibly an euphemistic expression to name some evil spirits.

4.4. Pali dakkhiṇaggi and the dakkhiṇeyyas

In order to better understand the role of merit, in particular in the Pali sources, it is important to investigate the function of the *dakkhiṇeyya* connected with fire. This fire is mentioned in a sacrificially oriented context, in the *Dutiyaṅgisutta* (A 4.41-46), where the protagonist is a brahmin who asks the Buddha for advice about the huge sacrifice he is arranging. After hearing the Buddha's response, he abandons the intent to perform a sacrifice. Some of the most typical implements of the brahmanical sacrificial arena, namely, the three renowned sacred fires of *āhavanīya* (the fire fit to receive oblations), *gārhapatya* (the householder's fire), and *dakṣiṇāgni* (the Southern fire of the altar, in which the offerings to the ancestors are poured) are reinterpreted by the Buddha as the three cornerstones of his Dhamma. The Buddha indeed explains that there are three fires¹³⁰ which have to be abandoned and avoided, namely *rāgaggi*, *dosaggi*, and *mohaggi*, that is, the fire of lust, the fire of hatred and the fire of delusion, while there are another three fires that should be cultivated. The first two of these are similar to the three brahmanical sacred fires just mentioned, namely the *āhuneyyaggi* and the *gahapataggi*. However, the third one, which is especially important for our inquiry, is not the *dakkhiṇaggi*, but is rather *dakkhiṇeyyaggi*¹³¹. If the constituent-analysis parallels that of the *āhuneyyaggi* (such as the Sanskrit *āhavanīya* are both gerundive form of *ā + hū*, i.e. lit. 'fit for the *āhavana*- "oblation"'), and we read it as closely cognate to the brahmanical *āhavanīya*, i.e. lit. 'fit for the *āhavana*- "oblation"', we should also interpret *dakkhiṇeyyaggi* as a *tatpuruṣa karmadhāraya*, i.e. 'the fire fit for the *dakṣiṇā*'. If instead the analysis has rather to be tuned to that of the *gahapataggi*, and even to *āhuneyyaggi* according to Bodhi's (2012: 26) translation as 'fire of the venerable', then *dakkhiṇeyyaggi* could be a mere *tatpuruṣa*, i.e. 'the fire of the one/ones who is/are fit for the *dakṣiṇā*' (consistently with Bodhi's [2012: 26] translation as 'the fire of the gift-worthy'). As a consequence, within the *sutta*, the association of these latter three fires with specific kinds of people (who deserve respect, attention and care) is especially noteworthy. The *āhuneyyaggi* stands for one's mother and

¹³⁰ Cf. another list of qualifiers which also combines *āhuneyya*- and *dakkhiṇeyya*- (referring to the Sangha) in A 1.208. In the previous *sutta* seven fires are mentioned: *rāgaggi*, *dosaggi*, *mohaggi*, *āhuneyyaggi*, *gahapataggi*, *dakkhiṇeyyaggi*, *kaṭṭhaggi*, 'the fire of lust, of hatred, of delusion, of those worthy gifts, the householder, of those worthy of offerings, a wood fire' (A 4.41). On the reinterpretation of these three Vedic fires, see Shults (2014: 125ff).

¹³¹ This compound is also quoted in D 3.127.

father who are to be honoured (*yassa te honti mātāti vā pitāti vā, ayaṃ vuccati [...] āhuneyyaggi*), because the one who has been honoured/become (*āhuta-*)¹³² has indeed been born (*sambhūta*) from this fire. One's children, wives, servants, messengers, and workers are taken to be the *gahapataggi* (*yassa te honti puttāti vā dārāti vā dāsāti vā pessāti vā kammakarāti vā, ayaṃ vuccati [...] gahapataggi*). The *dakkhiṇeyyaggi* refers to a different group of people, taken as a plurality which might overall be considered as 'religious':

[64] *idha brāhmaṇa ye te samaṇabrāhmaṇā madappavādā paṭiviratā khantisoracce niviṭṭhā ekam attānaṃ damenti ekam attānaṃ samenti ekam attānaṃ parinibbāpentī ayaṃ vuccati brāhmaṇa dakkhiṇeyyaggi.* (A 4.45)

'Consider, brahmin, those renunciants and brahmins, who abstain from pride and indolence, who bear things with patience, each mastering himself, each calming himself, each bringing himself to *nibbāna*: this, brahmin, is called *dakkhiṇeyyaggi*'.

Thus, according to this passage, these three fires ultimately represent three groups of important individuals that the brahmin should honour and support, and perhaps also three distinct kinds of Dharmaic behaviour. *dakkhiṇeyyaggi* in fact seems to be engaged in a path aimed at attaining the best after-death destination. Therefore, the Buddhist *dakkhiṇeyyaggi* and the Brahmanical *dakṣiṇāgni* somehow boil down to an akin setting, that is the ancestors' world, even though the semantic path followed by the two terms and their relationship perhaps need to be reconsidered. We wonder whether the Buddhist notion of *dakkhiṇeyyaggi* might have been a conservative item, since the name *dakṣiṇāgni* seems too distant from the semantic structure of the other two names *āhavanīya* and *gārhapatya*. Indeed, this is not a fire fit to receive the *dakṣiṇā*, unless the stem *dakṣiṇā* is something different from the Brahmanical 'priestly gift'. In this regard, ŚS 18.4.7-9 analysed above [37] and containing two occurrences of *dakṣiṇāgni* might document another aspect of the continuity here assumed.

¹³² *ato 'yaṃ brāhmaṇa āhuto sambhūto* 'From it [i.e. mother and father] one who has become/has been honoured, is generated'. Concerning the meaning of *āhuta-* see DP s.v. *āhuta*² which quotes the commentary that takes it to be equivalent to *ābhūta* 'become', by glossing it with *āgata*, although this raises the possibility that it represents *āhuta*¹ 'offered, sacrificed'.

The Vedic idea of abundance connected with *dakkhiṇā* as a means of merits is connected in the Pali Canon to the idea of *dakkhiṇeyya*, being those who are most worthy of gifts, represented by the Buddha, the *arahats* and the Sangha¹³³, to whom the act of giving guarantees the production of merit. For example, in the *Sammukhībhāvasutta*, we read:

[65] *tiṇṇaṃ bhikkhave sammukhībhāvā saddho kulaputto bahuṃ puññaṃ pasavati. katamesaṃ tiṇṇaṃ. saddhāya bhikkhave sammukhībhāvā saddho kulaputto bahuṃ puññaṃ pasavati. deyyadhammassa bhikkhave sammukhībhāvā saddho kulaputto bahuṃ puññaṃ pasavati. dakkhiṇeyyānaṃ bhikkhave sammukhībhāvā saddho kulaputto bahuṃ puññaṃ pasavati. imesaṃ kho bhikkhave tiṇṇaṃ sammukhībhāvā saddho kulaputto bahuṃ puññaṃ pasavati. (A 1.150)*

‘Bhikkhus, when three things are present, a clansman endowed with faith generates much merit. What three? 1) when faith is present, a clansman endowed with faith generates much merit 2) when an object to be given is present, a clansman endowed with faith generates much merit 3) when those worthy of offerings are present, a clansman endowed with faith generates much merit. When these three things are present, a clansman endowed with faith generates much merit’¹³⁴. (tr. Bodhi 2012: 244)

It is noteworthy that in this passage *dakkhiṇeyya* is listed as one of the three things, along with faith (*saddhā*) and material objects that are to be given (*deyyadhamma*), which generate much merit: *bahuṃ puññaṃ pasavati*, ‘he generates much merit’, an expression that echoes *brammapuñ[o] prasavati* ‘he generates the merit of Brahmā/Brahman merit’, in the Gāndhārī inscription discussed above.

