



Ordering the Cosmos: An Analysis of Religion and Society as Portrayed in the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa

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Ordering the Cosmos:

An Analysis of Religion and Society According to the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on one of ancient India's most fascinating and unique pre-Hindu religious commentaries. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa was composed circa 800 BCE and remains one of the most intriguing texts of its type. Brāhmaṇas are middle Vedic texts concerned with the justification of sacrifices and rituals. Their aim is to explain why certain rituals have the form they do and what are some of the deeper insights necessary to manipulate the world through sacrifice. The rituals and sacrifices come in large variety of shapes. There are simple offerings of clarified butter into the fire at sunrise and sunset; there are also manifold variations of rituals focussing on the divine beverage Soma. Apart from the ritual commentary, the text also contains clues to social history and other idiosyncracies in ideology pertaining to the Jaiminīyas. Interpreting these undercurrents significantly enhances our knowledge of the middle Vedic period. A period which is probably the least studied and well-understood era in ancient Indian history. It is, however, an era of massive changes in religion, philosophy and way of life. The Vedic Indians started to settle down after having lived semi-nomadic for centuries. Their area now encompasses almost the entirety of North India. Religiously, novel ideas revolutionise the ideas about the world. The old pantheon loses importance and there is an emphasis on a creator god. It is a preliminary step into the direction of religious and philosophical monism found in the slightly later Upaniṣads. The four chapters of the dissertation explore various aspects of Vedic belief system, religion, ritual, and society.

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In memoriam

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0. Introduction

The goal of this dissertation is an analysis of the outlook on religion and society according to the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The text itself is often normative as opposed to descriptive and there is a lack of accounts composed by anyone but the religious elite. Given these restrictions a discussion of the society depicted in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is necessarily restricted to the realms of ideology and idealisation. In other words we can gather information about the way society should have been according to the brahmin composers of the text but only very occasionally about the realities of middle Vedic¹ life.

In order to achieve even our more modest goal, it will be necessary to read the text both carefully and critically. Some parts of it have been translated into either German or English but there remains a large part that has never been translated. Neither has there been any discussion of specific questions concerning the non-religious content of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa.²

It is my hope to fill this lacuna of South Asian scholarship and to give new impulses to the study of the Jaiminīya in particular but also the generally neglected genre of other Brāhmaṇa-texts.

This research is also of wider interest to the humanities in general. The problem we are presented with is the discussion of purely religious texts for the purpose of societal and historical analysis.

This problem is found in other ancient societies as well but is exacerbated by the fact there is very little other evidence from this time. The material culture was still characterised by the use of

¹ Dates in the history of ancient India are notoriously difficult to pin down. We are dependent on the relative chronology of texts and thus usually presented with ranges of dates. The middle Vedic period can be roughly dated to 1000 – 600 BCE, see Witzel 2003: p. 125.

² Bodewitz (1973: pp. 213ff.), however, devotes about half his book on doctrinal questions concerning the *agnihotra*.

perishable material such as wood. What has mostly survived are potsherds and metal implements. Given India's usually humid and hot climate most other artifacts have not survived. The ones which have survived are notoriously difficult to attribute to any specific tribe or even society. The archaeological evidence therefore cannot help us much in the reconstruction of Vedic life.³ This leaves only the Brāhmaṇas themselves as historical sources. As historical sources, however, the Brāhmaṇas present us with two problems. First, they are religious commentaries; their main concern is the ritual and not Vedic society. The second problem is the question of agenda. These texts are composed by a priestly elite of brahmins for the next generation of a priestly elite of brahmins. This necessarily colours the remarks on society and especially its hierarchy.⁴ Brahmins claim the first place in society for themselves, arguing that they are the only ones who possess the necessary knowledge to perform sacrifices. In the same vein they also aggrandise the role of the sacrifice. Sacrifice is not simply a way to petition a god; it becomes the central power in the universe and even the gods perform sacrifices.⁵ Ultimately, however, the brahmin claim to supremacy is precarious, as brahmins usually do not possess physical or even political power. The Vedic tribes are led by a chieftain and his band of warriors. To overcome this obvious gap in political power the ruling elite had to be ideologically coopted by the brahmins. Many sacrifices offer the opportunity not only to fulfil personal desires for more cattle or sons, but also to harm an enemy. Sacrifice was made into a part of warfare; a development which we can already detect in the earliest Vedic text, the Ṛgveda. It is going to be vital to develop a way of differentiating between more or less accurate descriptions of society on

³ For an attempt to make use of archaeology in the Vedic context, however, see Rau 1971, Rau 1972, Rau 1974, and Rau 1983.

⁴ Cf. Witzel 2003: p. 39.

⁵ Cf. Oldenberg 1919: pp. 149ff.

the one hand and wishful thinking by brahmins on the other hand. This is incidentally a problem virtually every scholar of ancient South Asia has to grapple with.⁶ Methodologically, I would like to employ a philological close reading of the text taking into account the peculiarities of Brāhmaṇa-texts. This includes forays into historical linguistics and etymology. This approach builds on the numerous works of scholars of ancient India and historical linguistics, in particular scholars like Karl Hoffmann.

Just why is the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa in particular and the Brāhmaṇas in general of such great interest to the study of ancient India?

The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is arguably one of ancient India's most fascinating and unique pre-Hindu religious commentaries. The text was composed circa 800 BCE and remains one of the most intriguing texts of its type. Brāhmaṇas are middle Vedic texts concerned with the justification of sacrifices and rituals. Their aim is to explain why certain rituals have the form they do and to ask what deeper insights are necessary to manipulate the world through sacrifice. The rituals and sacrifices come in a large variety of shapes. There are simple offerings of clarified butter made into the fire at sunrise and sunset; there are also manifold variations of rituals focussing on the divine beverage Soma. Many of these rituals also include the slaughtering of animals. The range of occasions extends from simple private ceremonies at the conception of a child or at its birth to large, complicated and solemn rituals at the consecration of a king or at his ritualistic bid to become a suzerain. Especially the larger rituals developed such complexity that their performance required no fewer than 16 different priests and a multitude of ritual utensils and sacrificial animals. What is more, the priests also required a substantial fee often paid in cows, other animals, or precious metals. The astonishing complexity of the rituals

⁶ Cf. e.g. Olivelle 2005: pp. 62ff. for a similar problem in the case of an ancient Indian "law book."

also necessitated the development of handbooks for the correct procedures. One first step in this direction were the Brāhmaṇa-texts which contain mostly explanations and justifications for the inner workings of the sacrifices. While the manual actions and activities continued to be taught without a "textbook," the interpretation of the acts became of great importance to the priests. The ideology shifted from an unconditional belief in the efficacy of the sacrificial "machine" to the notion that the right knowledge was required as well if the ritual was to have the desired effect. The Brāhmaṇas deliver and explain this knowledge using different strategies. The most remarkable one is the creation or acknowledgment of so-called *bandhus*, usually translated as identifications (a better term is correlations).⁷ These correlations establish a connection between two elements we would usually consider unrelated. They often take the form of a numerical argument. Take as an example the following correlation given in the first book of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa:

"He offers during four days. This amounts to sixteen oblations. Sixteenfold is Brahman. Sixteenfold are the gods. Of sixteen parts consists this complete All."⁸

More extreme are correlation that are based on the number of syllables of certain words or poetical meters. An example can be found again in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa:

"He [the sacrificer] makes eight Stobha syllables [a chanted interjection in a melody]. The Gāyatrī [a certain meter] has eight syllables. The Gāyatrī means brilliance and splendour based on wisdom. He obtains a secure position in brilliance and splendour. And moreover in cattle with eight hoofs."⁹

⁷ See Farmer 2002: pp. 51ff.

⁸ Bodewitz 1973: p. 81.

⁹ Bodewitz 1990: pp. 74f.

Another prominent strategy of explanation or justification is the citation of "historical" precedences. The examples of famous seers of old are cited as a reason that the ritual in question is still able to help in similar situations. One example is the famous case of the "traffic accident:" a chieftain and his main priest are driving a chariot. They run over a brahmin child who dies. After arguing over whose fault this accident was the king and his people declare the priest guilty. In order to escape from this situation the priest "sees" a ritual melody. Singing it he revives the brahmin child and frees himself from any guilt.¹⁰

Using these strategies the Brāhmaṇas equip the priestly apprentice with the necessary knowledge and insight to offer sacrifices in the correct manner. The transmission of the esoteric understanding of the inner workings of the rituals gave the priestly schools a cutting edge over their rivals and competitors. The texts thus give a fascinating insight into the self-understanding of a Vedic school and the view it takes of its rivals.¹¹

Formally, the Brāhmaṇas are prose texts of varying length and age and remain one of the most understudied sources for the middle Vedic period (circa 1000 – 600 BCE).¹² The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa in particular remains an almost untapped treasure trove of a variety of information on ancient Indian civilization, culture, religion and history. Among the different Vedic schools, the Jaiminīyas are furthest to the south which leads to some peculiarities in their outlook of life and

¹⁰ A German translation of this episode can be found in Lommel 1964: pp. 25ff.

¹¹ For an overview of Vedic canon formation and its schools see Witzel 1997.

¹² For a numerical analysis of publications on the Veda, see Mylius 2011: pp. 264ff. Among all the publications on Vedic materials until 2005 known to Mylius, 2611 deal with the Ṛgveda, 573 with the Brāhmaṇas, 2643 with the Upaniṣads, and 638 with the Ritual Sūtras (p. 276). This is a striking example of the lopsidedness in scholarship of the Vedas and shows how little the Brāhmaṇas have been analysed yet as compared to the texts that are earlier and later.

religion. Unlike other Vedic schools which had already settled down from the Punjab in the west to what is now Bihar in the east, the Jaiminīyas pushed down south. Their existence was not quite as settled due to their living on the border to "uncivilised," i.e. non-Vedic societies. This position on the frontier contributes to the peculiarity of their culture.

The textual history of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is complicated as well. The text has survived in some manuscripts mostly from Southern India; oral transmission died out in the 20th century. The standard edition until this day was published by Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra in 1954.¹³ This edition, however, is fraught with printing mistakes, erratic editorial decisions and other problems. A critical edition has not been produced in its entirety, but Gerhard Ehlers¹⁴ has been working on a critical edition making use of new manuscripts that have come to light after 1954. Still there exists no complete translation of the text. A number of passages have been translated over the last century, but most of these are in German.¹⁵ Most scholars, especially outside the field of Ancient Indian Studies, are therefore not acquainted with it. These problematic circumstances surrounding the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa may have contributed to the relative lack of scholarly attention it has received.

We will analyse the text for clues to social history and other idiosyncracies in ideology pertaining to the Jaiminīyas. Such an undertaking has not been carried out so far, even though the text has been known in academia for more than a hundred years. Very few scholars have used the

¹³ Vira 1954.

¹⁴ For some preliminary findings see Ehlers 1988, Ehlers 2000, and Ehlers 2004.

¹⁵ The main translations are Caland 1919, Tsuchida 1976, Bodewitz 1973 and Bodewitz 1990.

Brāhmaṇas as sources for Vedic life. Notable exceptions are Hermann Oldenberg,¹⁶ Stanislaw Schayer,¹⁷ and Wilhelm Rau.¹⁸ But there remains a large gap to be filled in the history of ancient India. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa represents an ideal source for this undertaking because of its regional, ideological and linguistic uniqueness. On the other hand, however, there are a good number of parallel stories and discussions in other Brāhmaṇas, most prominently in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa which is much better known thanks to a translation by Julius Eggeling¹⁹ as well as another text belonging to the Sāmaveda albeit to a different school, the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa.²⁰

The middle Vedic period is probably the least studied and well-understood era in ancient Indian history. What we know, however, is that it was an era of massive changes in religion, philosophy and way of life. The Vedic Indians started to settle down after having lived semi-nomadic for centuries. Their area now encompasses almost the entirety of North India. Religiously, novel ideas revolutionise the ideas about the world. The old pantheon loses importance and there is an emphasis on a creator god (Prajāpati, lord of the beings). It is a preliminary step into the direction of religious and philosophical monism found in the slightly later Upaniṣads.

As an age of change the era of the Brāhmaṇas has often been dismissed as epigonic and of less interest than the eras delineating it. But one could argue the opposite: this age of radical change

¹⁶ Oldenberg 1919.

¹⁷ Schayer 1924 and Schayer 1925.

¹⁸ Rau 1957.

¹⁹ Eggeling 1882, 1885, 1894, 1897, 1900.

²⁰ Translated into English by Caland (1931).

presents us with the earliest "tools" of what was to become the basis of virtual all Indian philosophy. The Brāhmaṇas are the foundation of the Upaniṣads whose discussion and criticisms ushered in Hinduism. The texts contain the kernel of the karma and rebirth theory which has had huge significance in India until the present day. Given all the innovations, it is long overdue that this era gains more scholarly attention.

