

## INTRODUCTION

All the Vedic concerned texts repeat that the *agiṣṭoma* forms the archetype of the *soma* sacrifice. As such, it is usually confused with the *jyotiṣṭoma*, a ceremony where the pressing of the *soma* is accomplished in one single day. Nevertheless, the overall rite will require five days, for it is necessary to prepare the sacrificial ground, or *vedi*, and the sacrificer himself.

During the initial day, the first part of the *vedi* is prepared, which implies the erection of a kind of shed, the *śālā*, and the sacrifice is consecrated.

For the three next days, the main process will be articulated into the performance of two minor rites, the *pravargya* and the *upasad*. They must be achieved twice each day, once in the morning and then again in the afternoon. Inside this structure, the overall preparation of the last day moves forward.

During the fifth and last day, the most important and prestigious offerings will be performed by the priestly team. The entire day will be dedicated to the libations of *soma* freshly pressed out. There will be three main pressing sessions, early in the morning, at midday, and in the evening.

The *soma* libations prepared during this last day alternate with two kinds of oral performances. On one hand, certain hymns are chanted by the *udgātar* and his team. These passages constitute the *stotras* « chants ». On the other hand, selected hymns are recited by the *hotar* and his team. These hymns, mixed with other passages, as for instance the *nividas*, are arranged in *śāstras* « recitations ». Basically, each *soma* sequence corresponds to a particular *stotra* and *śāstra*. There are twelve sequences of this kind in an *agniṣṭoma*, whose name comes from the title of the last *stotra*. Most of the *stotras* are chanted after the filling of the cups and precede the *śāstras*, which are recited before the offering and consumption of the cups. The first *stotra* of the morning pressing session, the *bahiṣpavamāna*, is chanted outside the *havirdhāna* shed during the purification of the *soma* juice. The corresponding first recitation of the morning pressing is the first *ājyaśāstra*.

I invite you to read it together because it is the first recitation of this pressing day.

It wouldn't be right to say that the *ājyaśāstra* corresponds to the first *hotar* intervention during this day. From midnight until the crack of dawn, he has already recited long sequences of hymns dedicated to Agni, Uṣas and the Aśvins. It was the *prātaranuvāka*, which is not considered as a *śāstra*.

Dividing the first *ājyaśāstra*, I follow the brief synthesis given by Kane in the *History of Dharmaśāstra*. Nevertheless, the Kauṣītakibrāhmaṇa says that the

*ājyaśāstra* contains six steps : *tūṣṇīm̐japa-*, *tūṣṇīm̐śaṃsa-*, *puroruc-*, *sūkta-*, *ukthyavīrya-* and *yājyā-*. I usually use the Aitareyin version and complete it with the Kauṣītakin when I feel it useful. I suggest to read the text with the comments accessible in the Rigveda brāhmaṇas, before making a conclusive synthesis.

### First step : japa

#### hotar

*su mat pad vag de*

*su mat pad vag de*

*pitā mātariśvāchidrā padā dhād*  
sans défaut !

Puisse le père Mātariśvan établir des vers

*achidroktā kavayaḥ śaṃsan /*  
défaut !

Puissent les kavis réciter des hymnes sans

*somo viśvavin nīthāni neṣad*  
guider les chants !

Puisse Soma qui connaît tous (les chants)

*(somo nīthavin nīthāni neṣad, ŚŚS 7.9.1)*

*bṛhaspatir ukthāmadāni śaṃsiṣat //*  
acclamations !

Puisse Bṛhaspati réciter les hymnes et

*vāg āyur viśvāyur viśvam āyuh /*  
toute vie.

Vāc est vie. Elle détient toute vie. Elle est

*ka idaṃ śaṃsiṣyati sa idaṃ śaṃsiṣyati /*  
récitera cela.

Qui récitera cela ? C'est lui qui

The hotar first mutters a brief text whose composition slightly differs in the two versions given by the Aitareyins and the Kauṣītakins.