Moreover, the following *Suttanipāta* verse explains that he who desires to achieve merit (*puññatthiko*) can do so by giving to a *dakkhiṇeyya*, one worthy of gifts, the text using the instrumental case to underline their instrumental function:

[66] *yo yācayogo dānapatī gahaṭṭho māghā ti bhagavā
puññatthiko yajati puññapekko
dadaṃ pasesaṃ idha annapānaṃ
ārādhaye dakkhiṇeyyehi tādi. (Sn 488, p. 88)*

¹³³ We discussed this briefly also in Candotti, Neri, and Pontillo (2020: 141 ff).

¹³⁴ As regards the connection between *dāksinā* and faith (*saddhā/śraddhā*) see also ŚS 11.8.22 (see above § 3.2).

‘The householder who is devoted to generosity, a lord of giving, Māgha, (said the Blessed One) who, desiring merit, seeking merit, makes a donation¹³⁵, by giving food and drink to others here, such a one would achieve it (the merit) by means of those worthy of *dakkhiṇā*’.

Moreover, in the following passage the Buddha and the Sangha, apart from being *dakkhiṇeyya*, are *puññakkhetta* ‘fields of merit’ (e.g. Th 566, p. 59):

[67] *āyāgo sabbalokassa āhutīnaṃ paṭiggaho
puññakkhettaṃ manussānaṃ paṭigaṇhittha dakkhiṇan ti.*

‘The receiver of an offering by the whole world, recipient of oblations field of merit for men, he received the *dakkhiṇā*’.

To sum up, the words *dakkhiṇā* and *puñña* have a complex relationship in Pali canonical sources. In some cases, *puñña* is the result of the *dakkhiṇā*, while at other times they assume the same meaning, especially, in the transfer of merit. The ancient meaning of the word *dakkhiṇā* as being a means to achieve well-being is seen in the Pali expression *dakkhiṇā-ādis*. That the Buddha and Sangha are those worthy of receiving offerings and are fields of merits are the factors that—as in the Vedic texts—guarantee the stability and the redistribution of merit (in this life or in the after-life).

5. *The ideological and ritual context of the earliest dākṣiṇā/dakkhiṇā*

The purpose of this second section of our research is to understand—by means of the analysis of the vocabulary and imagery that characterise the contexts concerned with the archaic concept of *dākṣiṇā/dakkhiṇā* here tentatively reconstructed—what role might have been played by the relevant mythic or partly idealised leader whose ‘magnificence’ was supposed to allow the community to achieve prosperity. We have seen that his function was substantially different from that of the officiating priest in the late Vedic age.

¹³⁵ Although both Bodhi (2017: 237) and Norman (1992 [2001]: 60) use ‘sacrifices’ to translate *yajati*, here we have chosen to adopt another translation. In fact, the PED s.v. *yajati* offers this definition: ‘In the P. literature it refers (with *yañña*, sacrifice) either (when critical) to the Brahmanic rites of sacrificing to the gods according to the rules initiated in the Vedas & Vedic literature; or (when dogmatical) to the giving of alms to the bhikkhu. In the latter sense it implies liberal donation of all the necessities of a bhikkhu’. It seems to us clear from the context that here the word is referring to the second use.

5.1. *Who are the protagonists of the Vedic sacrificial arena?*

Due to the three different meanings of *dākṣinā/dakkhinā* we have singled out in the texts, which presuppose at least two different relationships between the participants in the sacrificial event, it is now crucial to reflect for a while on the political dynamic characterising the sacrificial arena. According to Heestermann (1962; 1985; 1993; 2012), the pattern of the classical sacrifice, which is exclusively performed by several officiants, in order to fulfil the wishes of a single sacrificer, represents the point of arrival of a long evolving process of sacrificial patterns that moves towards a lower and lower level of social complexity but an increasing ritual technicalisation of them¹³⁶. By contrast, e.g. Bronkhorst (2016b: 158) does not give any credit to the reconstruction of the so-called ‘pre-classical sacrifice’ with ‘agonistic cooperation’, carried out by Heestermann from 1962 onward. Thus, he consistently seems to take for granted that from the beginning Vedic sources show a neat distinction between patron and officiant priests and that only later on did phenomena such as those that he defines as ‘Vedic sacrifices without officiants’ develop, after Alexander’s transit through the North-western India¹³⁷.

We will not take a specific position for now on this complex question. Nevertheless, the completely new interpretation of the role of *dākṣinā* that we hope to have demonstrated in the previous paragraphs of this article, if accepted, supplies a strong, new element in favour of the backdating of the model of sacrifice without an officiant (or in general without rigidly defined roles).

As a social background of the earliest *dākṣinā*, it is better to postulate an original competitive collective sacrifice in which the group of warriors linked by a brotherhood agreement managed to distribute the booty (i.e. of the riches earned by means of races or military expeditions) among the members of the *viś*. Likely a *primus inter pares*, selected as the most trustworthy of the sodality in the community’s eyes, played the role of

¹³⁶ ‘The pre-classical sacrifice is the arena of conflict and alliance, the field in which honour and position are to be won, the market for the distribution of wealth. [...] Combining in itself all functions—social, economic, political, religious—sacrifice is the catastrophic center, the turning point of life and death, deciding each time anew [...]’ (Heestermann 1993: 2-3). This might have been indeed a very ancient Indo-Āryan social pattern, subversed only after the mentioned assumed reform, when the social status could have switched from the individual ability, such as poetical and ritual prowess, to lineage of birth (Falk 2001: 133). ‘The absence of the rival, who had co-determined the course and outcome of the agon, left a vacuum that was filled with an ever more-refined system of rules’ (Heesterman 2012: 7).

¹³⁷ ‘The distinction between officiant and sacrificer was as clear as daylight: the typical sacrificer could not sacrifice on his own, and the officiant would not sacrifice on his own behalf. [...] All this changed during the period under consideration. [...]’ (Bronkhorst 2016b: 157).

grhāpati. In such a context, the *dākṣiṇā* might have denoted that which made the *grhāpati* the most trustworthy, i.e. the fact of having gained goods in the past for his community and his wisdom-oriented way of administrating these goods. Probably the *dākṣiṇā* was at the beginning something immaterial, often evoked in a poetic way as the complex of auspicious features of this pre-eminent figure, but it might have slowly been identified with the goods themselves, particularly the cows which were the main part of the booty to be distributed. Thus, it should be not surprising that the noun *dākṣiṇā* (more and more often used as a plural noun) was combined with the verb *nī-* ‘to lead, to bring’, to denote the material which were probably gathered by the leader and led by him to the sacrificial arena where they were presented as a tangible sign of the success¹³⁸. In a heroic Indra-like horizon, the sacrificer’s role of food-provider for the community might have relied both on the loyal support that the brotherhood provided for him for his expeditions and on the public allegiance obtained thanks to the previous successful outcomes.