Our discussion of the Jaiminīya worldview will encompass four different if not clearly delineated areas. Fundamental to any worldview is the way the world has come into being. In the first chapter we will discuss multiple cosmogonies as well as some of the more important theogonies found in the text. The second chapter addresses the changes in the Vedic pantheon from Ṛgvedic times to the Brāhmaṇa-period as well as concepts of an afterlife. The third chapter combines an introduction to middle Vedic ritual with an analysis of malevolent sacrificial action, specifically the naturalness of excretions. Finally, the fourth chapter will take us into the realm of an idealised Vedic society. The social hierarchy and its religious underpinnings will be discussed in some detail.

1. Cosmogony and theogony

What are the myths surrounding the emergence of the universe and its key elements? To fully understand the worldview and outlook on life of the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, a study of their ideas about the emergence or creation of the world can provide valuable clues. Cosmogony and cosmology not only give us insight into some of the main actors in the pantheon of the Brāhmaṇa-period but also shed light on what Oldenberg has termed "world-pervading substances."¹ These are substances and entities that are thought to play an important role in the way the cosmos functions. They often are abstract notions such as cosmic order, (life-)breath, or speech. In the middle Vedic worldview these concepts grow in importance as compared to the earlier Vedic texts and they already foreshadow the philosophical system of the late Vedic texts, i.e. the Upaniṣads. Knowledge of these concepts and entities was part of the teachings that were to be conveyed to the next generation of priests, just as the text expounds the importance not only of the ritual but also its theoretical underpinnings. In other words, the Brāhmaṇas assert that the ritual is only effective if the ritualist is aware of the reasons why this should be case. We find this sentiment expressed in the ubiquitous phrase "*ya evaṃ veda*" (he who knows thus).² In the case of cosmogonies or acts of creation in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, these substances play an important role but there is one deity that overshadows all of them: Prajāpati, the lord of the beings. We will discuss his role in more detail in the second chapter but can note for now his presence in virtually all creation myths. Usually, it is Prajāpati who creates various beings, entities, or even other deities. The beginnings of Prajāpati's role as a creator god can be seen in

¹ Oldenberg 1919: pp. 32ff.

² See Gonda 1975: p. 340.

the later parts of the Ṛgveda.³ It is in the Brāhmaṇa-period, however, that this role gets embellished and expressed in numerous instances of creation. While he is still mostly devoid of any personal features his role is greatly expanded: Not only is he the creator god, but he is also a god commanding respect from the other deities who often ask for his help in solving arguments among them. Prajāpati becomes a figure of fatherly authority among the gods.⁴

While there are numerous creation myths pertaining to deities, to personified entities like poetic metres, and to other living beings, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa contains only one fully developed cosmogony in the discussion of the Ṛgvedic Nāsadīya-Hymn (10.129), which can be found at the end of the third book of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa (3.360-367). This is the only passage in the text that explicitly describes the creation of the cosmos out of nothingness. The mechanics of the other creation myths are rather unclear in comparison. They usually begin with Prajāpati being and feeling alone. He then starts creating various entities to populate the world that seems to already exist implicitly. However, this is not fleshed out in any detail and often leaves the impression of a rather impromptu notion to explain a ritual problem at hand. But let us turn to the structure of the cosmos according to the Jaiminīyas.

The account begins with a state of indetermination, "at that time there was neither something that did not exist nor something that did exist," and continues with a series of physical processes that finally end in the emergence of the cosmos and the earth. Following is a rather long creation myth that encompasses all kinds of entities, natural phenomena and deities. Starting at the end of

³ Cf. Oberlies 2012: pp. 227ff.

⁴ This is in contrast to the weaknesses Prajāpati possesses: The act of creation is often said to have him thoroughly exhausted and weakened. Cf. Oldenberg 1919: pp. 30f.

passage 3.361, we see a major overlap with or at least a parallel version of other creational myths which can be found scattered throughout the text including entities such as Agni, the god of fire (1.73), the Sacrifice (3.273), Prajāpati and *brahman* (2.369), and the animals (1.187), all of which will be discussed below. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa quotes the first stanza of the Ṛgvedic hymn in full and then continues smoothly with an exegesis of the verse. The rest of the hymn is not taken up or commented upon. The notion of an egg, although not explicitly mentioned in the Ṛgveda, can be detected in the third stanza of the hymn. This could very well be one source for the golden egg of the Jaiminīya version. It is furthermore connected to the Ṛgvedic concept of the golden embryo (*hiranyagarbha*) which is said to have been born from a golden egg.⁵ It is quite possible that the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa were constructing a composite myth out of the pieces of information found in the Ṛgveda. In this way all relevant information, even if it seems contradictory, can be reconciled as being part of one cycle of creation instead of presenting competing accounts of the same event. After the initial cosmogony the text goes on to the creation of the months and then the gods. In passage 3.361 a deity, most likely Prajāpati, appears rather suddenly and it remains unclear if that deity has been present all along while the cosmos is created or if it comes into being at the same time. Prajāpati then creates a number of entities and deities, such as the cardinal directions, the months of the year, and classes of gods. Once that process is finished, a question of hierarchy arises in the society of the gods. But first, we shall see how the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa thought the world came into being:

"At that time there was neither something that did not exist nor something that did exist. There was neither an atmosphere nor a sky above it. What did move back and forth? Where? Under whose protection? Did vapour exist? (Or) a deep abyss? (Ṛgveda 10.129.1)

⁵ See Oberlies 2012: p. 227.

In this (something) which was non-existing, which was nothing, light-possessing *ṛta*⁶ swam upwards, light-possessing truth swam upwards, light-possessing heat swam upwards. That which is *ṛta* is speech (*vāc*), that which is truth (*satya*) is breath (*prāṇa*), that which is heat (*tapas*) is mind (*manas*). Their food was light. (Then) they became one. Having become this one they swelled through this food, the light. It became how a well-filled honeycomb⁷ is or a skin (for holding fluids). It thought: "Now then, I will make the breath below." It made the breath below just like a woman (has) an opening below. From there the waters gushed with the utterance: "*bal bal bal*." This (world) was the waters, huge saltwater.⁸ When they say this: 'In the beginning this (world) was the waters, huge saltwater.' These are the waters. The waves pounded together (making the sound): "*phā3l phā3l*." It got pressed together⁹ into a golden egg." (3.360)

"Its lower shell was golden, the upper silver. Having lain for a hundred divine years or a thousand *dyumnas*¹⁰ it became (ripe for) splitting asunder. So-called *dyumnas* existed at that time. As long the year is so long are the measures of the year. They discern the year via the *dyumnas*. Then at that time day and night were sticking together, (they were) not separated.¹¹ They (became) separated only via the *agnihotra*.¹² It (the egg) split asunder with this utterance: "You two are willingly turning (but) unmoving on the right,¹³ o two shells, go apart! Into which world will I be born?"

(Making the sound) "*phal*"¹⁴ this egg split asunder. That which was its lower shell that became this earth. Then that which was its upper became that sky. That which was in between that became the intermediate space. Which speech he (Prajāpati) uttered while he was born that became the three Vedas. What this deity has uttered in the beginning while he was born that has become *brahman*. He thought: "I have created this huge foundation (*pratiṣṭhā*), i.e. these worlds. What I will create from now on that will find a foundation.

⁶ For *ṛta* see below.

⁷ Cf. Hoffmann 1976, pp. 516ff.

⁸ On the term *salila* see Thieme 1971: pp. 178ff.

⁹ See Hoffmann 1976, p. 521.

¹⁰ On the term *dyumna* see Bodewitz 1974.

¹¹ Cf. Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā 1.5.12 where only day exists. The gods create the night so that Yamī may forget the death of Yama.

¹² On the *agnihotra* and its religious significance see especially Bodewitz 1973: pp. 215ff. We can note here that it is not only the most basic of the Vedic sacrifice, but also happens twice a day in the early morning and the evening, i.e. on the verge between day and night. Cf. Jamison 1992: p. 38.

¹³ The preceding half of the sentence is extremely unclear.

¹⁴ Cf. Narten's comments on the √ *phal* (Narten 1995: p. 338).

Now then, I shall create." He observed himself with (his) mind. In it arose two drops, the two spring months." (3.361)¹⁵

This concludes the purely cosmological part of the myth. Let us begin its analysis with a discussion of the terminology employed by this creation myth. The term *ṛta* which presented a major element of the Ṛgvedic worldview is conspicuously rare if not entirely absent in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The concept is often compared with the term *dharma*, which rose to immense importance in the subsequent development of the Hindu belief-system.¹⁶ *Ṛta* plays a main role in the earliest Indo-Aryan literature and is most often connected with the "ethic" deities Mitra and Varuṇa.¹⁷ Perhaps it is only fitting that the decline in importance of these deities was accompanied by the waning of interest in *ṛta* as well. In the Ṛgveda, *ṛta* is the concept of cosmic order that underpins everything.¹⁸ It seems therefore very fitting to include it in the account of how the cosmos has come into being. Its correlation with speech (*vāc*) points to the fate of *ṛta* in classical Sanskrit. It is almost entirely lost there, having been replaced by the term *dharma*. But it does survive in its negated form *anṛta* meaning "untruth." Remarkably, its counterpart is *satya* instead of the expected simple positive *ṛta*.¹⁹ This has led scholars like Lüders to believe that *ṛta*

¹⁵ Due to the poor state of the text Caland gives only the Sanskrit and does not attempt to translate the passage (Caland 1919: pp. 294f.). Hoffmann has edited and translated the passage into German (Hoffmann 1976: pp. 516ff.). On various other creation myths see Witzel 2012: pp. 105ff.

¹⁶ However, note that Varuṇa is called "lord of *dharman*" already in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa; see Brereton 1981: p. 146.

¹⁷ See Oberlies 2012: p. 68.

¹⁸ See Oberlies 2012: p. 67, and Lüders 1959: pp. 568ff.

¹⁹ Furthermore, the Avestan evidence points towards an antonymic relationship of *ṛta* with the word *druh*, *aša* and *druj* respectively in Avestan. *Druh* denotes conceit and deception. It is thus a fitting conceptual counterpart to *ṛta* in the sense that it also has an active component to it: not simply untruth, but an active intention to conceal the truth.

even in the oldest texts means nothing other than "truth," albeit one that is active in nature, trying to establish itself in the cosmos.²⁰ While I do not think that it is necessary to limit the meaning of *ṛta* so drastically to just one term in English, the equation of *ṛta* and *vāc* seem to indicate the narrowing of focus in the meaning, especially if we understand *vāc* not only as speech but as true speech.²¹ This is not too far a stretch since *vāc* is exclusively positive in the Vedic context, whereas lies are usually counselled against and never equated with *vāc*. Interestingly, the two terms *ṛta* and *satya* are found here side by side implying a difference in meaning and complicating the picture further.²²

Of greater importance for the Brāhmaṇas and their worldview is the term *prāṇa*, usually translated as "breath." It becomes one of the most important tools of the beginnings of Indian philosophy. The development of *prāṇa* begins quite naturally with the observation that the absence of breathing equals death. Consequently, it takes on the meaning of "life force," being understood as the animating principle that differentiates living beings from dead matter.²³ Breath is then split up into five different activities (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *samāna*, *udāna*; exhalation, inhalation, diffusing breath, circulating breath, rising breath, respectively).²⁴ These different

²⁰ See Lüders 1959: pp. 415ff.

²¹ Cf., however, Lüders 1959: pp. 635ff. He argues for a strictly limited meaning of *ṛta* as truth of an utterance or a thought. *Satya*, in contrast, is taken to mean something that is actually existent because the term is derived from $\sqrt{\text{sat}}$, "to exist."

²² Lüders has proposed to interpret *ṛta* as a noun meaning "truth" and *satya* as an adjective meaning "true" in the Ṛgvedic context. Lüders 1959: pp. 633ff. This solution does not seem applicable to me in this instance because it would destroy the symmetry of nouns being equated with each other. *Satya* would be the only adjective in this list of nouns.

²³ See Oldenberg 1919: p. 66.