In the Aitareyin version, it begins with five mysterious syllables. I wonder if it doesn't simply consist in five successive roots summarizing the sacrificial process. The three first ones could describe the efficiency of the soma : once it is pressured (*SU*), it exhilarates (*MAD*) the persons who drink it, and they believe they fly (*PAT*). Therefore they become able to speak (*VAC*) the divine language. The last root (*DI*) is the most difficult. Something shines, perhaps the fire, or the *jyotis* itself, and of course I think of the Avestan *daēnā*, whose vision concludes the success of the sacrificial process.

Then we find four formulas, whose antiquity seems guaranteed by the very good subjunctive aorists we encounter in the Aitareyin version. Both schools agree on several facts : the first *yajus* mentions *Mātariśvan*, the subject of the second is a plural, in the third the subject is soma, and, in the fourth, *Bṛhaspati*.

In the Aitareyin version, a very brief dialogue is understood as an allusion to Prajāpati, because it includes the interrogative pronoun *ka*, whose identity with this creator god is already attested in the tenth maṇḍala of the Rigveda. More simply, this dialogue appears as a fossilized form of the designation of the hotar who will pronounce the *śastra* itself.

The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa contains two suggestive interpretations of this passage. On one hand, Bṛhaspati is identified as the priests, and Soma as the kṣatriyas. The word *nīthāni* represents the *stotras*, while *ukthamadāni* represents the *śastras*. This observation would be more consistent if it were possible to prove that soma is linked with the udgātar, and Bṛhaspati with the hotar.

Furthermore, the four chapters concluding the second pañcika of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa explain that the *ājyaśastra* symbolizes mating, followed by a pregnancy and finally a birth. By his gestures during this first step, the adhvaryu would represent a female, while the hotar is the male. A seed is emitted and a breath does appear. This is the reason why Mātariśvan is named as father, and the final begetting is implied by the allusion to Prajāpati. This interpretation is perhaps secondary, but it doesn't mean that it is totally wrong. I will later come back to this point.

For the moment, let's say that this *japa* seems to have originally been a blessing formula calling the divine protection for the priests and the texts they must recite or sing.

### **Second step : āhāva and pratigara**

The hotar won't be alone to perform the *śastra*. It will be a duet where the hotar's parts are replied to by the adhvaryu's answers intermittenly. This dialogue is now announced. The hotar pronounces a first call (*āhāva*) and the adhavyu must provide an answer (*pratigara*). It is well known that *śoṃsāvom* is the liturgical way to say a simple *śaṃsāva* (subj. pr. A 1 duel) « let's both recite ». The answer, an older *śaṃsa madeva*, means « Recite ! Let's both exhilarate ! » This short section opens the recitation.

**hotar : āhāva (sans avoir fait hiṃ)**

*śoṃsāvom (+ variante)*

**adhvaryu : pratigara**

*śoṃśāmo daiva (+ variante)*

### **third step : tūṣṇīmśamsa**

They begin the third step, with a short recitation named *tūṣṇīmśamsa*, making reference to its silent character. More precisely, they pronounce it in a low voice, in such a way that the other actors don't hear them. The answer made by the *adhvaryu* represents *atha madeva* « May we both exhilarate now ! ». He whispers it thrice, after each formula recited by the *hotar*, who identifies first Agni, then Indra and finally Sūrya to Jyotiḥ « the light », in other words the heart of the ceremony.

Each formula includes one syllable more, *bhūr* first, then *bhuvah* and finally *sva*. They have not been pronounced yet, since the *hotar* began his first *japa* without saying the *abhihiṃkāra* : *hiṃ bhūr bhuvah sva om*. *Bhūr* is said in the beginning of the first formula, *bhuvah* in the middle of the second, *sva* at the end of the third.

The Aitareyins are perfectly conscious of this structure, and use several arguments to explain it.

In the last chapters of the second *pañcika*, they develop their metaphor of a rising process. The *tūṣṇīmśamsa* is mute because it is secret, and it is secret as is the embryonic period preceding the appearance of a new life.

Before these chapters, they already made two other observations. On one hand, they said in II 31 that gods invented the *tūṣṇīmśamsa* in order not to be heard by the *asuras*, who were copying this sacrifice. Therefore, the *asuras* become unable to perfectly reproduce the divine pattern. This explanation is just one minor part of the very frequent and often obscure discourses presenting the sacrifice as a new conflict between *devas* and *asuras*, the old riddle of the indo-iranian comparison.