In the Atharvaveda socio-political context, on the other hand, the tendency to concentrate every sacrificial function under the authority of the *purohita* at the kingly court, plausibly transformed the early Vedic sacrifices characterized by circularity and reciprocity (e.g., between donor and recipients) into a system of actions, uniformly oriented towards the donor, where the simple offering (*dākṣiṇā*) is the core of the whole ritual performance¹³⁹.

With the advent of the inheritance right, due to the Yajurvedic development of sacrifice and society, such a leader, who is also depicted as *dākṣiṇāvat*, skilful and successful in the several *Ṛgveda* passages analysed in the first two sections of the present article, may historically have split into two figures: the king who embodied the ruling, military and economic power, and the priest as recipient of a portion of the goods earned by the leader and guarantor of the technical relationship with the gods and above all with the collective tradition. When the access to every form of power and prestige was no more eminently competitive, verses such as ṚV 10.107.5-6 (see above § 1.1) should have been perceived as senseless. The list of requirements for candidates for the pre-eminent position, which attributes to one single person (the *dākṣiṇāvat*-) every facet

¹³⁸ See e.g. ĀpŚS 22.5.10-11; KŚS 22.4.25-26.

¹³⁹ It is probable that in such a new later historical reconstruction of South Asian religions, the Atharvaveda emerged as an alternative Vedic block with respect to the *Ṛgveda* and *Yajurveda*, *de facto* superseding the ritual supremacy of the latter which had lasted for several centuries. The new configuration of the sacrificial arena was clearly explained for the first time by Inden (1992: 566, 573).

of excellence—be it fruit of poetry and wisdom or of military and ruling skills—would be considered as deprived of purpose.

5.2. *The political and social dimension of the leader's magnificence*

It is now necessary to concentrate on the sharp aura of heroism surrounding the leader, an aura that, as we have seen, played a crucial role in ritual, to the point of becoming the sacrificial matter itself. As far as the Vedic documents are concerned, we need in fact to further investigate the origin of the shift of emphasis from the image of a successful leader eager to share the fruits of his success to that of a generous patron who bestows gifts rather than shares his wealth, with particular regard to gifts to officiants (*dākṣiṇā*). The early Vedic image is without doubt somewhat extreme and one wonders exactly which, if any, specific culturally grounded social pattern is hinted at and how it became extraneous to the secondarily developed Brahmanical civilization¹⁴⁰.

Indeed, in the *R̥gveda* there are not so many pieces of information about the actual functions linked to the exercise of authority, but the pre-eminence on the battlefield¹⁴¹, as well as a clear-cut economic authority of the chieftain—envisioned as god Agni who reigns over riches¹⁴²—are almost taken for granted¹⁴³:

[68] *viśāṃ kavīm viśpátim śásvatīnām nitósanam vṛṣabhám carṣaṇīnām |
prétiṣaṇim iśáyantam pāvakám rājanam agnīm yajatām rayīnām ||*
(RV 6.1.8)

‘[*īmahe* v. 7 We invoke] the sage community-lord of all communities, the granter bull of cultivators.

Striving to move forwards, strengthening, purifying, the one who is worthy of worship, Agni, reigning over wealth’.

The economic role played by the chieftain/king is also confirmed by the imagery relying on fire, for instance in a hymn of the *Athar-*

¹⁴⁰ See Samuel (2008: 99); Fussman (2010: 8); Attwood (2012: 55).

¹⁴¹ See Maggi (2019: 75). The leader probably relied on the group of *ṛ̥c-*, i.e. the young adult members of the communities who assured victory for their *viś* and were compared with the Maruts (RV 7.56.5), who used to fight beside Indra (Maggi 2019: 37).

¹⁴² The so-called *ignis publicus*, i.e. the ritual fire which is the emblematic joint possession of several allied communities, ultimately ‘belonged to the house of the king, and represented the center of his power’ (Proferes 2007: 35).

¹⁴³ Furthermore, a judicial function is not excluded, but it is not documented: it has merely been deduced on the basis of the often combined Indra’s and Varuṇa’s aspects of sovereignty, which could represent the military and sapiential pre-eminence of the leader in war and peacetime respectively or the ruling power and the administration of justice in general.

vaveda, which ultimately is a prayer addressed to the god Indra to obtain strength, power and victory for one's own leader. And the effect of Indra's protection is essentially a matter of crops and cattle that the successful chieftain is able to assure to his community for its perpetual prosperity¹⁴⁴.

[69] *ayám astu dhánapatir dhánānām ayám viśám viśpátir astu rájā |
asmínn indra máhi várcāmsi dhehy avarcāsam kṛṇuhi sátrum asya ||
asmaí dyāvāpṛthivī bhūri vāmám duhāthām gharmadúghe ivá dhenú |
ayám rájā priyá índrasya bhūyāt priyó gávām óśadhīnām paśúnām ||*
(ŚS 4.22.3-4 = PP 3.21.2)

‘Let this man be riches-lord of riches; let this chieftain be community-lord of communities!

O Indra, bestow great lights on him; make his enemy bereft of light!

O heaven and earth, like two milk-cows milking the *gharma*¹⁴⁵, milk abundant wealth to him!

May this chieftain become beloved by Indra, beloved by cows, plants, cattle!’¹⁴⁶.

Such a leader is somehow appointed by his own *viś*, so that his power crucially depends on the legitimisation that only the community can assign to him and *vice versa* the well-being of the community exclusively depends on the leader's magnificence ensuring him success both in war and in his relationship with the gods.

¹⁴⁴ See Maggi (2019: 75): ‘[...] poiché è Indra a essere pregato in quest’ inno di fare re (in 1a con la titolatura anche di *viśám ekavṛṣám* “unico toro delle viś-”) il personaggio che vi si sostiene, è notevole la solidarietà fra l’esser caro [...] a Indra, da cui la regalità è fatta dipendere, e l’esser caro a vacche e messi, che devono dunque prosperare perché la posizione di re possa mantenersi’.

¹⁴⁵ i.e. the draught basically made of hot milk offered as an oblation especially to the two gods Aśvins.

¹⁴⁶ Once again, Agni as a sort of *alter ego* of the chieftain is often associated with the same function as guarantor of prosperity in food and riches in general. See e.g. ṚV 5.8.5 *tvám agne pururūpo viśevīṣe váyo dadhāsi pratnāthā puruṣṭuta | purūṇy ānnā sāhasā ví rājasi tvīṣih sá te titviṣānāsya nādḥīṣe* ‘You, o Agni, with your many forms establish vitality for every clan in your ancient way, o you much praised. By your strength you rule over many foods. When you have flared, that flare of yours is not to be challenged’ (tr. Jamison, Brereton 2014: 672). See also ṚV 7.10.5 *mandrām hótāram uśījo yáviṣṭham agniṁ vísa īlate adhvarēsu | sá hi kṣāpāvām ābhavad rayīṇām átandro dūtó yajāthāya devān* ‘The fire-priests invoke him, the delighting Hotar, the youngest one; the clans invoke Agni at the rites, for he has become the protector of riches on earth and the unwearying messenger to bring sacrifice to the gods’ (tr. Jamison, Brereton 2014: 1108).