²⁴ These are attempts at a verbatim translation of the numerous terms connected to breathing. Different interpretations are given for *vyāna*, *samāna*, and *udāna* so that we are not able to say with absolute

parts of breathing have been explained differently in the Brāhmaṇa texts, but it seems that only the terminology became fixed while the underlying concepts remained flexible.²⁵ More astonishing is the identification of the standing list of five senses (*manas, vāc, prāṇa, cakṣus, śrotra*; mind, speech, breath, sight, hearing, respectively) with breaths. Breathing ceases to be a purely physical activity and takes on aspects of mental capacities and the senses.²⁶ It furthermore is already in the Atharvaveda (9.4) correlated with the wind as its macro-cosmological equivalent. The underlying reason may be found in the concept of rain bringing wind which nourishes animals and plants, thus being a form of life force on the cosmic level.²⁷ The use of *prāṇa* in a cosmogonic passage emphasises its central role in the school of thought of the Brāhmaṇa texts and points already to the increasingly abstract discussion found in the later Vedic texts, the Upaniṣads. The terms most often used there to discuss reality are *brahman*, which we already encounter in the Brāhmaṇas,²⁸ and *ātman*, usually translated "self." En passant, it should be noted that the term *ātman*, at least in the Ṛgvedic context, has been interpreted as a form of breath as well.²⁹

certainly which physical processes these terms denote. See Oldenberg 1919: pp. 66f. Cf., however, Brown's discussion of the terms *prāṇa* and *apāna* (Brown 1919: pp. 104ff.).

²⁵ Oldenberg 1919: pp. 66f.

²⁶ Oldenberg 1919: p. 67.

²⁷ Oldenberg 1919: p. 68.

²⁸ We indeed see it already in the Ṛgveda. However, its meaning there is more limited and technical, most likely denoting a sacred formula. Cf. Lüders 1959: pp. 646ff. Likewise Oldenberg 1970: p. 65, n. 1. See, however, Thieme 1971: pp. 100ff. for a different interpretation.

²⁹ See Oberlies 2012: p. 334.

One more point of interest is the imagery of procreation and birth in the myth: The flood of water rushing downwards evokes a human birth and the ruptures of membranes. Perhaps insufficient in itself, this is followed by the description of avian birth in the form of an egg.³⁰ Interestingly, after these two "births" the appearance of Prajāpati is rather abrupt.³¹ He suddenly appears in the text to claim the role of creator but it is unclear if he himself has been created or if he is uncreated. In several other instances Prajāpati is indeed himself born. But it is unclear from where or by whom. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa shies away from explaining his origin. It should be noted, however, that Prajāpati is born or created before *brahman* in this passage, albeit only shortly since he utters it during his own coming into being. This is not necessarily in contrast to the creation of Prajāpati and *brahman* in 2.369 where it is possible that *brahman* had been created at the same time as Prajāpati and is considered to be of greater importance.

At the end of the first section earth, sky, and atmosphere have come into being. This is the usual tri-fold division of the cosmos which we encounter in almost all instances from the Yajurveda onwards.³² The way the text describes the division as parts of the egg corresponds to other

³⁰ The egg, of course, is not an unusual image in Vedic creation myths. Besides this passage, it can be found in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.1.6.1f. and Chandogya Upaniṣad 3.19.1ff. Cf. Klaus 1986: p. 33. Its inclusion may be explained by the wish of the composers to include all known kinds of cosmic creation. The Brāhmaṇas often operate by adding relevant information to the original composition instead of reworking it, which also explains some of the layering we can observe in many Brāhmaṇas. Cf. Farmer 2002: pp. 52ff. On the creation myths found in the Ṛgveda, see Oberlies 2012: pp. 223ff. For a comparative perspective see Witzel 2012: pp. 105ff.

³¹ In contrast, the parallel version of this myth in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (11.1.6.1ff.) clearly states that Prajāpati was born from the egg, thus eliminating any ambiguity. Cf. Eggeling 1900: p. 12. One possible explanation for the obscurity is the poor condition of the transmission of this passage. Cf. Hoffmann 1976: p. 516.

³² See Klaus 1986: pp. 24ff. for an extensive list of quotations and pp. 44ff. for the physical attributes of all three parts.

concepts of earth, sky, and atmosphere, where the former two are of some substance and the latter is characterised by insubstantiality.³³

Prajāpati has started to create the months of the year. They are associated with the cardinal directions as we can observe in the progress of the passage:

"He told the two (drops/months): "Let the two of you be created!" – "In which direction, father?"—"In this (eastern) one." He created the two with the utterance "om". Having fallen in this (eastern) direction they found a foundation. Analogous to the two the *rathantara* melody was created, the rays of light. For the two this (*rathantara*) was the food, (and) the light. It shines from the two of them. They then became the authority (there). He who knows thus becomes the authority (there). He (Prajāpati) observed himself again with (his) mind. In it arose two drops, the two summer months. He told the two (drops/months): "Let the two of you be created!" – "In which direction, father?"—"In this (southern) one." He created the two with the utterance "om". Having fallen in this (southern) direction they found a foundation. Analogous to the two the *br̥hat* melody was created, the rays of light. For the two this (*br̥hat*) was the food, (and) the light. It shines from the two of them. They then became the authority (there). He who knows thus becomes the authority (there). He (Prajāpati) observed himself again with (his) mind. In it arose two drops, the two months of the rainy season. He told the two (drops/months): "Let the two of you be created!" – "In which direction, father?"—"In this (western) one." He created the two with the utterance "om". Having fallen in this (western) direction they found a foundation. Analogous to the two the *vairūpa* melody was created, the rays of light. For the two this (*vairūpa*) was the food, (and) the light. It shines from the two of them. They then became the authority (there). He who knows thus becomes the authority (there). He (Prajāpati) observed himself again with (his) mind. In it arose two drops, the two autumn months. He told the two (drops/months): "Let the two of you be created!" – "In which direction, father?"—"In this (northern) one." He created the two with the utterance "om". Having fallen in this (northern) direction they found a foundation. Analogous to the two the *vairāja* melody was created, the rays of light. For the two this (*vairāja*) was the food, (and) the light. It shines from the two of them. They then became the authority (there). He who knows thus becomes the authority (there). He (Prajāpati) observed himself again with (his) mind. In it arose two drops, the two winter months. He told the two (drops/months): "Let the two of you be created!" – "In which direction, father?"—"In this (upward) one." He created the two with the utterance "om". Having fallen in this (upward) direction they found a foundation. Analogous to the two the *śākvara* melody was created, the rays of light. For the two this (*śākvara*) was the food, (and) the light. It shines from the two of them. They then became the authority (there). He who knows it thus becomes the authority (there). He (Prajāpati) observed himself again with (his) mind. In it arose two drops, the two months of the dewy season. He told the two (drops/months): "Let the two of you be created!" – "In which direction, father?"—"In this (downward) one." He created the two with the utterance "om". Having fallen in this (downward) direction they found a foundation. Analogous to the two the *raivata* melody

³³ Klaus 1986: p. 46.

was created, the rays of light. For the two this (*raivata*) was the food, (and) the light. It shines from the two of them. They then became the authority (there). He who knows thus becomes the authority (there)." (3.362)

We should note how the cosmos had been chaotic when first created: the flood and the egg do not yet constitute a world that humans or other beings could live in. Instead they are only a first step on the way to a fully developed cosmos. But they are the raw materials out of which the world can be fashioned. So as to do this, a second step becomes necessary to bring order into the chaotic circumstances. The act of creating the cosmos is separated from the process of ordering it.³⁴ It is this second step where Prajāpati, the lord of the beings, comes into his own as the creator god in the Brāhmaṇa period. Through his mental powers he starts to create the world as we would recognise it: the year is divided into twelve months, space into cardinal directions. Only by taming the chaos, the world becomes inhabitable or even recognisable. Interestingly, the division of creation is not only spatial in the form of directions, but also temporal as the months of the six Indian seasons.³⁵ Furthermore, we should note that the creation of the months and directions is accompanied by that of several melodies. Integral parts of the ritual are in this way woven into the cosmos, underlining their major importance not only for the Vedic ritual specialists but, in a way, for all of creation. We can see how this concept gets developed in the following passage: the metres are connected ("bred") with *stomas*, the lauds, to create classes of gods. In this way the main elements of the ritual from a Sāmavedic perspective are mentioned

³⁴ Cf. Smith 1989: pp. 50f.

³⁵ The number of seasons underwent a change during the Vedic period. Whereas the earliest references usually speak of three seasons: spring, summer and rainy season, and autumn, the numbers go up to five, six, or even seven seasons. The five seasons are spring, summer, rainy period, autumn, and winter. In the case of six seasons, a dewy season of two months is inserted between winter and spring. The seventh season would actually be a leap month. See Zimmer 1879: pp. 373f. There also a discussion of the possible geographical changes of the Vedic tribes, i.e. their immigration further into the Indian subcontinent, and the resulting changes to the calendar.

and integrated into the ordering of the cosmos. The significance of the ritual elements could hardly be understated when they represented such an important part of the cosmogony. This is indeed a strategy that we also find in the justification of hierarchies in society. The existing order is presented as god-given and completely natural, being rooted in cosmological myths. We will discuss this in further detail in the fourth chapter. Naturally, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa being a Sāmavedic text the ritual entities invoked are also Sāmavedic, namely melodies, metres, lauds, etc. Texts of other branches of the Veda employ their own respective ritual vocabulary. However, the methodology is identical even if the categories are different.

Having created the months of the year, the directions, and several melodies, Prajāpati goes on to populate the earth with sundry deities which are correlated with the points of the compass just like the months:

"Through the two seasons (winter and dewy season) he (Prajāpati) then went apart. Therefore the cattle goes apart in the dewy season through the two seasons. He (Prajāpati) thought: "I shall create from this threefold Veda which I have just created." He bred the (metre) *gāyatrī* by means of the *trivṛt stoma*.³⁶ From there he created the Vasus.³⁷ They went along to this (eastern) direction. He bred the (metre) *triṣṭubh* by means of the *pañcadaśa stoma*. From there he created the Rudras. They went along to this (southern) direction. He bred the (metre) *jagatī* by means of the *saptadaśa stoma*. From there he created the Ādityas. They went along to this (western) direction. He bred the (metre) *anuṣṭubh* by means of the *ekaviṃśa stoma*. From there he created the Allgods. They went along to this (northern) direction. He bred the (metre) *pañkti* by means of the *triṇava stoma*. From there he created the Maruts. They went along to this (upward) direction. He bred the

³⁶ A *stoma* is the way verses are sung by the Udgātar priest and his assistants. See Mylius 1995: p. 138. Mylius' dictionary is indeed invaluable for the comprehension of the innumerable terminology of the Vedic ritual. For *termini technici*, I will refer to his work throughout. There are, however, some issues with the description of some terms. It is generally useful to cross-check his entries with other publications on ritual vocabulary such as Renou 1954 and Sen 1978.

³⁷ The Vasus and all the offspring in the following are classes of gods. Cf. Oldenberg 1919: p. 16, and Oberlies 2012: pp. 182f.

(metre) *aticchandas* by means of the *trayastrimśa stoma*. From there he created the Sādhyas³⁸ and Āptyas. They went along to this (downward) direction." (3.363)

As we were able to observe before, the newly created entities all get correlated with the directions, thus creating schematic groupings. The entities are organised in "horizontal hierarchies"³⁹ that can be expressed in the following scheme:

Spring, east, *rathantara*, *gāyatrī*, *trivṛt stoma*, Vasus.

Summer, south, *bṛhat*, *triṣṭubh*, *pañcadaśa stoma*, Rudras.

Rainy season, west, *vairūpa*, *jagatī*, *saptadaśa stoma*, Ādityas.

Autumn, north, *vairāja*, *anuṣṭubh*, *ekaviṃśa stoma*, Allgods.

Winter, upwards, *śākhara*, *pañkti*, *triṇava stoma*, Maruts.

Dewy season, downwards, *raivata*, *aticchandas*, *trayastrimśa stoma*, Sādhyas and Āptyas.

The creation of such frameworks provide one of the main argumentative strategies of the Brāhmaṇa-texts. It is in these correlations that some of the most important and insightful knowledge of ritual priests was expressed and transmitted to the next generation. The importance of these schemes of correlation can be seen in their occurrence in all Brāhmaṇa-texts.⁴⁰ They furthermore survived into the era of the Upaniṣads.⁴¹

³⁸ On the Sādhyas and their role as earlier gods, see Oberlies 2012: p.183.

³⁹ Smith 1994: p. 12.

⁴⁰ Cf. Smith 1994: pp. 58ff.

⁴¹ E.g. in Maitrāyaṇa Upaniṣad 7.1ff.