On the other hand, in II 32, the Aitareyins very clearly explain that these three formulas represent the three pressings and bring light, and then sight, to the sacrifice.

Introducing the next step, it is already possible to say one more word. If the three formulas of the *tūṣṇīmśamsa* represent the three pressings, then the place occupied by the supplementary syllables correspond to that of the *nividas*, the litanies composed in prose which are inserted in each strophic *śastra*. The same can be said about *tūṣṇīmśamsa*, announcing not only the three sessions of libations, but also the general structure of the *śastras* which adorn them.

### **hotar**

***bhūr agnir jyotir jyotir agno3m***

**adhvaryu : *o3thāmo daiva***

**hotar***indro jyotir bhuvo jyotir indro3m***adhvaryu : o3thāmo daiva****hotar***sūryo jyotir jyotiḥ svaḥ sūryo3m***adhvaryu : o3thāmo daiva****fourth step : puroruc**

Then the hotar begins the oral performance which must be uttered out loud. The first step of his intervention consists of pronouncing texts which are known thanks to the sūtras, because their prosaic character excludes them from the collections. Their common name is *nivid*, which means « announcement », but the *nividas* corresponding to the morning pressing are also named *puroruc* « shining in front », or, with Renou, « forelight », « avant-lumière ».

The *puroruc* of the *ājyaśāstra* consists of twelve short sentences. The nine first ones look like simple nominal propositions. The three last ones contain a conjugated verbal form, each time an active subjunctive aorist.

Ait.Br. II 34 tries to convince us that this *puroruc* can be seen as the succession of four series of three sentences, where, each time, the first one represents the celestial world, the second the earthly one, and the third the atmospheric one, governed by the god Vāyu. This interpretation doesn't seem convincing. For instance, it is clear that the third sentence, *agnis suṣamidh*, never intended to allude neither to the *antarikṣa*, nor to Vāyu.

More generally, this apparent structure generates a question. Is it really so ancient? Isidor Scheftelowitz saw in these *nividas* prosaic sequences more ancient than the Rigvedic hymns themselves, but this assertion is not obvious at all in the case of the present *puroruc*. Its prose is really very elementary, which will not be the case with other ones. Moreover, the second *puroruc*, which will be inserted in the second *ājyaśāstra*, is a metric text dedicated to Vāyu.

I wonder if the true intention of the *puroruc* is not to give a list of basic subjects to be developed in the selected Rigvedic hymns. If we have a look at the *puroruc*, we notice that all the notions and keywords that we read are known and used in the Rigvedic hymns. The three first sentences just qualify Agni himself, the two next ones mention him in his quality of hotar. Two sentences show him as the leader of the offerings. The two next ones are perhaps the most difficult : do they have in common the fact of attesting a word built on the zero grade of the root

*TAR* and, if yes, why? Finally, three sentences contain a subjunctive aorist, whose value can't be studied without taking into account the other *nividas*. Furthermore, the final mention of Agni as *Jātavedas* is very important, since perhaps it intends to return to the topic of confusion between Agni and the hotar.

It is essential to take into consideration the fact that this *puroruc* is also used in another liturgical context, when it becomes the heart of the *pravara mantra*, a liturgical sequence found in the *darśapūrṇamāsa*. The *pravara*, whose inherited character is beyond doubt, corresponds to the choice of Agni as representing the ancient hotar of the sacrificer's ancestors. My hypothesis is that this value of the *puroruc* in the *pravara mantra* necessarily plays a role in the first *ājyaśāstra*.

One word more about the title of the text, « forelight ». According to the liturgical synopsis of the *agniṣṭoma*, the sun has already risen when the first *ājyaśāstra* is recited. It is already too late to say that we are still before the light. Aitareya brāhmaṇa says that the beginning of the recitation made aloud corresponds to the birth of the embryo. As the *nividas* are considered as embryo-hymns, the name given to the *puroruc* perhaps symbolizes the precise moment when the embryo comes to light.