- [70] *tvām viśo vṛnatām rājyāya tvām imāḥ pradīśaḥ pāñca devīḥ |
vārṣman rāṣṭrāsya kakūdi śrayasva tāto na ugró vi bhajā vásūni¹⁴⁷ ||
ácha tvā yantu havīnaḥ sajātā agnir dūtó ajiráḥ sám carātai¹⁴⁸ |
jāyāḥ putráḥ sumánaso bhavantu bahúm balīm práti paśyāsā ugráḥ ||
ŚS 3.4.2-3 (~ PP 3.1.2-3)*

‘May the communities choose you for sovereignty, these regions, the five divine ones¹⁴⁹, [may choose] you, may you attain the vertex of the kingly power at the top: thus, you formidable distribute riches to us! Towards you may your kinsmen come looking for help: Agni shall move as a quick messenger! May your wives and your sons be benevolent: you formidable shall see abundant tribute back!’.

Such a ritual process of legitimation is inherently agonistic because the leader, a sort of new Indra, despite his power, is transformed into something even more powerful by the ritual itself: in many passages one can sense the anxiety (both on the part of the leader and on the part of his community) about the success of the enterprise, which will thereby guarantee the survival and flourishing of the community.

The following passage seems to evoke an unstable political situation or better, stability is the greatest ambition presented in the hymn (notice e.g. the 14 occurrences of the nominal stem *dhruvá-* ‘stable’ in 6 verses). Soma is the official addressee of the hymn, but since it is as usual depicted as a king and it is the ritual substance that puts the chieftain’s consecration into effect, the actual focus of the hymn is the *rājan* (v. 4cd *dhruvám viśvam idám jágad dhruvó rájā viśám ayám* ‘Let all the animate universe be stable, let this king of communities be stable!’).

- [71] *á tvāhārṣam antár edhi dhruvās tiṣṭhāvicācaliḥ |
viśas tvā sárvā vāñchantu má tvád rāṣṭrám ádhi bhraśat ||
ihaivaidhi mápa cyoṣṭhāḥ párvata ivāvicācaliḥ |
indra ivehá dhruvās tiṣṭhehá rāṣṭrám u dhāraya ||*

¹⁴⁷ This verse in PS 3.1.2 is perfectly overlapping ŚS 3.4.2, apart from the last seven words, which are substantially put in a different order. Moreover *ataḥ* is used instead of *tataḥ* and the subjunctive *vi bhajāsy* instead of *vi bhajā*: ° *śrayasvāto vasūni vi bhajāsy ugráḥ*.

¹⁴⁸ Once again in PS 3.1.3 there are only a couple of differences: *accha* instead of *ácha* and *santurātiḥ* instead of *sám carātai*.

¹⁴⁹ This number plausibly indicates the totality of the space dominated by the chieftain, encompassing the four quarters and the area in the middle of these four. Such a totality is also envisioned as the aggregate made of *pāñca-jána-* ‘five races’ or *pāñca-kṣití-* ‘five furrows (i.e. settlements)’. See Crevatin 1978: 7ff.; Maggi 2019: 42. Witzel (1995: 202 and fn. 89) notices that these phrases are more frequent in the ‘family books’ than in the other ones.

dhruvām dhruveṇa haviṣābhī sómam mṛśāmasi |
átho ta índraḥ kévalīr víšo balihītas karat || (RV 10.173.1-2, 6)

‘I have taken you; be in the middle! Stand stable, without wavering! Let all the communities desire you. Let kingship not drop out of you! Be exclusively here! Do not fall off, without wavering, like a mountain! Like Indra, stand stable: here uphold the kingship! May we come in contact with the stable Soma by means of a stable oblation. And now may Indra make the *vís* bring tribute exclusively to you’.

In passages like this, the king is indeed merely a chieftain, who needs to show his abilities, to assure the communities that he is able to provide them with the due prosperity. Thus, he has to maintain his pre-eminence, his magnificence, by means of his deeds, in order to be confirmed in his central position. On the other hand, the community who chose him still acts (both at the ritual and mundane level) to make this pre-eminence possible and durable¹⁵⁰. In other words, the political context is that depicted with a more ritualised garb, in the original Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda background of the *rājasūya*¹⁵¹, aimed at the inauguration or merely at the annual confirmation of the chieftain’s power¹⁵². In that context both the crucial function of legitimising the chieftain himself¹⁵³, brought about by seven people¹⁵⁴, and their precise commitment to fight against the leader’s enemies¹⁵⁵ neatly

¹⁵⁰ See Sharma 1968: 16 about the Vedic people during their expansion in the Indian territory: ‘No doubt a strong general was a great necessity in such a situation, but such a general could not fight successfully without the active support of all the male adults of the tribe’.

¹⁵¹ This term occurs for the first time in the *Atharvaveda*: ŚS 4.8.1 (1X), 11.7.7 (1X); PS 14.1.1-9 (9X), 14.2.1-10 (10X).

¹⁵² At least in the ‘commented version’ of TS 1.8.15-16 supplied by BŚS 12.15.

¹⁵³ This happens when they recite four times *brāhmāṣṇ tvām rājan brahmāsi* ‘O *brahmán*! O king, you are the *brahmán*’ (TS 1.8.16). See Neri, Pontillo 2016: 139-141.

¹⁵⁴ According to BŚS 12.15, these seven *ratnins* are the chamberlain/attendant/carver/distributor (*kṣattr*), the charioteer (*saṃgrahītr*) and the tax-collector (*bhāgaduh*) together with the four officiant priests (*ṛtvij*, i.e. *hotṛ*, *adhvaryu*, *udgātr*, *brahman*). Nonetheless, in TS 1.8.9 eleven people close to the chieftain are mentioned as participants at the event: a specific oblation to a specific divinity is offered in each of their houses in order to propitiate the consecration ceremony.

¹⁵⁵ Indeed, the king delivers a wooden sword to each of them appointing them to fight against his enemies, like Indra’s thunderbolts against Vṛtra, by means of the following: *indrasya vājro vārtraghnas téna me radhya* ‘You are the thunderbolt of Indra, slaying enemies; with this, be subjugated to me’ (TS 1.8.16), cf. BŚS 12.15 *sapta punyanāmo* ‘*bhyudyāthāsmāi sphyaṃ prayacchatīndrasya vājro* *śi vārtraghastena me radhyeti* ‘Having addressed seven persons having auspicious names, he (the sacrificer) hands over the wooden sword to each of them with the formula [...]’. In the background as a prototypical event, it is easy to read the Rgvedic alliance between the God Indra—who is called *brahmán*—and his companions, i.e. the Maruts (see e.g.

emerge. We seem to have, in this later recast of the rite a kind of fossil of a more archaic ritual of attribution of power where the need for a reciprocal legitimation of the leader and the other members of a same group is apparent (Proferes 2007: 17, 39). The one with greatest authority is extolled as a god, but he represents—*primus inter pares*—all the others.

Therefore, R̥gvedic and Atharvavedic poetry extolled the merits of the chieftain and the consequent benefits received by the community, while the contribution of the community (through its representatives at least)¹⁵⁶ was not dedicated as much space. Yet, as we have seen, the role of the community is implicit but far from absent: it is present in the use of the plural referring to the speaking subjects who sing the hero's praises and implore the divinity for his success. It is represented in short by that 'we' who is often the implicit choral singer of the hymns¹⁵⁷. The relationship of mutual endorsement between royal and Brahmanical power that characterises the more recent stages of Vedic society seems to find a more communal and agonistic dimension in earlier texts¹⁵⁸. The simple ritual (particularly borne witness to by the *Atharvaveda*) of offering one's magnificence in order to ritually transform it into something even more valuable for the whole community fits quite well into this assumed background.