Let us return to the cosmological myth: Now that a plethora of entities have been come into being, there arises the question of a hierarchy. Being on equal footing these creations of Prajāpati clamour for someone who can reign over them:

"These are the deities that have been created,⁴² the *stomas*, the metres, the seasons, and the *grahas*.⁴³ Individually, these their blazing lights were standing. No (group) was superior to another. They said: "Let us not be superior to one another. Come, let us find someone who will rule us!" They went to Prajāpati, (their) creator, and said: "Let us not be superior to one another. Create him for us who will rule us!" Prajāpati said: "There was only so much splendour, power, and strength in me when I created you. Practice austerities for one year! Having heated yourselves for one year approach me together (bringing) what each one (of you) has accomplished!" They practiced austerities for one year. Having practiced austerities they approached (Prajāpati) together (bringing) what each one (of them) had accomplished. This they poured in his wrath, in (his) *yoni*.⁴⁴ From there Indra came into being. This is stated about it: "While they say: "He has come from the horse." I think he has been born from vigour. He has come from wrath, he has stood on the fireplaces. From where he has been born, his (*yoni*), Indra knows." (Ṛgveda 10.73.10) "He has come from wrath," (is said) because they poured (what they had accomplished) into his (Prajāpati's) wrath, into (his) *yoni*. "He has stood on the fireplaces," (is said because) the hearts are fireplaces. One is (also) angry with the heart. "I think he has been born from vigour."" (3.364)

"They asked Gaurīvita:⁴⁵ "Did you see Indra when he was born?" He said: "While they say: "He has come from the horse." I think he has been born from vigour. He has come from wrath, he has stood on the fireplaces. From where he has been born, his (*yoni*), Indra knows." (Ṛgveda 10.73.10) "I think he has been born from vigour," he said. "But only Indra knows from where he was born." After he (Indra) had pulled his head (out of the *yoni*) he looked around. He saw that all this had been won by them (the other gods). He said: "Since all this has been won by them into which world will I be born? Give me now these two (spring months)!" (3.365)

"Give me the two spring months!" – "I will give them to you." (Saying:) "Food, food," he (Indra) rushed on the *rathantara* (melody) of the eastern direction, the rays of light, and took it. He took possession of it from here. He who knows thus takes singlehandedly the power of two (others). He (Indra) entered again into it (the wrath?). (Prajāpati) said to him:

⁴² The vocabulary of creation is usually derived from a rather unspecific act of creation denoted by the √srj "to let go, to emit, to create." This circumvents the need to address the problem that Prajāpati has no partner with whom to procreate.

⁴³ *Grahas* are libations of Soma. See Mylius 1995: p. 65.

⁴⁴ The term *yoni* usually denotes the female genitals, and in a more general sense the place of origin. It remains unclear what exactly Prajāpati's *yoni* may be as he is usually understood to be a male god.

⁴⁵ On Gaurīvita, see Macdonell 1912a: p. 242.

"You shall be born!" – He (Indra) said: "Now give me (something else)!" "Give me the two summer months!" – "I will give them to you." (Saying:) "Food, food," he (Indra) rushed on the *bṛhat* (melody) of the southern direction, the rays of light, and took it. He took possession of it from here. He who knows thus takes singlehandedly the power of four (others). He (Indra) entered again into it (the wrath?). (Prajāpati) said to him: "You shall be born!" – He (Indra) said: "Now give me (something else)!" "Give me the two months of the rainy season!" – "I will give them to you." (Saying:) "Food, food," he (Indra) rushed on the *vairūpa* (melody) of the western direction, the rays of light, and took it. He took possession of it from here. He who knows thus takes singlehandedly the power of six (others). He (Indra) entered again into it (the wrath?). (Prajāpati) said to him: "You shall be born!" – He (Indra) said: "Now give me (something else)!" "Give me the two autumn months!" – "I will give them to you." (Saying:) "Food, food," he (Indra) rushed on the *vairāja* (melody) of the northern direction, the rays of light, and took it. He took possession of it from here. He who knows thus takes singlehandedly the power of eight (others). He (Indra) entered again into it (the wrath?). (Prajāpati) said to him: "You shall be born!" – He (Indra) said: "Now give me (something else)!" "Give me the two winter months!" – "I will give them to you." (Saying:) "Food, food," he (Indra) rushed on the *śākvara* (melody) of the upward direction, the rays of light, and took it. He took possession of it from here. He who knows thus takes singlehandedly the power of ten (others). He (Indra) entered again into it (the wrath?). (Prajāpati) said to him: "You shall be born!" – He (Indra) said: "Now give me (something else)!" "Give me the two months of the dewy season!" – "I will give them to you." (Saying:) "Food, food," he (Indra) rushed on the *raivata* (melody) of the downward direction, the rays of light, and took it. He took possession of it from here. He who knows thus takes singlehandedly the power of twelve (others). He (Indra) thought: "How can I seize (all) these seasons?" (3.366)

"He saw the (earth) lying on its back.⁴⁶ With the head he seized these eastern (months), with the arms (he seized the northern and southern months) separately, with the feet the western (months), with the chest the upward (months), (and) with the ribs the downward (months). Having seized them in this way he fortified them from below. He, raised in this lustre, shines in the seasons and the year. Together with all this he entered again into him (Prajāpati). (Prajāpati) said to him: "In the beginning I was not able to lift you alone. But together with all this I am (all the more) unable to lift you. You shall be born!" In him he perceived something simmering, the waters. He (Indra) said (to Prajāpati): "Give me now! Give me these waters! Then I will be born." (Prajāpati) gave him six thousand waters. There is the following verse about it: "No one else crosses these (waters), no one can swim through them. The mothers lead to him from everywhere sweet milk, ghee, (and) sour milk, six thousand (streams of it)."⁴⁷ The so-called mothers are the directions. They pour a thousand each for him. They satiate him. He was born. (Prajāpati ?) pleased him (by saying): "The splendour has just been born, the power has just been born, the strength has just been born, the class of brahmins (*brahman*) has just been born, the class of warriors (*kṣatra*) has just been born, the driver of the seven domesticated animals has just been born, the supporter of the seven directions has just been born, the one born (before) has just been

⁴⁶ Cf. creation myths in other cultures, Witzel 2012: pp. 128ff.

⁴⁷ This is reminiscent of but not identical to Ṛgveda 1.23.16.

born, the progenitor/father has just been born, the female progenitor/mother has just been born." (Indra) made him (Prajāpati) glad saying: "Mother". He who knows thus will be (similarly) pleased. When he (Indra) was born (the gods) placed this throne for him. On it they consecrated him." (3.367)

This concludes the theogonic part of the passage which finally ends in a discussion of hierarchy between the sun, here embodied by Indra, and the moon (Prajāpati). The passage employs two rather typical tropes that we encounter repeatedly in the Brāhmaṇas: The role of Indra as a conqueror and more importantly the equation of a mythological in the past with the reality of the contemporaries of the text. The text states explicitly that someone who possesses the right knowledge will be able to copy Indra's deeds and conquer his enemies. This, of course, is one of the main strategies for a Brāhmaṇa-text to explain the efficacy of the ritual. It has worked in the past, either for a god or an ancestor, and this taken together with the right knowledge and understanding guaranties its potency. The insistence on the right knowledge in the context of the ritual is highly interesting and has become subject to lively scholarly debate. It appears to be at odds with Staal's insistence on the "meaninglessness" of ritual.⁴⁸ His stance does not seem to be mirrored by the Vedic apologists of ritual who supplied every action in a ritual context with an explanation. They also insist that the rituals not be carried out mindlessly but quite the opposite: Not only the how is important, the why is of at least equal importance. In passing, we should also note the fascinating fluidity of Prajāpati's gender. While there are no indications that Prajāpati was seen as a goddess rather than a god, we can see here how he is described as giving birth to Indra and as a mother. In the realm of divine births, there is certainly a measure of artistic or mythological licence.⁴⁹ However, Prajāpati is even said to possess a *yoni* in this instance which

⁴⁸ Cf., e.g., Staal 1979.

⁴⁹ Ancient Greece's Athena and Aphrodite come to mind. See also the birth of Agni described below.

could refer to female genitals. This is far from the only meaning of the term *yoni* so that it ultimately remains unclear from where Indra is actually born. Similarly, the connection between Prajāpati's wrath (*manyu*) and *yoni* remains unexplained.

Let us now turn to the creation of Prajāpati himself which can be found in 2.369. We have seen above that Prajāpati's emergence was described somewhat ambiguously in the cosmogony of passage 3.360-361. He seems to have appeared out of nowhere or, alternatively, to have existed already when the cosmos was created. In the following passage, however, Prajāpati is born into the world but it remains unclear how exactly that happened or who was giving birth to him:

"Prajāpati was born here alone in the beginning without seeing someone else, a second. He thought: "I have been born as the first. I am the best. Might there be someone other than me?" He looked around. Behind him he saw something else standing, something better. He asked it: "What are you here that you are here?" It said: "I am *brahman*." He said to it: "We two have just been born as the first, we are the best. Let us mate, let us be together." "No," it said, "you are seized by evil (*pāpman*)." – "This evil of mine, where is it?" – "It is on your head." – "Beat it off of me!" – "So be it." It (*brahman*) beat it (evil) off. It bound it to the vertebrae of the neck. It squeezed it. (Prajāpati said:) "That which is seized from all sides as it were, beat it off!" It beat it off. It bound it to the skirt. It squeezed it. (Prajāpati said:) "That which is seized from all sides as it were, beat it off!" It beat it off. It bound it to the ankles. It squeezed it. (Prajāpati said:) "That which is seized from all sides as it were, beat it off!" It beat it off. "Step on it with your foot!" (said Prajāpati). It stepped on it with its foot." (2.369)

As before, we see both Prajāpati and *brahman* mentioned in close proximity in a cosmogonic passage. The remark that *brahman* is better (*jyāyas*) than Prajāpati foreshadows the development of the later Vedic texts, the Upaniṣads which increasingly centre on the discussion of the abstract notions of *brahman* and *ātman* instead of the old pantheon. In this instance, *brahman* is furthermore able to rid Prajāpati of the evil that has afflicted him, thus underlining its superiority. Remarkably, this theogony of Prajāpati very much lacks any details of how exactly he has come into being. One of the reasons could be the comparatively young age of Prajāpati. His rise to prominence between the time of the Ṛgveda and the later Mantra- and Brāhmaṇa-periods

apparently did not give the theologians enough time to furnish this god with a full-blown mythology. Instead, there are several ad-hoc constructions of myths to aid the discussion of ritual details. But these certainly exhibit an improvised and superficial character. We will discuss Prajāpati's nature further in the second chapter.

One other god whose creation we encounter in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is the god of fire and messenger of the gods, Agni. As with Indra's creation above (3.364ff.), Agni is brought into the world not by natural birth but by a violent expulsion from Prajāpati's skull:

"Prajāpati created the beings. He wanted to also create Agni from his mouth. Agni loathing (to be created) from the mouth, ran upwards and pushing (Prajāpati's) skull up was born." (1.73)⁵⁰

The passage continues with the creation of the *dronakalaśa* (the wooden vessel or bucket to catch the pressed-out Soma) out of the upper part of Prajāpati's skull. The birth of Agni is almost secondary to the discussion of the ritual implement and is therefore not presented in any greater detail.⁵¹

Not only the gods are created by Prajāpati in his role as a creator god but also ritual entities and animals. The next passage sees Prajāpati creating the sacrifice (*yajña*) itself.

"On these (verses) the *śrudhīya* (melody). Prajāpati once created the sacrifice. He gave it to the gods. Fearing (its own) diminishment it fled. The gods desired: "It should listen to us." They saw this melody. With it (and the interjection) "*środhiya*" they called (the sacrifice) back. It listened (to them). They told it: "Turn towards us." (It said): "I am fearing (my) diminishment." – "No," they said. "Make me believe that." (Using the interjection)

⁵⁰ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 41, and Caland 1919: p. 16.

⁵¹ In the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (7.5.1) it is the sun who pushes Prajāpati's skull up. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Mādhyandina 4.4.3.4) the *dronakalaśa* is made from the skull of Vṛtra. See Caland 1919: p. 16.

"*środhiya*" they made it believe. (With the interjection) "come here" they called it back. Then the sacrifice did not leave them. It turned towards them." (3.273)⁵²

Again and again, we encounter the trope of created beings or entities who are not quite fit for existence yet. The sacrifice above or the number of animals below come into being somewhat imperfectly.⁵³ The sacrifice fears for its diminishment and has to be appeased, the animals perish and have to be provided with nourishment. Prajāpati plays two roles here: First as the creator of the beings and then secondly as the source of order and sustenance. This ties in with the motherly, nourishing aspect of Prajāpati which we have already seen in the creation of Indra. In the following, he plays a similar role for a number of different creatures:

"Prajāpati created the beings. These (beings), his creation, perished. They became this reptile (class); different from the snakes. (Prajāpati) created a second (class of beings). These (beings), his (creation), perished. They became fish. (Prajāpati) created a third (class of beings). These (beings), his (creation), perished. They became birds. He created a fourth (class of beings). He thought: "How may these beings, once they are created by me, not perish?" He saw this melody. With it (and the interjection) "*urj*" (= nourishment) he touched them. Anointed by his nourishment they prospered. He said: "I have supported these beings well (*subhṛta*)."⁵⁴ This is the *saubhara*-ness of the *saubhara* (melody).⁵⁴ He who knows thus supports (his) offspring well." (1.187)⁵⁵

The final myth to be discussed in this chapter is the removal of the sun from the surface of the earth to the heights of heaven. This is another instance of bringing order to a world that is chaotic in the beginning. By divine intervention the sun, which in the beginning was placed on earth, is removed from the earth where it was at risk of burning everything. By means of the ritual the

⁵² Cf. Caland 1919: p. 294.