***agnir deveddhaḥ* | (1)**

**(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)**

***agnir manviddhaḥ* | (2)**

**(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)**

***agnis suṣamit* | (3)**

**(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)**

***hotā devavṛtaḥ* | (4)**

**(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)**

***hotā manuvṛtaḥ* | (5)**

**(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)**

***praṇīr yajñānām* | (6)**

**(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)**

***rathīr adhvarāṇām* | (7)**

**(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)**

***atūrto hotā* | (8)**

(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)

*tūrñir havyavāṭ | (9)*

(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)

*ā devo devān vakṣat | (10)*

(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)

*yakṣad agnir devo devān | (11)*

(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)

*so adhvarā karati jātaved(āḥ)o3m || (12)*

(adhvaryu : *o3thāmo daiva*)

### **Fifth step : sūkta**

Then the hotar immediately begins to recite the *ājyasūkta*. Aitareyins and Kauṣītakins agree to say that the chosen *sūkta* corresponds to the Rigvedic hymn III 13. I don't intend to read it carefully, since it is obvious that this hymn stands out of its original use. It seems more important to take into account the value given to it by the priests in the context of this practice. In II 35, the Aitareyins say that the recitation of the stanzas reflect the sexual and procreative dimension of the rite. The two first padas are separated by the hotar to symbolize the fact that a woman opens her thighs during the mating, the two last padas are united as are the male's thighs !

In II 40, the entire *sūkta* is analysed as describing the coming of a breath, belonging to the mind and the word. This is followed by the development of different senses, in such a way that we attend the complete organisation (sam + KAR) of a perfectly finished *ātman*.

*prá vo deváyāgnáye bárhiṣṭham arcāsmāi |*

(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)

*gámad devébhír á sá no yájiṣṭho barhír á sadat ||1||*

(adhvaryu : *o3thāmo daiva*)

*ṛtāvā yásya ródasī dáksaṃ sácanta útáyah |*

(adhvaryu : *othāmo daiva*)

*haviṣmantas tám ṛlate tám saniṣyántó 'vase ||2||*

(adhvaryu : o3thāmo daiva)

*sá yantá vípra eṣāṃ sá yajñánām áthā hí śáh |*

(adhvaryu : othāmo daiva)

*agním tám vo duvasyata dātā yó vānitā maghám ||3||*

(adhvaryu : o3thāmo daiva)

*sá naḥ śármāṇi vītáye' gnír yachatu sám̐tamā |*

(adhvaryu : othāmo daiva)

*yáto naḥ pruṣṇávad vásu diví kṣitíbhyo apsv á ||4||*

(adhvaryu : o3thāmo daiva)

*dīdivámsam ápūrvyaṃ vásvībhir asya dhītībhiḥ |*

(adhvaryu : othāmo daiva)

*ḥkvāṇo agním indhate hótāraṃ viśpátim viśám ||5||*

(adhvaryu : o3thāmo daiva)

*utá no bráhmān aviṣa ukthéṣu devah útamaḥ |*

(adhvaryu : othāmo daiva)

*śám naḥ śocā marúdvṛdhó'gne sahasrasátamaḥ ||6||*

(hotar : śo3ṃsāvo3m | adhvaryu : śo3ṃsāmo daiva ||)

*nú no rāsva sahasravat tokávat puṣṭimád vásu |*

*dyumád agne suvīryaṃ vārṣiṣṭham ánupaksitam ||7||*

(adhvaryu : o3m)

### Sixth step : japa

In the Aitareyin school, the hotar simply mutters that the recitation is finished, and the adhvaryu confirms it.

In the kauṣītakin version, the same process is preceded by a series of syllables and short words which recalls us the initial series we read in the aitareyin synopsis of the rite. Here, there is no doubt about the fact that the aitareyin hotar ends his śastra by announcing the advent of light. The link between this symbolic dawn and the recitation of the śastra justifies the name *puroruc* given to the nivid, but it is consistent too with the metaphor of birth.



Let's leave the priests a few minutes, the time we need to notice that, invited by the brahman, the yajamāna pronounces a few yajus, whose significance seems clear. The sacrificier first appropriates to himself the efficiency and the strength of the recitation. He then clearly says that the sacrifice is now born.