RV 10.77.1). Indra is the divine priest-king who is considered to be the model of the earthly chieftain. See Heesterman (1957: 225); Kuiper (1972: 284f.).

¹⁵⁶ According to Sharma (1968: 16) in the Vedic age 'the mass of the people might be technically free citizens, with full rights', but 'the actual government would be in the hands of a small, comparatively leisured elite'. Sharma (1968: 19) maintains that 'each king governed with the consent of the heads of families' also before that the group of these heads had constituted an institutional assembly (*samiti*), even though the ruler seems to be 'appointed' by the *viś* (see e.g. RV 10.124.8cd *tā im viśo nā rājānam vṛṇānā bībhatsūvo āpa vṛtrād atiṣṭhan* 'like communities who choose their ruler, disgusted, they have turned away from Vṛtra'). By contrast, the *samiti* appeared when 'the previous practice of choosing the king by the heads of families ceased to exist in some political communities, and the ruling power fell into the hands of an aristocracy' (Sharma 1968: 43).

¹⁵⁷ Proferes (2007: 3) highlights the increasing phenomenon according to which the king 'embodied the aspirations of others' because the power and the freedom he enjoyed were not attainable by all people but could be morally and even mystically reinterpreted.

¹⁵⁸ The role of the *viś* may be more direct or mediated by the élite, following the focus of the hymn itself or different stages of composition; see, e.g. RV 4.50.8-9 *sā it kṣeti sūdhitā okasi své tasmā ilā pinvate viśvadānīm | tasmai viśaḥ svayām evā namanante yāsmīn brahmā rājani pūrva éti || āpratīto jayati samī dhānāni prātijanyāny utā yā sājanyā | avasyāve yō vārivaḥ kṛṇōti brahmāne rājā tām avanti devāḥ* 'Only he dwells well placed in his abode. For him refreshment constantly overflows. For him the communities spontaneously bow, with respect to which king the brahmān comes first. Unattainable, he wins both his enemies' and his allies' wealth. The gods assist the king who clears the path for the brahmān who is desiring assistance'.

The crucial role of such magnificence of the leader in a ritual context underlines the possible role of asceticism within this social model. If we stay with Heestermann (1962; 1993) who interpreted the pre-classical asceticism of the consecrated warriors as an antecedent of the one-year consecration for the religious performance (*dīkṣā*), we can understand what the inspiration and the aim of the leader who adopted this temporary but challenging behaviour might have been. We believe that such a leader might have had a mythical heroic model in which, along with the importance given to meritorious and glorious deeds, emphasis was also placed on a more static and ascetic dimension where the hero accumulates a power that will in fact be put at the service of others. A striking example is to be found in the already mentioned ŚS 4.11 where Indra (accompanied by the gods) takes upon himself the vow of the ox for all celestials to obtain immortality (see above [28]). His final aim was really ‘bigger than himself’¹⁵⁹, at least in earthly terms: the community was indeed the entity that benefitted from his efforts and a future glorious ultramundane life was the destiny which his sacrifice could ultimately be targeted on¹⁶⁰.

It is not possible here to take up the question of heroic asceticism. In fact, it is enough for the moment to show how well our interpretation of *dākṣiṇā* fits this supposed model. However, it may be useful to show how, in a text that is undoubtedly more recent, but which presents a ritual with clear traces of archaism, the close link between the election of the leader and the latter’s undertaking of an ascetic practice on behalf of the whole community is explicitly postulated. In fact, according to the Śrautasūtra interpretation of the *vrātyastoma sattra* performance, a key-point in the relationship between the head—called *sthapati*—and the whole group of consecrated warriors gathered all around him, is the fact that, the former inflicts mortification and penance on himself on behalf of all the others. Thus, the *sthapati* seems indeed to be required to adopt the behaviour of an ascetic more than that of a warrior—something which makes it easier to understand why the continuity of this imagery with the heroism depicted in Pali literature is quite plausible (see below § 5.3):

[72] [...] *te yam abhisamjānate taṃ sthapatiṃ kurvanti. sa eṣāṃ vratāni carati. so ’dhaḥ saṃveśy amāṃsāśy astryupāyī bhavati. tad dhi dīkṣitavratam [...].* (BŚS 18.24)

¹⁵⁹ See Campbell, Moyers (1991: 79), where the hero is defined as ‘one who is ready to give his life to something bigger than oneself’.

¹⁶⁰ See the collective dimension of the ultramundane abode in ŚS 18.4.37 (see above § 3.2), where the forefathers are prayed to prepare for the deceased a house as big as his clan is.

‘They appoint one whom they agree on as their leader. He observes vows for them. He becomes one who lies down (on the ground), who does not eat meat, who does not approach his wife. This is what the consecrated man observes’¹⁶¹.

5.3. Heroic generosity in early Buddhism

Buddhism is famous for its rejection of violence including the killing of other beings which is set out in the first of the Buddhist precepts (*sikkhāpada*). Nevertheless, in the Pali canon there are often passages that show the presence of a warrior lexicon, a good example being the following passage from the *Selasutta* (Sn 552-557, pp. 108-109):

- [73] 552. *rājā arahasi bhavitum cakkavattī rathesabho cāturanto vijitāvī jambusaṇḍassa issaro.*
 553. *khattiyā bhoja-rājāno anuyantā bhavanti te rājābhirājā manujindo rajjaṃ kārehi gotama.*
 554. *rājāham asmi selā ti (bhagavā) dhammarājā anuttaro dhammena cakkaṃ vattemi, cakkaṃ appaṭivattiyam.*
 555. *sambuddho paṭijānāsi (iti selo brāhmaṇo) dhammarājā anuttaro dhammena cakkaṃ vattemi iti bhāsasi gotama.*
 556. *ko nu senāpati bhoto sāvako satthu-d-anvayo ko te imaṃ anuvatteti, dhammacakkaṃ pavattitam.*
 557. *mayā pavattitam cakkaṃ (selā ti bhagavā) dhammacakkaṃ anuttaram sārīputto anuvatteti anujāto tathāgataṃ.*

‘552. You are fit to be a king, | a wheel turning monarch, lord of charioteers, a victor in all the four quarters, | lord of Jambu Continent.

553. “With *khattiyas* and great princes | all devotes to your service, | as king above the kings, as a ruler of people, | you should exercise rulership, Gotama”.

554. “I am already a king, | (Sela”, The Blessed One said). | “I am the unsurpassed king of Dhamma,

I turn the wheel by means of Dhamma, | the wheel that cannot be turned back”.

555. “You claim to be an enlightened one”, | (the brahmin Sela said).! “You say Gotama,

¹⁶¹ For the context of the assembly (*sabhā*) within which the leader was elected, see Falk (1986: 92-99). This social and ritual context closely recalls both the ancient *saṅgha/gaṇa* institution of the Licchavis and *sattra* and *vrātyastoma*-contexts, when all the officiants are simultaneously sacrificers, who elect the best of them as their leader. See Neri (2015: 405) and Candotti, Pontillo (2015: 181ff.) and bibliography quoted there.

I am the unsurpassed king of the Dhamma. | I turn the wheel by means of the Dhamma”.

555. “Who is your general, that disciple | who follow after the Teacher? Who is it who helps you turn | This wheel that you set in motion?”.