⁵³ Cf. Witzel 2012: pp. 160ff. for parallel mythologies.

⁵⁴ This is a prime example for a Brāhmaṇa-etymology. The name of a ritual entity is (secondarily) derived from an expression used to explain the name. The inner characteristics of the defined term are then expressed by the abstract noun, here *saubharatva*, modified by the genitive of the term itself; thus, *saubharasya saubharatvam*.

⁵⁵ Cf. Caland 1919: p. 76, and Bodewitz 1990: p. 105.

gods move it and create a habitable world. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa has two different versions of this myth: one is employed to explain the *bahiṣpavamāna stotra*⁵⁶ used on the first day of a Soma sacrifice, the other is mentioned in connection with *viṣuvat*-day of a year-long sacrifice. Both instances are the only ones in the Brāhmaṇas to go into any detail. Parallel versions in the Pañcaviṃśa and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa are little more than allusions to the myth rather than explanations.

"The sun was here in the beginning where the *cātvāla* (fire pit)⁵⁷ is. The fire was yonder. (The sun) heated this entire world. The gods feared being burnt by it. They said: " (The sun) is going to burn this entire world; let us exchange the two (= sun and fire)." They carried (the sun) from here with three (verses of the *bahiṣpavamāna stotra*),⁵⁸ with (another) three from the intermediate space, (and) with (another) three made it go to heaven. It then gave out heat being turned away (from the world). They saw the last syllable containing "ā" (hither). With it they made (the sun) turned hither. It then gave out heat being turned hither. With that syllable containing "ā" they placed the fire in this world." (1.87)⁵⁹

⁵⁶ A *stotra* is the chanting of verses by the Udgatar-priest and his two assistants. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 137.

⁵⁷ Located north-east of the main sacrificial ground. See Mylius 1995: p. 69 for the term *cātvāla*, and p. 147 for a map of the sacrificial ground.

⁵⁸ Bodewitz 1990: p. 50. For the term, see Mylius 1995: p. 101. A detailed explanation can be found in Eggeling 1885: pp. 130f.

⁵⁹ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 50, and Caland 1919: p. 17. On the placement of Agni in this world see Kuiper 1971: pp. 93ff. There is also a parallel version in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa. As in most cases the Pañcaviṃśa-version is considerably shorter. It only divulges the absolutely necessary information on the ritual without going into any greater detail. Their version simply says:

"Having looked at the *cātvāla* they chant the *bahiṣpavamāna (stotra)*. That (yonder) sun was here. The gods brought it to heaven (*svarga loka*)." (6.7.24). Cf. Caland 1931: pp. 119f.

The density of the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa is quite remarkable. In this instance, while the Jaiminīya version of the myth contains enough details to make it understandable, the Pañcaviṃśa is so terse that one can hardly pick up on the finesse with which the parts of the laud are explained by the myth. Another reference to the sun on earth can be found in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Mādhyandina). The context is the same as in the first instance in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa, namely as discussion of the *bahiṣpavamāna stotra*. But it is again much abbreviated and does not furnish much more information:

"In the beginning that (yonder) sun was here. The seasons embraced it and went upwards from here to heaven. Firmly established among the seasons it gave out heat." (4.2.5.9). Cf. Eggeling 1885: pp. 309f.

The second iteration begins in an almost identical manner before the wording gets changed to accommodate the different circumstances:

"The sun was here in the beginning where the *cātvāla* (fire pit) is. (The sun) heated this entire world. The gods feared being burnt by it. They said: " (The sun) is going to burn this entire world; come, let us carry it upwards and upright." For six months they carried it upwards and upright. They placed it in the *ekaviṃśa viṣuvat*.⁶⁰ Being placed in the *ekaviṃśa viṣuvat* it gave out heat. There are the worlds (*loka*)⁶¹ that are rising upwards from here and there are the worlds that are turned hither from there; (the sun) is in the centre (*viṣuvat*) of these two (groups of worlds). Because (the sun) is in the centre of these two (groups of worlds) therefore it is the middlemost. Just like the spokes are protruding (?) from the nave of a chariot-wheel all the worlds are protruding from (the sun)." (2.5).

We, arguably, see here the same theme already encountered in other creation myths: At first, the state of the world is not conducive to living in it. In a second act order has to be created out of the chaos and the world be made into a habitable space. These myths also underline the intimate relationship of sun and fire, where the sun is viewed as a form of celestial fire. It, of course, fulfils the same two functions a fire does, being a source of heat and light. A correlation of the two seems thus entirely natural. Remarkably, the gods exchange the position of fire and sun by ritual means employing specific elements of the ritual. The human sacrificers accordingly copy the behaviour of their divine paragons; they act out the same ritualistic behaviour that worked successfully for the gods. We can detect at least two different motivations here. First, the action of the ritual is sanctified because it has worked in the past and has been carried out not merely by men but by the gods. It seems almost impossible to criticise or attack this stance from within the religious tradition. In tying the ritual to the authority of deities, the ritualists make their own

⁶⁰ The day which divides the one-year-sacrifice in half and is characterised by the *ekaviṃśa stoma*. See Mylius 1995: p. 118.

⁶¹ On the term *loka* and all its connotations, see Gonda 1966.

position practically unassailable. At the same time they also elevate their own status: Priests become surrogate of the gods on earth when they act out the same rituals.⁶²

The situation is reminiscent of Xenophanes' criticism of anthropomorphical gods.⁶³ It seems the concept of the divine in the Brāhmaṇa-period changes to accommodate the rise of elaborate rituals and their practitioners to ever greater importance. Gods are conceived of as ritualists themselves.⁶⁴ That is naturally of great benefit to the apologists of the ritual. The ritual is thus clearly marked as divine and gains a highly normative character. If this is the way the gods interact with and manipulate reality it follows naturally that the ritual is the right course of action for human beings as well. We can indeed detect a remarkable shift in the behaviour of the gods from Ṛgvedic times to the Brāhmaṇa-period. Whereas before specific gods would have traits of a priest, deities in the times of the Brāhmaṇas have become veritable ritualists, engaged in ritual activities more often than not.⁶⁵

Besides the ritualistic dimension of this myth, we can also detect an interesting observation in the second iteration. The sun is carried upwards for six months, the amount that passes between the two solstices or equinoxes. The composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa not only knew this natural

⁶² Cf. Oldenberg 1919: p. 157.

⁶³ Cf. Warren 2007: p. 43. "But if oxen, horses, or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and create works as men do, then horses would draw images of gods just like horses, and oxen images just like oxen and they would make the bodies of the gods like those they themselves had. (DK 21 B15)."

⁶⁴ This is not entirely unheard of in the Ṛgveda either. Particular deities like Bṛhaspati are seen as divine priests who, in Bṛhaspati's case, supports Indra in splitting the *vala*-cave, see Oberlies 2012: pp. 141f. Bṛhaspati thus seems to be the divine prototype for the human priest rendering ritually created assistance to his employer. Cf. also Schmidt 1968: pp. 30f. Another god who has priestly features is Agni who is said to fulfil different priestly duties for the gods. See Oberlies 2012: p. 116.

⁶⁵ Oldenberg 1919: p. 150.

phenomenon, as is likely in a culture only just in transition from a semi-nomadic lifestyle, but also were able to give it a mythological and ritualistic explanation. What appeared before as a possibly dangerous situation – who was to say that the sun would not stop rising and vanishing – was explained mythologically and probably even made manipulable by ritual means.⁶⁶ Since the *viṣuvat* marks the middle of the year-long *gavām ayana*-ritual, the symbolism of the path of the sun is particularly apt.

In conclusion, we have encountered a number of cosmogonic and theogonic myths in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Most often they feature Prajāpati as the creator god, a role whose kernel is already visible in the Ṛgveda. The creation of the cosmos, gods, and other beings is often described in the way of a more or less natural birth, either that of a mammal or of a bird. But there is also often a rather unspecific act of creation denoted by the √srj "to let go, to emit, to create." Avoiding details is a way around the paradox of the male Prajāpati procreating without a partner. Another aspect we have seen is the state of the newly created world which is often chaotic and unfit for habitation. This chaotic state necessitates a second act of creation: The creation of order out of chaos. An action of equal importance since a chaotic world is of no use to the beings. The creation of order can also be detected on the side of the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The compilation of lists of correlations as seen above in 3.362ff. is clearly an attempt to bring order to an otherwise terrifyingly disordered cosmos. We will see how these correlations are one of the main strategies of the ritual theorists of the Brāhmaṇa-period. It will play a particularly important part in the conception of the ideal Vedic society which we are going

⁶⁶ This can be seen already in the Ṛgveda, where the winter solstice is of particular importance. Rituals are undertaken to "regain" the sun, particularly contests like a chariot race. Oberlies 2012: pp. 30f.

to discuss in the fourth chapter. For now, let us turn to other aspects of the Vedic belief system, especially its evolution since the time of the Ṛgveda.

2. Pantheon and afterlife

The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa provides us with a snapshot of the changes the Vedic belief system underwent from its earliest recorded instances in the Ṛgveda to the middle Vedic period. The old pantheon has undergone certain changes. Old gods have diminished in stature while relative newcomers have risen to greater importance. The ritual machinery has grown in scope, complexity, and importance. The number of sacrifices and priests has proliferated. New ideas have taken hold representing developments on the way to a full-blown theory of karma, for example. What were the most important changes in the Vedic religion? How did the pantheon of beliefs in the afterlife change?

In a discussion of the pantheon we encounter the same problems we are constantly facing with a text like the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The text is a commentary on the ritual, not a textbook or an introduction to middle Vedic religion. What we see is not a systematic exposition of the belief system of the Jaiminīyas. Instead there is large number of stories and myths that potentially throw light on some of the main deities. The frequency of those instances vary massively among different gods thus allowing us some insight into their respective importance as far as this can be expressed in mere quantitative terms. Even here some caution should be expressed. Some gods like Agni, the god of fire, or Soma, the deified beverage, potentially lend themselves more easily to being included in comments on the ritual because they play such an important role in it not as deities but as the actual, physical entities they represent on the offering ground. In this regard it is striking that they play barely a role in the narrative passages of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa.¹ By far the most important deities there appear to be Indra and Prajāpati. We will address both gods

¹ This is, however, also the state of things in the Ṛgveda, where neither god has extended narratives connected to them.

in some detail below. For now there is an interesting qualitative difference to be noted in the treatment of these two gods. Whereas stories on Indra are often quite peculiar and rich in fascinating details, many of which date back to older texts, Prajāpati in contrast is mostly treated in a more cursory and makeshift way. The myths which incorporate Prajāpati have a distinctly recent feel and lack the archaic features of other stories told in the Brāhmaṇas. This is connected to the relative recentness of Prajāpati in comparison to other gods. There simply cannot be ancient myths about Prajāpati if he did not play a role in the times when these myths were composed. There are some exceptions such as his incestuous desire for his own daughter: A myth that clearly has ancient features. The explanation, however, lies in a transference of the myth's protagonist – it was originally Dyaus, heaven personified and deified, who desired his daughter Uṣas, the dawn.² Thus, even in the case of the underlying idea being ancient, Prajāpati's role is not. Given the nature of the text, most of the myths surrounding Prajāpati seem to be tailor-made for the explanation of ritual details. They consequently often exhibit a certain lack in literary merit. Nonetheless, they can give us valuable insight into the beliefs of the composers. A different problem presents itself again in the way we can present the religion as expressed in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa as a coherent whole when we are only presented with mythological stories, anecdotes and identifications. I think there is ultimately no elegant solution. Instead our discussion will have to negotiate the tension between disparate traits of any given deity and a harmonised overview.³ It is probably fair to say that especially popular gods like Indra do not necessarily have only one role to play in the mythology or the ritual. A deity can have multiple, occasionally contradictory aspects. However, any discussion of a deity should begin with our gathering of pertinent passages in the text. In so doing it will be interesting to note both content

² Oberlies 2012: p. 172. For the story see below.

³ The tendency towards the latter is admonishingly noted by Rau 1966: p. 22.

as well as context. While the inclusion of a myth can often happen on what would strike us as rather spurious grounds we can gain some additional insight into the mechanism of ritual commentary and explanation. But let us now turn to the most prominent Vedic deities and explore how their role has changed from Ṛgvedic times to the middle Vedic period.