**hotar : *uktham vāci ghoṣāya tvā (aitareyin)***

*bhā vibhā uṣāḥ svar jyotiḥ ślokāya tvoktham avāci (kauṣītakin)*

**adhvaryu : *ukthaśāḥ***

**yajamāna (sur invitation du brahman) :**

*śastrāsya śastrām asy*

*úrjam máhyaṃ śastrám duhām*

*á mā śastrāsya śastrám gamyād*

*indriyāvanto vanāmahe*

*dhukṣīmáhi prajám ísam*

*sá me satyásír devéṣu bhūyād*

*brahmavarcasám mágamyāt*

*yajñó babhūva sá á babhūva*

*sá prá jajñe sá vāvrdhe*

*sá devánām ádhipatir babhūva*

*só asmáñ ádhipatīn karotu*

*vayám syāma pátayo rayīṇám /*

**seventh step : *yājyā***

The final step of the sequence is the offering formula itself, whose recitation makes the libation possible. The adhvaryu makes the libation in the āhavanīya altar when he hears the *vaṣaṭ*. Afterwards, the other *camasinas* priests, those who have an individual cup, join the adhvaryu and drink the soma with him.

The *yājyā* stanza recited by the hotar identifies the deities which this offering has been dedicated to : they are Agni and Indra.

**adhvaryu :**

*úkthaśāḥ (yaja somānām)*

**hotar :**

*ye3 yajāmahe |*

*ághna índras ca dāsúšo duroṇé*

*sutāvato yajñám ihópa yātam |*

*ámardhantā somapáyāya devā || (RS III 25, 4)*

*vau3ṣaṭ | somasyāgne vīhī3 | vau3ṣaṭ //* Qu'il porte ! Feu, profite de ce soma !  
Qu'il porte !

It is now time to unify all the collected information. As I stated before all the traditional explanations don't seem useful. Some of them, clearly secondary, show us the evolution of the sacrificial doctrine, but don't help us when we try to identify the real roots of the ceremony. This was the case with the *aitareyin* division of the *puroruc*. On the other hand, the doctrinal analysis identifying the first *śastra* to a creation and a birth is extremely precious because it allows us to perceive the general meaning given by the priests to the sequence. This is the main problem we meet each time we read a sacrificial chapter : how should we manage the data, how can we verify that the traditional comments give us access to the meaning of the sacrifice and to the meaning of the texts used in the sacrifice, which is more difficult.

By reading this *śastra*, we clearly saw how carefully it is structured. In this first recitation of the pressing day, one step was exceptional and will not appear again in later *śastras* : it was the *tuṣṇīmśamsa*. Let's temporally exclude it. We see a basic plan where the hymn, which must be loudly pronounced, is encompassed with mute passages, the *japas*. This organisation is common to the *śastras* and the *stomas*. Needless to say, it presents concrete advantages for the priests, who cautiously communicate and dialogue in order to facilitate the fluent progress of the sacrificial script. But on the other hand, there is a symbolic aspect in this structure, since we sometimes see the priests instructing themselves loudly. It seems that the sacred speech must be prepared before being revealed. The sacrifice is the space where the sacred speech is publically manifested, and this must be perceptible.

In the first *ājyaśastra*, the hymn is preceded by the *nivid* or, more precisely, the *puroruc*. This passage is described as the embryo of the hymn. It stands before the *sūkta* because it corresponds to a morning pressing. The *nivid* stays in the middle of the hymn at the midday pressing, and after the hymn in the evening

pressing, in such a way that the position of the *nivid* always represents the position of the sun in the sky.

As I already said, my opinion is that the *tūṣṇīmśamsa* represents the summary of the same structure. If this is true, this indication is precious because it shows us how the sacrificial process is organised. Nevertheless, the challenge is to determine a refined mechanism enabling the representation of the entire structure of time, while it reproduces the genesis of the creation. To say it otherwise, is represents the conviction that, from its very beginning, the time was already containing all the future at an embryonic level. Therefore, the Vedic soma sacrifice tells the history of a sacrificer whose personal journey is paralleled with the widest schedule of time.

At a comparative level, the question is to know whether this basic structure could be inherited or not. The first *ājyaśastra* looks like a kind of variation on a basic schedule opened by the choice of the hotar (*pravara*), then followed by the recitation of the *sūkta*, finally concluded by the *yājyā*. It should be tried to understand if this structure is inherited and, if yes, which significance it had.