557. “The wheel set in motion by me”, | (Sela’ the Blessed One replied) | “The unsurpassed wheel of Dhamma, Sāriputta, the Tathāgata’s offspring, | helps to keep turning”’. (tr. Bodhi 2017: 252-253)

Here the Buddha is compared to a *rājā cakkavattin*, the universal wheel-turning king, and the Buddha in turn re-uses the same image of being a king but referring to himself as an unsurpassed king of the Dhamma (*dhammarājā anuttaro*). When asked who his general (*senāpati*)¹⁶² is, the Buddha refers to Sāriputta, one of his two chief disciples. And then, in the verses that follow those cited above, the Buddha is referred to as the one who crushed Māra’s army (*mārasenappamaddana*), who has subdued his enemies (*sabbāmitte vasīkatvā*), is without fear (*akutobhaya*), and is the great hero (*mahāvīra*)¹⁶³. In the Pali canon there are many such examples of military and warrior lexicon applied to the Buddha and his monks, although often with new interpretations. Again, the epithets and descriptions of Indra (see above § 2.1, the discussion of the connection between Indra and *dākṣiṇā*) found in Vedic texts are also used for his equivalent, Sakka, in Pali texts¹⁶⁴. In some cases they are also applied to the Buddha. An interesting example is the word *netar*, the agent noun of *nī*, ‘to lead, guide’. In the *Cundasutta*, Cunda asks the Buddha about the conqueror of the path (*maggajina*) to which the Buddha answers:

¹⁶² This word is used in the compound *dhammasenāpati* ‘general of the Dhamma’, which frequently refers to Sāriputta e.g. Th 96 v. 1083.

¹⁶³ Sn v. 561. *brahmabhūto atitulo, mārasenappamaddano* |

sabbāmitte vasīkatvā, modāmi akutobhaya. |

562. *imaṃ bhonto nisāmetha, yathā bhāsati cakkhumā*

sallakatto mahāvīro, sīho va nadatī vane.

561. “I have become Brahmā, peerless, | one who has crushed Māra’s army, | having mastered all my enemies, | I rejoice, without fear from anywhere”. |

562 “Sir, hear this’ said Sela”, | “as the One with Vision has spoken, |

the surgeon the mighty hero, | who roars like a lion in the forest”’. (tr. Bodhi 2017: 255)

¹⁶⁴ As regards the academic discussion of the identification of Indra with Sakka see Bingenheimer 2008 and in particular on p. 153 where he claims: ‘Considering the differences between the Vedic Indra and the Buddhist Sakka, some eminent scholars wanted to believe that Indra and Sakka were “independent conceptions”. However, there is overwhelming evidence for the fact that Sakka is indeed a transformation of Indra’. Moreover, as Bingenheimer (2008: 155, 160) observes, also in the Pali Canon, the etymology of the name Sakka is exactly connected with giving. For a general idea of the role of Sakka in the Pali canon and commentaries see Malalasekera 1974 s.v. Sakka.

- [74] *yo tiṇṇakathaṃkatho visallo
nibbānābhirato anānugiddho
lokassa sadevakassa netā
tādiṃ maggajinaṃ vadanti buddhā.* (Sn 86, p. 17)

‘One who has crossed over perplexity, free of inner darts,
delighted with nibbāna, without any greed;
the guide of this world together with its devas:
the buddhas call the impartial one a conquer of the path’. (tr. Bodhi
2017: 170)

In this case the guide (*netar*) of the world is a Buddha, depicted as a lord, a leader of the gods. In these passages the word *dakṣiṇā* is not present, but it is clear that the path (*maggā*) the Buddha conquers reminds us of the path of a *dakṣiṇā* leading to success that, in the case of the Buddha, is shared with others by distributing his teaching, just as Indra distributes the fruits of his conquest, and a hero distributes his booty (see above § 2.1).

We can find another example of the usage of *netar* in the *Munisutta*:

- [75] *ekaṃ carantaṃ muniṃ appamattaṃ,
nindāpasamsāsu avedhamānaṃ
sīhaṃ va saddesu asantasantaṃ,
vātaṃ va jālamhi asajjamānaṃ
padumaṃ va toyena alippamānaṃ
netāraṃ aññesaṃ anaññaneyyaṃ,
taṃ vāpi - pe -* (Sn 213, p. 36)

‘Living alone, a muni, heedful,
not swayed by blame and praise-
like a lion not alarmed among sounds,
like the wind not caught in a net,
like a lotus not tainted by water,
a leader of others, not by other led:
he, too, is one the wise know as a muni’. (tr. Bodhi 2017: 190)

Thus, the Buddha is a leader of others, not one who is led by others (*netāraṃ aññesaṃ anaññaneyyaṃ*).

Finally, in the *Vaṅṅīsa-sutta*, although it is not a warrior context, one of the Buddha’s monks asks him whether a certain monk had attained *nibbāna*, comparing the Buddha to Sakka who is all-knowing (by virtue of his thousand eyes):

- [76] *chind’eva no vicikicchaṃ brūhi m’etaṃ, parinibbutaṃ vedaya
bhūripañña,*

majjhe va no bhāsa samantacakkhu, sakko va devāna sahasanetto.
(Sn 346, p. 60)

‘Cut off our doubt! Tell me this: | announce he attained nibbāna, you
of broad wisdom. |
Speak up in our midst, O universal eye, | Like thousand-eyed Sakka
among devas’ |. (tr. Bodhi 2017: 213)

Since here, the Buddha is compared to Indra/Sakka due to his role as a leader and his special qualities, and, since Indra distributes the benefits of his conquests, the Buddha likewise distributes his conquest of the Dhamma. Sakka is also sometimes portrayed as the bearer of Buddhist values. For example, in the *Sakka-samyutta*, and particularly in the *Vepacittisutta*, he—whose power is explicitly said to be founded on the fruit of his own merit (*puññaphala*) that is, as we saw previously, on the outcomes of his magnificence—is portrayed praising the non-violent Buddhist values of patience and meekness¹⁶⁵ explicitly declaring his veneration for the Buddha¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶⁵ Sakka says:

yo have balavā santo, dubbalassa titikkhati | tam āhu paramaṃ khantiṃ, niccaṃ khamati dubbalo. | abalaṃ taṃ balaṃ āhu, yassa bālabalaṃ balaṃ | balassa dhammaguttassa, paṭivattā na vijjati. | tass-eva tena pāpiyo, yo kuddhaṃ paṭikujjhati | kuddhaṃ apaṭikujjhanto, saṅgāmaṃ jeti dujjayaṃ. | ubhinnaṃ atthaṃ carati, attano ca parassa ca | paraṃ saṅkupitaṃ ṇatvā, yo sato upasammati. | ubhinnaṃ tikkhantaṃ, attano ca parassa ca | janā maññanti bālo ti, ye dhammassa akovidā ti. | so hi nāma bhikkhave sakko devānaṃ indo sakaṃ puññaphalaṃ upajīvamāno devānaṃ tāvatiṃsānaṃ issariyādhipaccaṃ rajjaṃ karonto khantisoraccassa vaṇṇavādī bhavissati. | idha kho taṃ bhikkhave sobhetha yaṃ tumhe evaṃ svākhāte dhammavinaye pabbajitā samānā khamā ca bhaveyyātha soratā cā ti. (S 1.222)

“When a person endowed with strength, | Patiently endures a weakling, |
They call that the supreme patience, | The weakling must be patient always. |
They call that strength no strength at all- | The strength that is the strength of folly- |
But no one can reproach a person | Who is strong because guarded by Dhamma. |
One who repays an angry man with anger, | Thereby makes things worse for himself, |
Not repaying an angry man with anger, | One wins a battle hard to win, |
He practises for the welfare of both, | His own and the other’s |
When, knowing that his foe is angry | He mindfully maintains his peace |
When he achieves the cure of both- | His own and the other’s |
The people who consider him a fool | Are unskilled in the Dhamma”.