One of the main gods of the Ṛgveda is without doubt the mighty warrior Indra. He is invoked for assistance in battles but also celebrated for several primordial acts. The martial aspects of his personality appear to preclude him to some extent from the settled and peaceful times the Vedic tribes experienced when not on the warpath.⁴ But when engaged in battle Indra's help could bring about victory even if the situation seemed hopeless before. A famous instance is the battle of the ten kings (*dāśarājña*) in which Indra rescues chief Sudās from certain defeat and ensures his victory instead.⁵ Besides his aid in armed conflicts Indra is credited with a number of primordial acts. Among other things, he secures the swaying earth, fixes the mountains in their place, and lifts the sky off the earth.⁶ These actions are dwarfed by two other endeavours that make the earth habitable. Indra is particularly feted for these two primordial deeds: the slaying of Vṛtra and the opening of the Vala-cave. Vṛtra was a enormous serpent who held the waters captive in primordial times. Since there is no life without water Indra set out to slay the serpent and free the waters⁷ – an action of particular significance in the arid parts of the Indian subcontinent. This deed is celebrated many times in the Ṛgveda and finds many expressions in the Jaiminīya

⁴ Oberlies 2012: pp. 101ff.

⁵ Ṛgveda 7.18, 7.33 and 7.83. See Witzel 1995 for a discussion of this story in post-Ṛgvedic times and Stuhmann 2016 for an analysis of the historicity of the Ṛgvedic event.

⁶ Oberlies 2012: p. 102.

⁷ On the Ṛgvedic Vṛtra-myth see Oberlies 2012: pp. 198ff.

Brāhmaṇa as well. Most often it is reduced to a very short reference to the act of slaying Vṛtra without going into any details. Some examples are:

"Accompanied by the Maruts Indra slew Vṛtra." (1.116).⁸

"Indra slew Vṛtra with the *vajra*." (1.354).⁹

The mention of Vṛtra's slaying is employed to explain a ritual detail. These explanations can also include somewhat spurious justifications of the names of certain melodies or other elements of the ritual. Consider, e.g.:

"Having gathered all the metres Indra slew Vṛtra. Since he slew (*ahan*) the great (*mahāntam* Vṛtra) therefore they are called the *mahānāmnī*-verses." (3.111)

"Indra slew the roaring (*nānadyamāna*) Vṛtra with the *nānada* (melody). Since he slew the roaring (*nānadyamāna* Vṛtra) therefore it is called *nānada* (melody)." (3.80)

Occasionally, however, the narrative is more embellished. The composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa discuss Indra's slaying of Vṛtra most often in the context of sacrifices performed to hurt the rivals of the sacrificer. The cosmogonic element of the myth, namely the release of the pent-up waters, is downplayed or remains unmentioned. Instead the focus is on the killing itself:

"Indra desired to slay Vṛtra. He ran up to Prajāpati (saying): "I will slay Vṛtra." (Prajāpati) gave him the *ṣoḍaśin* (sacrifice)¹⁰ as a *vajra* whose power, namely the *śakvarī* (verses) he had taken himself. (Indra) could not slay him (= Vṛtra). He ran up to him (= Prajāpati) again (saying): "I will indeed slay Vṛtra." (1.193)

(Prajāpati) gave him the *śakvarī* (verses). Then Indra slew Vṛtra. He who knows thus slays the enemy who hates (him)." (1.194)¹¹

⁸ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 66.

⁹ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 203. The *vajra* is of course Indra's famous weapon, the precise nature of which, however, has been under discussion ever since Western scholarship started engaging with Vedic texts and culture. See, e.g., Falk 1994.

¹⁰ The *ṣoḍaśin* is a one-day Soma sacrifice that utilises 16 *stotras* and *śastras* respectively. (The *śastras* being the recitation of verses by the Hotar priest and his assistants. Mylius 1995: p. 123). See Mylius 1995: p. 126.

¹¹ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 109.

The following passage is very similar and contains another reference to the *nānada* melody:

"Indra desired to slay Vṛtra. He ran up to Prajāpati (saying): "I will slay Vṛtra." (Prajāpati) gave him this powerless (?) Anuṣṭubh (metre). With it he did not lay low (Vṛtra). What he roared (*vyanadat*) when he did not lay low (Vṛtra) that became the *nānada* (melody). Therefore it is called *nānada*. Therefore they say: "The *nānada* should be made the melody of the *ṣoḍaśin* because he did not lay low (Vṛtra) with it."¹² He ran up to him (= Prajāpati) again (saying): "I will indeed slay Vṛtra." (Prajāpati) created the energy of the seven *hotrā*¹³ and gave it to him. Three verses from (each) *hotrā*. This *ekaviṃśa* (*stoma*) amounted to a *ṣoḍaśin*. With it Indra slew Vṛtra. He knows thus slays the enemy who hates (him)." (1.203)¹⁴

A particular fascinating aspect of Indra's relationship with Vṛtra is Indra's fear that he might not have slain his enemy after hurling his *vajra* at him. We see here one facet of Indra's personality: being filled by fear after slaying Vṛtra. However, the nuances of the Ṛgvedic story and the account in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa are subtly different. In the Ṛgveda, Indra seems to fear retribution for his action. In the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, on the other hand, he is unsure about the initial success of his attack on Vṛtra. The Ṛgvedic instance of his flight goes as follows:

"Whom did you see, Indra, as the avenger (?) of the serpent? So that fear entered your, the killer's, heart and so that you crossed the ninety-nine rivers like a frightened hawk the areas." (Ṛgveda 1.32.14)

But in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, Indra does not fear reprisal by a mysterious avenger but rather, or so it seems, by Vṛtra himself. Overcome by fear¹⁵ Indra flees and seeks shelter in various

¹² The reasoning behind this statement remains unclear to me.

¹³ The offices of the priests in post-Ṛgvedic times: Hotar, Maitrāvaruṇa, Brāhmaṇacchaṃsin, Acchāvāka, Potar, Neṣṭar, and Āgnīdhra. See Bodewitz 1990: p. 278. Oberlies (2012: pp. 246f.) has the following list of the priests for the Ṛgveda proper: Hotar, Adhvaryu, Praśāstar, Brahman, Agnidh, Potar, Neṣṭar. For more complicated post-Ṛgvedic sacrifices the number of priests would reach 16 (or even 17). Hillebrandt 1981: p. 97.

¹⁴ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 113.

¹⁵ An interesting parallel in the Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā has been discussed by Karl Hoffmann (1975: pp. 207ff.). Indra is paralysed by fear when he encounters Vṛtra. An intervention by either the Aśvins or the Maruts helps him to regain his composure and attack his foe.

places. He variously goes to the furthest distance or enters plants or cows to hide. The following passages¹⁶ are some examples of his escape:

"Indra, having thrown the *vajra* at Vṛtra, thought: "I have not slain him." He went to the furthest distance." (1.137¹⁷ = 3.297)

"Indra, having thrown the *vajra* at Vṛtra, thought: "I have not slain him." He entered the *ūtīka* (plants)." (1.352)¹⁸

"Indra, having thrown the *vajra* at Vṛtra, thought: "I have not slain him." He entered the cows." (3.19)

The trope of Indra's running away is so common that it gets repurposed repeatedly to explain specific rituals and motivate their performance. In the following two instances we can see how the story was used to elucidate sacrifices performed to heal the sacrificer from deafness and jaundice:

"Indra, having thrown the *vajra* at Vṛtra, thought: "I have not slain him." He became perplexed. His two ears contracted. He could not hear with them. He desired: "Let me not be deaf; let me hear with (my) two ears!" He saw this melody. He praised with it. Then he became not deaf; he heard with (his) two ears. He said: "I have just heard with (my) two ears (*aśrauṣaṃ vai karṇābhyām*)" Therefore the melody is called *kārṇaśravasa*. He who knows thus becomes not deaf, he hears with (his) two ears." (3.163)

"Indra, having thrown the *vajra* at Vṛtra, thought: "I have not slain him." He became perplexed. Jaundiced and perplexed he became decrepit. He thought: "How can I overcome this evil of jaundice (*hariman*) on the tenth day?" He saw this ten-day-sacrifice. He fetched it (and) sacrificed with it. Then he overcame this evil of jaundice on the tenth day. He who knows thus overcomes the evil of jaundice on the tenth day." (2.324)¹⁹

¹⁶ These passages are also a good example of the repetitiveness of the Brāhmaṇa-literature. Set phrases are repeated time and again in the texts, either in the same passage or, as in this case, scattered all over the entire body of the text.

¹⁷ Cf. Caland 1919: p. 39 and Bodewitz 1990: p. 77.

¹⁸ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 203.

¹⁹ Cf. Caland 1919: p. 204.

The flexibility of Brāhmaṇa-explanations can once more be witnessed in the next quote in which a specific Soma-sacrifice is attributed to the same myth:

"Indra, having thrown the *vajra* at Vṛtra, thought: "I have not slain him." He went to the furthest distance. The gods searched for him. They did not find him. They said: "Let us press (Soma), then he will come!" They pressed (the Soma). During their entire morning pressing (*prātassavana*) he did not come. Pressing the Soma vessels (*camasa*) to their chests they poured (the Soma into them) thinking: "Let us not enjoy the Soma without Indra." He came to (their) midday pressing. They rejoiced. They rejoiced as if a man of high rank (*śreṣṭhin*) had come." (2.152)²⁰

This passage is particularly interesting because Indra is invited to all three pressings of Soma in a standard Soma-sacrifice. He is a guest repeatedly in the morning paired together with the god of wind Vāyu, then on his own, and then again paired with god Agni. In the evening, Indra is also a guest. Just like in the morning, however, this ritual is aimed at a number of different gods.²¹ Only the mid-day pressing is ordinarily performed exclusively for Indra (in the company of the Maruts).²² The emphasis on the mid-day pressing is thus logical in the context of the Soma-sacrifice. In this instance, the *tīvrāsoma*-sacrifice, however, the different behaviour during the morning-pressing is justified by Indra's absence.²³ Concluding the discussion of Indra's flight we can see how "bleached" some myths, or rather only the kernels of myths, have become. They can be alluded to rather than spelt out and taken out of their original context and plugged into the ritual discussion at hand. It raises the question whether these myths were still recognised as such

²⁰ Cf. Caland 1919: p. 172.

²¹ The following gods are invited to the morning pressing: Vāyu, Indra and Vāyu, Mitra and Varuṇa, the Aśvins, Indra again, the All-gods, Sarasvatī, Mitra and Varuṇa, Indra, and Indra and Agni. The evening pressing hosts the Ādityas, Savitar, the All-gods, Agni and the wives of the gods, and Indra. See Oldenberg 1970: pp. 453f.

²² Schmidt has connected the mid-day pressing with the Vṛtra-myth which is similar to the parallelism between the opening of the Vala-cave and the morning pressing. See Schmidt 1968: pp. 243f.

²³ The text, however, continues to say that Indra in the end did come to the morning-pressing as well otherwise he would have been excluded from the ritual. Ultimately, the Soma is drunk later in the ritual than normally. See Caland 1919: pp. 172f.

or if they had deteriorated to mere tropes. This problem also shows us once more the difficulties in mining a text like the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa for information on the religious life and the myths of its composers. The text is not a neutral catalogue of deities or collection of myths. It is a ritual commentary using myths and other strategies to explain and justify the ritual system. Thus, we are repeatedly offered glimpses on the belief-system and the myths but they are always channelled through the needs of the composers to elucidate the ritual. In the same vein, we have observed how a Ṛgvedic myth (Indra's fleeing after slaying Vṛtra) is taken up by the ritual commentators and employed to explain ritual details. Frustratingly, this approach does not throw light on the story itself. It remains as skeletal as it has been in the Ṛgveda.

The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa enlightens us about the reason that Indra and Agni are sharing the Soma during the morning-pressing. The gods were having a race to decide which gods should have the *ājya-śastras*.

"Among them (= the gods) Agni was victorious first, then Mitra and Varuṇa, then Indra. One (race)²⁴ was then (still) not won. Indra knew: "Agni is going to win this (race)." He said: "Agni, if one of us two will win this (race), then it will be jointly ours." – "So be it." Agni was victorious. It became jointly theirs, one and a half *stotras* for one and one and a half *stotras* for the other. The sacrifice belongs to Indra and Agni (*aindrāgna*)." (1.106)²⁵

The story of the race is almost immediately told again. As before Agni wins the race and goes on to reluctantly share the reward with Indra, but only after going to Prajāpati for arbitration:

"Agni, having won (the race), drove off. Indra said to him: "Let it jointly be ours." – "No." Said (Agni). What one of the inhabitants of a (shared) house wins that becomes jointly everyone's (possession). Let it jointly be ours." (Replied Indra). "No," said (Agni). (Indra said): "Look at me." He looked at him. (Indra) said: "You have looked at me for reconciliation; it has become jointly ours." (Agni) said: "Only for him at whom I will

²⁴ For an extremely succinct explanation of the Vedic chariot race see Oberlies 2012: p. 26.