“So, bhikkhus, if Sakka lord of the devas subsisting on the fruit of his own merit exercising supreme sovereignty and rulership over the Tāvatiṃsa devatas, will be one who speaks in praise of patience and gentleness, then how much more would it be fitting here for you, who have gone forth in such a well-expounded Dhamma and Discipline, to be patient and gentle”’. (tr. Bodhi 2000: 323)

¹⁶⁶ *yaṃ hi devā manussā ca, taṃ namassanti vāsava | atha ko nāma so yakkho, yaṃ tvaṃ sakka namassasī ti. | yo idha sammāsambuddho, asmiṃ loke sadevake | anomanāmaṃ satthāraṃ, taṃ namassāmi mātali. (S 1.235)*

Concerning the Pali Canon, Gethin (2007: 65) describes the presence of some “ascetic violence”, which he considers common to all ascetic religious movements and which in Buddhism can be defined as violence towards the self¹⁶⁷. Even more interesting for our parallelism is the image of the ascetic as warrior and hero. He makes the following interesting observation:

‘One further aspect of ascetic violence requires some brief comment: the ascetic as sacrificial victim. One aspect of the argument that the Indian renouncer tradition has its origins within the complex of Vedic sacrificial ritual, rather than outside it, is the suggestion that renunciation is an extension of the sacrificial ritual: the renouncer’s life is essentially a form of sacrifice and he himself is ultimately offering himself as the sacrificial victim. Certainly, we can find examples of the Buddhist spiritual path being presented as a species of sacrifice (*yañña*) in early Buddhist texts, yet the principal concern in those contexts seems to be to present this as precisely a non-violent sacrifice in contrast to the bloodthirsty sacrifice of a living victim’.

Therefore, the sacrificial victim in this case is the ascetic himself¹⁶⁸ which might find a Vedic parallel in the devotee using his own magnificence (be it material or not) as sacrificial matter, up to the body of the deceased transformed into the last and most meagre offering granting him a body of pure light in heaven. This ascetic sacrifice happens quite frequently in the Jātakas stories, the accounts of the Buddha’s past lives. The most paradigmatic and well-known examples

“Both devas and human beings, | humbly worship you, Vāsava.
So who, o Sakka, is that spirit, | to whom you bow in worship?”
[Sakka:]

“The Perfectly Enlightened One here, | in this world with its devas,
The Teacher of perfect name | he is the one whom I worship, Mātali”’. (tr. Bodhi 2000: 335)

¹⁶⁷ Gethin (2007: 65): ‘If one wishes to argue, as some might, that all forms of asceticism are in essence form of violence against the self, the clearly Buddhist asceticism must represent in instance of violence against the self’.

¹⁶⁸ On the idea of sacrifice as self-immolation in Buddhism see also Bronkhorst (2016a: 4): ‘Buddhism, for example, is said to be a religion without sacrifices, and indeed, Buddhism is critical of the Vedic tradition of sacrifice, especially animal sacrifices. But Indian Buddhist literature is full of a theme that looks very much like it: devoted Buddhists — including prominently future Buddhas — give away their body or parts of it. And this is not only a literary theme. The Chinese pilgrim Yijing reports that in his time there were Buddhists in India who burned their own bodies as an act of religious fervor. And in China, from the fourth century CE onward, there were instances of bodily self-mutilation, sometimes on a massive scale, in conjunction with the worship of relics or stūpas’.

are the famous *Vessantara-jātaka* (no. 547)¹⁶⁹, in which the bodhisattva is a prince who was so generous that he gives away everything, including his wife and children, and the *Sivi-jātaka* (no. 499) where the bodhisattva is a king who is so generous that he gives his eyes to a brahmin. In these *jātakas* there are many stories in which the protagonist gives with no regard for his own life, i.e. he embodies heroic generosity. According to Egge (2002: 38) the ‘praise of royal generosity is frequent in these texts’, adding that ‘[t]hese (legendary and historical) princes adhere to an ideal of Kṣatriya conduct that Thomas Trautmann has shown to be well represented in the Epics; among other things, this warrior ethic prescribes that a king is to give freely to all, but to accept no gifts (see also Sudyka 2015). By denying reciprocity, this ideology asserts the moral and material superiority of the donor over the recipient’. The Vedic and Epic notion of the heroic and sovereign warrior is thus adopted in descriptions of the Buddha as a model who gives and generously cares for others¹⁷⁰, for example in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* it is said:

[77] *ekapuggalo bhikkhave loke uppajjamāno uppajjati bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. katamo ekapuggalo. tathāgato araham sammā sambuddho.* (A 1.22)

‘Bhikkhus, there is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings. Who is that person? The Tathāgata, the Arahata, the Perfect Enlightened One’. (tr. Bodhi 2012: 107)

The Buddha is a person who arises in the world for the welfare of other people. With reference to this idea, Egge (2002: 38-39) adds: ‘The difference between ideologies of sacrificial and heroic giving in Buddhism therefore exemplifies a fundamental paradox in ancient Indian society, in which religious gifts flow upward to superior beings, but royal gifts flow down a hierarchy of dependency’. However, we think that the ideology behind the ‘magnificence made an offering’ as we described it in the Vedic texts (§ 3.2), was similar to the heroic generosity found in the Buddhist tradition that sometimes assumed different aspects of the ideology of sacrifice.

¹⁶⁹ For a study on this text see Cone, Gombrich (2011).

¹⁷⁰ The Buddha is frequently described as dedicated to the others.

5.4. dakkhiṇā as the cow of plenty (kāmaduhā)

From the perspective of generosity and the exchange of goods, we find a story in Jātaka literature which, even at the level of images used, preserves the Vedic idea of an offering that is ritually transformed into a source of infinite blessings (see above § 2). In fact, in the *Saṅkha-jātaka* (no. 442), the brahmin Saṅkha, who is a generous supporter of the poor, decided to set sail with his ship in search of other riches that will enable him to continue his almsgiving. He was seen by a *paccekabuddha* who asked him to give away even his last possessions, even his shoes. Later, when his ship had sunk, he had received support from a deity and was able to return home carrying wealth that he could continue to distribute. When the deity comes to his rescue, she says these words to him:

[78] *ghamme pathe brāhmaṇa ekabhikkhuṃ, ugghaṭṭapādam tasitam
kilantaṃ
paṭipādayi saṃkha upāhanāhi, sā dakkhiṇā kāmaduhā tav' ajja.* (Ja 4.20)

‘O brahmin Saṅkha, giving [your] shoes to a solitary bhikkhu on a hot path, sore of foot, thirsty, weary, that offering is your cow of plenty today’.

The image of the cow of plenty associated with the *dāksīṇā* is very often found in Vedic texts, both in the *Ṛgveda* (see above §§ 2, 2.1) and in the *Atharvaveda* (§ 3.1), but it is not yet called *kāmaduh-*, even though in the *Atharvaveda* the same compound is found in a hymn which contains several occurrences of *dāksīṇā*, namely in ŚS 9.5.25 (see above § 3.2), where the five dishes of smashed rice that accompany the offering of the goat, which is at the core of a so-called *dakṣiṇā*-hymn, are identified with *pāñca dhenāvaḥ kāmadūghāḥ* ‘five milch-cows of plenty’. But let us focus particularly on a semantic detail in our Jātaka passage: the shoes donated by the brahmin which are considered to be his *dakkhiṇā*, i.e. metaphorically his cow of plenty (*Pali kāmaduhā*), are not presented as a generic image of abundance, but rather as a specific manifestation of his ability to continue supporting others. Thus, it is noteworthy that, in the Vedic contexts too, the leader as a bearer of *dāksīṇā*, is of course pre-eminent because of his military prowess, but also thanks to his wisdom and to his predisposition for sharing the entire booty (gained during races and expeditions) with his community for its welfare. Thus, it comes as no surprise that in the Buddhist context, despite the shared warrior lexicon, it is virtue and generosity that make a man pre-eminent among the others. The importance of the ability, dexterity, precisely called *dāksīṇā* and

depicted within such an imagery of the cow of plenty, is also clearly documented in the *Atharvaveda*, especially as the *pṛṣṇi-* (*dhenú-*) i.e. the ‘speckled storm-cloud/milch-cow’ in the hymns ŚS 5.11 and 7.104 (where it is also defined as *sudúghā- nityavatsā-* ‘well-milking, always possessing a calf’), which is the wisdom-poetry ability Varuna bestowed on Atharvan (see above § 2.1).

5.5. *Sharing food, merit and possessions*

Another level of this generosity is the one shared by the members of the Buddhist monastic community. In the *Bilarikosiya-jātaka* (no. 450) a monk is so generous that he does not eat or drink if the other monks are not able to eat or drink. The Buddha says that the origin of this generosity is due to the fact that in the past the monk’s family, for six generations, had been very generous and gone to heaven. However, the sixth son interrupted this tradition of generosity, so Sakka—significantly, an epitome of the Vedic god of power and sharing—decided to visit him and induce him to change. The resulting change in the young man was so significant that he maintained the vow of never eating in his future life unless others are eating. In this story there are two significant elements. The first is the promotion of generosity in the form of sharing food, etc., within the monastic community (like the community of warriors). And second, at the end of the *jātaka*, the Buddha identifies himself in his past life with Sakka, king of the gods, which reinforces the identification or association of the Buddha with Sakka/Indra. Furthermore, the story is also important because of the use of the term *dakḥhiṇā*. The relevant passage is as follows:

[79] *appasm’ eke pavecchanti, bahunā eke na dicchare*
appasmā dakḥhiṇā dinnā, saḥassena samam mitā ti. (Ja 4.65)

‘Some give from little; some give not though they have plenty.
An offering given from little is equal in measure to a thousand’.

These verses express how the act of giving is particularly celebrated when it involves difficulty. And in general, the story confirms the importance of the practice of sharing benefits, of giving to others. This detail seems to show how *dakḥhiṇā* is not a value in itself but rather is a means to attain something else, which is greater if one is devoted to sharing it with other people.

The practice of sharing merit and goods within the Sangha is also testified in the epigraphic material. In fact, as recorded in many inscriptions, it is common for monastics to be donors to the monastic community. Schopen (1997: 62-63) summarises this, stating:

‘We know, however, that the Bhārhut inscription is only one of a large number from that site recording similar gifts and that in thirty-six cases, or almost 40 percent of these inscriptions, the donors were monks or nuns [...]. There are eight inscriptions from Mathurā that record gifts made for the benefit of the donors’ parents in which the donors’ names or titles have been preserved. In six cases, or in 75 percent of these inscriptions, the donors were monks [...]. In one of the two inscriptions I have cited above from Bodh-Gayā the donor is, again, a monk. [...]. At Sarnāth, for example, in the ten inscriptions that record gifts made for the benefit of the donors’ parents, four-fifths or eight of the donors were monks. In the nineteen inscriptions from Ajaṅṭā that express a similar intention, thirteen of the donors were certainly monks, two more were probably monks, and in one case it is impossible to say’.

Another interesting practice discussed by Schopen is the transfer of merit and the distribution of a dead monk’s possessions. He claims that according to the Mūlasarvāstivādin sources monks would recite formulas for the transfer of merit at a dead monk’s funeral and afterwards divide his possessions¹⁷¹, the latter only being possible once the former had been performed. The monks who performed the funeral ritual were the first to receive the deceased’s possessions, probably in accordance with the customs described in the *Dharmaśāstra*¹⁷².

Of course, the behaviour of the one who partakes of all goods and especially the monk who abstains from eating and drinking unless the other monks can eat or drink, closely recalls both the goods- and especially food-provider function of the Vedic leader represented by Agni (RV 5.8.5—see above § 5.2 and fn. 144) and the specific phrase *nāraḥ pitubhājāḥ* ‘men who partake of food’, which plausibly denotes the group of young adults fighting alongside the leader for the community. Moreover, in the attitude of the monk abstaining from food, we may even find an echo of the ascetic observances of Indra on behalf of the gods mentioned in [29].

¹⁷¹ Schopen (2004: 96) states: ‘Keep in mind that the expression used here, “robe and bowl”, was a euphemism that covered a large variety of personal property’. For this and other problems connected with funeral rites and property and inheritance, see Schopen 2004.

¹⁷² Schopen (1997: 214) says: ‘In his *History of Dharmaśāstra* Kane says, for example, that “there was a close connection between taking the estate of a man and performing the rites after death up to the 10th day”, and “that it was obligatory on everyone who took the estate of another [...] to arrange for the rites after death and *śrāddha*”. In another paper, Schopen (2004: 97) explains: ‘Indian legal texts, for example, take as a given that the property or estate of a dead person goes to the person or persons who perform his funeral rites’.

6. Conclusions

This paper has verified the hypothesis that the meaning of *dakṣiṇā/dakkhiṇā* did not denote '(priestly) gift' in the earliest sources. We have reconstructed for the term, in both the *R̥gveda* and *Atharvaveda*, a basic meaning of an auspicious condition we have decided to translate with the term 'magnificence', a particular characteristic of the leader. In some occurrences, this magnificence is presented in its more material form as the best offering. This is particularly evident in the so-called *sava-* or *dakṣiṇā-yajña*, a performance which *de facto* merely consists of it, without any priestly pomp or technical complexity, but with great expectations for the after-death. The Pali texts document the survival of this notion of *dakṣiṇā/dakkhiṇā* to recent times, despite the fact that we must assume that the term in the meaning of priestly gift was probably already used in Brahmanical circles. These texts also bear witness to the importance of the practice of making offerings/gifts as a means to produce merit.

Both the Vedic and the Pali tradition stress the communal dimension of this offering of one's best, an endeavour which seems to multiply blessings both for the donors and for their lot. Among such blessings we also find a trace of the possibility of gaining the access to some heavens and progressing along the path to *nibbāna*.

In the second part of the article, we have tried to interpret the relevance of this supposed different meaning of the term against a social and ritual background. In particular, we hope that we have been able to show that some assumed features of the most ancient Indo-Aryan societies fit quite well with our lexical proposal. In our opinion, this especially sheds light on the most archaic features of the Indo-Aryan leader, which are kept alive and probably derive from a common source, also in the earliest testimonies of the Buddhist culture.

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