²⁵ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 61.

look (again and again) will my (possession) become jointly his." (Indra) said: "No. You have looked at me just now for reconciliation; it has become jointly ours." (1.108)

They said: "Let us ask (someone)." They brought the question before Prajāpati. Prajāpati said (to Agni): "You have looked at him for reconciliation; it has become jointly yours." – "Very well." It became jointly theirs, one and a half *stotras* for one and one and a half *stotras* for the other. The sacrifice belongs to Indra and Agni (*aindrāgna*)." (1.109)²⁶

Notwithstanding Indra's desire to have a share of the Soma-sacrifice we encounter an episode in which he leaves the evening pressing of Soma. This occurs further on in the discussion of the *Agniṣṭoma*:

"Loathing (it) Indra went away from the third pressing because it was sucked out,²⁷ as it were. The All-gods called him with the melody (the *stobha* of which is): "u ho i yā." Then Indra returned to the third pressing. He did not leave it (anymore). This melody is accompanied by Indra. The sacrifice of his who knows thus is accompanied by Indra and the gods; Indra visits his sacrifice; (and) Indra does not leave his sacrifice." (1.164)²⁸

Indra's behaviour is all the more astonishing because he is said to actually have instituted the evening pressing.²⁹ It may be a hint at his somewhat fickle nature. The sacrificers could not be entirely sure of Indra's willingness to come to their sacrifice and there are instances in the *Ṛgveda* in which the poets express their concern that Indra might rather stay at a rival sacrifice instead of coming to their own.³⁰

²⁶ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 62.

²⁷ While fresh Soma-stalks are used in the morning and mid-day pressing, the evening pressing of Soma sees the re-use of the already pressed-out stalks from the prior pressing. See Bodewitz 1990: p. 266, n. 12.

²⁸ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 92. Parallel versions in 3.268 and 3.296.

²⁹ The relevant passage is 1.154: "There were two pressings (morning and mid-day) in the beginning. With two pressings the gods were victorious in the beginning. To them who were staying each in their respective world after having been victorious Indra said: "There are three metres, three breaths: *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*; these three worlds. Among the gods there is a triad." He said: "Come, let us make these three pressings." They said: "We will not be able to. We are fatigued by this prior action." Indra said: "I will make the third pressing out of myself." He made the third pressing out of himself. Thus, among the deities Indra is the third pressing. He who knowing thus praises with the third pressing praises with Indra among the gods." (1.156) Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 56f. and Bodewitz 1990: p. 88.

³⁰ See Oldenberg 1970: pp. 319f.

After this digression on Indra's role in the Soma-sacrifice let us continue with his second primordial deed, the opening of the Vala-cave. In the Ṛgveda, Indra is repeatedly celebrated for finding and breaking open the Vala-cave. The significance of the cave lies in its content: on the one hand cattle, on the other hand dawn, or light in general.³¹ The significance of either cannot be underestimated for the Vedic people. As semi-nomadic cattle-rearers and only part-time agriculturalists herds of cattle were the prime symbol of livelihood and wealth for the Vedic tribes.³² Light on the other hand is inherently positive for the poets, just as darkness is generally negative and dangerous.³³ The original myth seems to have been primarily concerned with the cattle, however, which were said to belong the Paṇis – enemies of the Vedic tribes who were infamous for their miserliness.³⁴ They hid their cattle in the Vala-cave where Indra's dog Saramā tracks them. The Paṇis are not willing to surrender the cows and their cave is then attacked by Indra with the help of the Aṅgirasas, mythical proto-priests of the Vedic ritual.³⁵ The connection of the cows with the dawn appears to be poetic – red cows denote dawn.³⁶ But the inclusion of

³¹ Cf. Oldenberg 1970: pp. 141ff. and Oberlies 2012: pp. 200ff. See also Witzel 2005.

³² Oberlies 2012: pp. 13ff.

³³ Cf. the Iranian parallels culminating in the "dark spirit" (Aṅra Mainiiu), see Skjærvø 2011: pp. 9ff. An interesting exception to darkness being negative is shade which appear to have been highly welcome. Cf. the following passage:

""Cut it (= the evil that had been attached to Prajāpati) into three parts!" (said Prajāpati to the *brahman*). (The *brahman*) cut it (= the evil) into three parts. That became his (= Prajāpati's) splendour: one third the cow, one third sleep, one third shade. Therefore someone high ranking (*śreṣṭha*) has the most of these: the most animals, the best shade, (and) he sleeps (the most)." (2.370) Cf. Tsuchida 1979: p. 116, and Caland 1919: p. 206.

³⁴ Macdonell 1912a: pp. 471ff.

³⁵ Oberlies 2012: p. 201.

³⁶ Oldenberg 1970: p. 147.

light in the myth also significantly increases its cosmogonic connotations. Once again, just like the release of the waters from Vṛtra, Indra makes the world habitable by creating the conditions for human existence. The significance of this deed appears to have become drastically diminished in the versions of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. There are three tellings of the Vala-myth and Indra does not play a prominent role in any of them. In the first passage, Indra participates in a Soma-sacrifice that precedes the opening of the Vala-cave. However it is not Indra who splits the cave but the main sacrificer, a priest called Medhātithi:

"The Vibhindukīyas³⁷ performed a *sattra* with Medhātithi³⁸ as the *grhapati*.³⁹ Among them Dṛdhacyut Āgasti was Udgātar, Gaurīviti Prastotar, Acyutacyut Pratihartar, Vasukṣaya Hotar, Sanaka and Navaka Kāvya were the Adhvaryus. Medhātithi desired cattle, Sanaka and Navaka desired wives, the other desired what(ever) they desired. Formerly, (the sacrificers) used to perform a *sattra* with manifold wishes. Having succeeded and obtained their wishes they finished (the *sattra*). Having assumed the shape⁴⁰ of Medhātithi's ram Indra partook of their Soma. They drove him away thinking: "Medhātithi's ram is partaking of our Soma." Then he assumed his own shape (again) and partook of their Soma. Therefore they invite him hither saying: "O ram of Medhātithi." Medhātithi desiring cattle saw this melody. He praised with it. (Reciting): "Breaker of strongholds, youthful poet."⁴¹ He split the Vala (cave). With: "You have opened the cave of the cow possessing Vala, o possessor of (pressing) stones,"⁴² he opened the cave." (3.234)

³⁷ Unfortunately, nothing else is known about the Vibhindukīyas. See Macdonell 1912b: p. 303. Cf., however, the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa passage 15.10.11 in which Medhātithi is said to have driven away cows from someone called Vibhinduka. Functionally, the Vibhindukīyas take the place of the Aṅgirasas in this myth – with the added twist that they and not Indra are now the main protagonists. On the Aṅgirasas in the Vala-myth see Schmidt 1968: pp. 139ff.

³⁸ On Medhātithi see Macdonell 1912b: p. 178.

³⁹ *Grhapati* literally means lord of the house and is the name of a sacrificer who participates in a *sattra* instead of a *yajamāna*. Cf. Mylius 1995: pp. 63f.

⁴⁰ On Indra's shapeshifting see Oberlies 2012: pp. 111ff.

⁴¹ Ṛgveda 1.11.4a.

⁴² Ṛgveda 1.11.5ab.

What is most interesting about this passage is not the splitting of the Vala-cave but Indra's ability to shapeshift. This facet of his character can already be found in the Ṛgveda where he is said to have variously transformed into a ram, a woman, a brahmin, an ant and a bull.⁴³ Given the manifold metamorphoses Indra undergoes this ability seems to be one of his fixed character traits. While we cannot exclude the possibility that other gods were able to shapeshift it is Indra to whom this activity is most deeply connected.⁴⁴ A slightly different case are gods who only appear in animal form. For the Ṛgveda, however, the list is limited to Aja Ekapad, the one-legged goat, Ahi Budhnya, the snake of the depths, and the divine horse Dadhikrāvan.⁴⁵ The first two play a cosmogonic role but the extent of veneration of them seems to have been limited. But let us return to our discussion of the Vala-myth.

In the second version of the myth, Indra is not even mentioned by name. Instead the cave gets split by unspecified gods:

"The gods saw these two (one-day Soma-sacrifices), the *valabhid* (Vala splitting) and the *udbhid* (breaking out). With them they approached (the cows). They split the Vala (*valam abhinda*) with the *valabhid*. With the *udbhid* they set free the cows." (2.90)⁴⁶

Indra plays a marginally more prominent role only in the last and longest instance in that he sends his dog Saramā to track down the cattle. Even here, the gods open the cave collectively

⁴³ Cf. Oberlies 2012: p. 112. There is also a baffling story about Indra's assistance in the battle of the ten kings in which he appears as an old man; Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 3.245-248. Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 285f. and Rau 1966: pp. 92f.

⁴⁴ He shares this trait with other trickster figures. See Witzel 2012: pp. 138ff.

⁴⁵ Oberlies 2012: pp. 110f.

⁴⁶ Cf. Caland 1919: p. 150.

and release the cows. But in an interesting twist the Paṇi are re-introduced as the cow-herds of the gods:

"The demons (*asura*)⁴⁷ called Paṇis were then the cow-herds of the gods. They went off with them (= the cows). Confining them at the (river) Rasā they hid them with the Vala. The gods said to a vulture: "Suparṇa (beautifully winged), look for our cows." – "Yes." He flew after (them). He reached them in the middle of the Rasā hidden with the Vala. Having come (the demons) served him ghee, milk, curds and sour milk. He was thoroughly satiated with it. They told him: "Suparṇa, this food, that is going to be your gift. Do not tell on us!" He flew back (to the gods). They said to him: "Have you found the cows?" He replied: "What is this talk of cows?" – "This is the talk of cows," said Indra squeezing his neck. "Your face is that of someone who has stayed among cows." (Suparṇa) regurgitated a drop of sour milk or curds. This became (the plant) *bhūmikapaṭhu* which grows in spring. (Indra) cursed him (saying): "Wretch, your livelihood shall be unpleasant because you found our cows but did not tell (us)." Therefore his livelihood (consists of) the worst things at the end of the trek.⁴⁸ (The gods) then told (the female dog) Saramā: "Saramā, go look for our cows." – "Yes." She followed (the cows and) came to the Rasā. This is the Rasā that (flows ?) hither to the ? of the confluence. She said to (the Rasā): "I am going to swim across you or are you going to be fordable for me?" – "Swim across me; I am not going to be fordable for you," said (the river). Bending her ears back she approached (the river) to swim across. (The river) thought: "How could a dog swim across me? Very well, I will be fordable for her." (The river) said to her: "Do not swim across me. I will be fordable for you." – "So be it." It was fordable for her. She crossed (the river) via the ford. She reached (the cows) in the middle of the Rasā hidden with the Vala. Having come (the demons) likewise served her ghee, milk, curds and sour milk. She said: "I did not find the cows of the gods thus that I would unfaithfully eat your (food). Having stolen from the gods you roam about. But I am the pathfinder of these cows. You are not going to convince (?) me. You will not keep Indra's cows." Not eating she stayed there. She found a discarded afterbirth. She chewed on it. Someone came across her and said: "Saramā chews on the afterbirth⁴⁹ as if she was trying to kill someone." This saying exists even today: "Saramā chews on the afterbirth as if she was trying to kill someone." Because she chewed on the afterbirth. She then returned (to the gods). They asked her: "Saramā, did you find the cows?" – "I have found them in the middle of the Rasā hidden with the Vala," she said. "Fetch them in any way you like." Indra said to her: "Saramā, I am making your offspring rich in food because you have found the cows." They are the Macala (dogs) in the country of

⁴⁷ On the term *asura* more below.

⁴⁸ The term *grāma* clearly denotes a band of moving carts here and not the village which is its meaning in classical Sanskrit. Cf. Rau 1957: pp. 51 for an analysis of the shift in meaning. Regarding our passage, we can safely assume that whatever refuse accumulated during a temporary stay was left behind for vultures and other animals to rifle through.

⁴⁹ *jāru* for *jarāyu*?

Vidarbha, the offspring of Saramā. They slay even a tiger. The gods then offered this *abhiplava* (-sacrifice). With it they swam across (the Rasā ?). They swam across (*abhyaplavanta*) therefore it is called *abhiplava*. They burned the Vala with Agni (or: with fire). They split it with the *vajra*." (2.440-442)⁵⁰

Taken collectively, these myths make Indra's loss of standing in the religious canon astonishingly clear. The god's role in opening the Vala-cave is reduced to a minimum and the myth itself exhibits diminished importance. The cosmogonic elements of light, dawn, and sun are missing and the focus lies now exclusively on the cattle. It is interesting to note the clear familiarity the composers must have had with the underlying source material. Including protagonists like Saramā or the Paṇis shows their conversancy with the Ṛg- or Sāmavedic⁵¹ version of the myth. On the other hand, we can detect a certain utilitarian approach to the myth. Instead of awe towards the heroic deed performed by a god and his retinue the predominant approach seems to be the usefulness of any given myth to explain the ritual. As we have seen, it is sometimes only the name that triggers the myth as in the case of the one-day sacrifice *valabhid*. In other cases, the fact that certain stanzas are recited during the ritual is used to deftly weave a story around them as in the case of Medhātithi. Ultimately, this utilitarian approach must lead to a diminished role of the myths main protagonists. They become tools to be employed in the explanatory discourse of the Brāhmaṇas – a major demotion compared to their being celebrated in the hymns of the Ṛgveda. The question which development came first – the decline in importance of some gods or their treatment as useful explanations for ritual details, to be mechanically plugged into a discussion – has to remain unanswered. The lack of contemporary material, especially of anything deviating from Vedic orthodoxy and orthopraxy, simply does not

⁵⁰ Cf. Rau 1966: pp. 81ff.

⁵¹ The text of the Sāmaveda is largely taken over from the Ṛgveda with the exception of 76 stanzas which can only be found in the former or other Vedic texts but not in the Ṛgveda. See Gonda 1975: pp. 313f.

allow us to draw any definite conclusions. However, it is easy to imagine how mutually reinforcing these developments must have been: the more a former high god lost in standing the easier it became to manipulate him or his myth to fit into ritual discussions. The more this happened, the more the god in question came to be seen as part of the ritual machine and even subservient to it, the more he loses in eminence. We can see the culmination of these development in post-Vedic Indian religions: in Buddhism, in which the gods still have a role to play but do not have the same relevance as in other religions,⁵² but also in Hinduism, in which Indra's role becomes reduced to that of a god of thunder and occasional antagonist of Kṛṣṇa.⁵³

One possible sign of Indra's decline in importance can be seen in his becoming ritually impure due to his actions. While at first relatively innocuous the problem becomes more severe when traced through post-Vedic texts. In the case of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa Indra thinks that he is ritually impure but is then purified by seers:

"Having slain the *asuras* Indra believed himself to be unpurified, unfit for the ritual, as it were. He desired: "May they praise me, who is pure, with a pure melody." He said to the seers (*ṛṣi*): "Praise me!" The seers saw this melody. They praised him with this: "Come, let us praise the pure Indra with a pure melody. Let the pure (Soma) mixed with milk intoxicate him who is gladdened by pure verses."⁵⁴ Thus the pure Indra became purified, fit for the ritual. This melody is a purifier. Pure, purified, fit for the ritual becomes who knows thus." (3.228)

However, in later literature this theme is taken up and embellished. Astonishingly, brahmin theologians began to regard Indra's old foe Vṛtra as a member of the brahmin class. In slaying

⁵² Cf. Bechert 2008: p. 23.

⁵³ Cf. Dimmitt 1978: pp. 116f.

⁵⁴ Ṛgveda 8.95.7.

Vṛtra, Indra thus commits one of the worst possible crimes: the killing of a brahmin.⁵⁵ He has to undergo fierce expiation to regain his purity. Turning one of Indra's most prominent and vital deeds into a severe misdeed is a fascinating turn of events showing us clearly just how massive the changes between the Vedic religion and later Hinduism really are. But even temporary impurity does not stop Indra from being considered the leader of the gods. In the middle Vedic religion, he leads the gods as a mighty warrior and is often depicted as a crucial protagonist in their battles. However, we should also note the relationship between Indra and Prajāpati and the possible dependency of the former on the latter. Consider the following passage, in which Indra asks Prajāpati to make him leader of the gods:

"Previously, the gods were not subordinate to Indra. He ran to Prajāpati (and said): "Give me these two (nights)!" He gave him these two (nights) of the full moon and the new moon. In it he established the *aṣṭakā* (eighth day after the full moon). Then the gods were subordinate to Indra.⁵⁶ One's own people are subordinate to him who knows thus." (3.3)

We encounter quotations of this nature several times in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. It is not always Indra who goes to Prajāpati to ask for a favour. It can be other individual gods or their entirety. Prajāpati appears as a source of greater power than the other gods; but at the same time he is somewhat removed from their endeavours. He usually does not get involved personally but enables others to fulfil their respective desires by advising them or furnishing them with a means to do so. We will discuss Prajāpati in greater details below. For now, let us return to Indra and particularly his foes.

⁵⁵ Zimmer 1992: p. 189. Another list of Indra's "crimes" can be found in Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 2.134. Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 169f.

⁵⁶ It is unfortunately unclear why this action would make the other gods subservient to Indra.

When Indra is not feuding with particular entities like Vṛtra, he can often be found fighting the so-called *asuras*.⁵⁷ The term is usually translated by demon but behind the term itself lurks one of the most remarkable developments from Ṛgvedic to post-Ṛgvedic religious beliefs. In the Brāhmaṇas we find time and again that the gods are feuding with the *asuras*. The reasons for their rivalry are not spelt out but their struggle usually seems to be one for supremacy. The narration often grants the *asuras* a temporary victory only for them to be then defeated by the gods. The texts usually remain silent about the exact nature of these foes of the gods. One aspect, that is mentioned frequently, is their ritual activity: just like the gods, or humans for that matter, the demons offer sacrifices to gain the upper hand. This may be the root of the later notion that gods and *asuras* are of the brahmin-class since they are such active ritualists. Interestingly enough, the term *asura* in the Ṛgveda itself seems to have very different implications.⁵⁸ It is most often used as an epithet of the gods Mitra and Varuṇa and less often Agni. Even more instructive is the Ancient Iranian parallel: the cognate *ahura* is part of the name of the Avestan high god Ahura Mazdā.⁵⁹ The contradiction of this former high status and the later synonym for demon has puzzled scholars. One possible explanation, expounded by Kuiper and tacitly adopted by Oberlies, is the idea that the *asuras* constitute an older class of gods compared to the relatively younger *devas*.⁶⁰ According to this hypothesis, the *asuras* are the gods who ruled before they got supplanted by the *devas*. Some of the most important *asura*, namely Mitra and Varuṇa and with

⁵⁷ We encounter the strife between *devas* and *asuras* in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa numerous times. The following is only an incomplete list but already illustrates the ubiquity of this topic: 1.98-99; 1.107; 1.129; 1.138-139; 1.153-155; 1.179-180; 1.196-197; 2.90; 2.291-292; 2.404-405; 3.31; 3.41; 3.104-109; 3.146.

⁵⁸ On the following cf. Oldenberg 1970: pp. 158ff.

⁵⁹ Cf. Jamison 1992: p. 61.

⁶⁰ Cf. Kuiper 1983: pp. 9ff. and Oberlies 2012: pp. 94ff.

them the other Ādityas,⁶¹ switched sides and joined the *devas* before the *asuras* were permanently deposed. This theory would certainly explain the rivalry between these two classes of supernatural beings. The Ṛgveda hints at a class of older gods, but does not explicitly identify them as *asura*.⁶² There are also some references in late and post-Vedic texts which name the *asuras* as the older gods.⁶³ In the youngest layer of the Ṛgveda, the tenth book, the antagonism is already clearly developed and the *asuras* seen as an entire group of beings hostile to the gods, the *devas*.⁶⁴ The references in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa do not deviate from this pattern and there is no trace left of the earlier reverential usage of term. While our text is thus unable to shed any new light on the problem the contention of *asuras* and *devas* is a prominent feature that is repeatedly mentioned. The number of passages in which the two parties are feuding is quite astonishing. There are also a number of different things the gods and demons are fighting over. A partial list would include space, heaven, food, supremacy, religious merit, etc. One main feature all these stories share is the fact that the gods are always victorious in the end.⁶⁵ Quoting all stories featuring *asuras* and *devas* in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa would only minimally add to our understanding of their struggle. Consider instead this quite representative example:

"The gods (*devas*) and the *asuras* were fighting over food. The gods desired: "Let us take the food from the *asuras*." They saw this melody (the *vājajit*). They praised with it. (Closing with): "*vājījigīvā viśvādhanāni*," they took the wealth, animals, and food of the *asuras*. Therefore the *vājajit* (winning booty) is called *vājajit*. It is a melody for obtaining

⁶¹ On the Ādityas in general, see Brereton 1981.

⁶² Oberlies 2012: p. 95. He refers to Ṛgveda 7.21.7.

⁶³ Oberlies 2012: pp. 95f. See there also for possible Indo-European parallels.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ṛgveda 10.53.4 and 10.157.4.

⁶⁵ This feature remains in later literature. Indeed, the Purāṇas contain numerous stories with the same narrative pattern. Cf. Dimmitt 1978: pp. 299ff.

food. He who knows thus obtains food, he takes the wealth, animals, and food of (his) enemy who hates (him)." (3.299)

The following passage is another fascinating example of the strife between gods and *asuras*. It is of further interest because it illustrates two other features which we have discussed above. Both sides, the gods and the *asuras*, are using the ritual to try to further their own side in battle.

Ultimately, even if this is not explicitly said in the quote, the party with superior ritual knowledge prevails. In this case, the gods convince the main priest of the *asuras* to defect to their side. The implications seem to be that the loss of this priest neutralises the ritual efforts of the *asuras*. The defection of priests is not unknown in the Vedic context and the rivalry between the seers Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra seems to be hinting at the possibility that the latter used to be the *purohita* of chief Sudās but turned on him. Sudās then triumphs in the battle of the ten kings with the (ritual) assistance of Vasiṣṭha.⁶⁶ The other feature of interest is Indra's ability to shapeshift which he employs twice in the passage turning himself into a leech or stalk of reed and into a parrot. En passant, we should also note the way the Ṛgveda is cited in this story.

Usually, only the first couple of words of a stanza, the *pratīka*, are mentioned. Here, however, this only happens for one verse, the two subsequent verses from the same Ṛgvedic hymn are cited in their entirety:

"The gods and the *asuras* had been fighting for a long time with neither side winning. Bṛhaspati was the *purohita*⁶⁷ of the gods, Uśanas Kāvya the *purohita* of the *asuras*. Whichever spell (*brahman*) was employed from below was (also) employed from above. Since the spell was equal it did not win. But a three-headed (*triśīrṣan*) *gandharva*⁶⁸ knew (the means) of victory over them. He was jealous. His ship-town⁶⁹ was floating in the

⁶⁶ See Macdonell 1912b: pp. 274f.

⁶⁷ The main priest.

⁶⁸ A class of supernatural beings.

⁶⁹ The term *naunagara* appears to be a *hapax legomenon*. The concept seems to be particular to this one instance and is not found elsewhere.

midst of the waters. Indra then realised: "Triśīrṣan knows (the way) to victory among us two (parties)." He importuned his (Triśīrṣan's) wife out of desire for victory. He said to her: "Ask (your) husband which of the two (parties) will win after the gods and the *asuras* have been fighting for a long time." As the two were talking (Triśīrṣan) came. (Indra) turned into a leech or a stalk of reed and clung to the side of the boat. She asked (her) husband: "Which of the two (parties) will win after the gods and the *asuras* have been fighting for a long time?" – "Not (so) loud," he said. "The ground has ears." Therefore people now still say: "Not (so) loud. The ground has ears." She said: "Not at all. Just tell me." He said: "The brahmins know the same; Bṛhaspati among the gods (and) Uśanas Kāvya among the *asuras*. What the two do that amounts to the same. The offerings which one offers the other (offers too). They (the offerings) come together and return to their respective place. Should one of them join the other they will win." Having realised this Indra turned into a parrot and flew off. (Triśīrṣan) watching the flying (parrot) said: "For whom that green-feathered (parrot) flies they will win." (Indra) went to Uśanas Kāvya among the *asuras*. He asked him: "Seer, what kind of people are you strengthening here? You belong to us or we belong to you. Turn towards us!" – "How?" he said, "With what are you persuading me?" – "With these wish-fulfilling cows of Virocana Prāhlādi. With these (verses beginning with): "Forth now"⁷⁰ they ran off. The *asuras* ran⁷¹ after them. They came close to the two. (Indra) said: "Seer, these *asuras* are getting close." He continued: "Make it so that they do not come close to us." The two started uttering this (verse): "The well-armed divine Indu (drop), who averts curses and protects the settlements, purifies himself, the father of the gods, the dexterous progenitor, the pillar of heaven and foundation of the earth."⁷² They raised a pillar up to heaven. The *asuras* did not overcome it. The two (= Indra and Uśanas) reached the gods together with these wish-fulfilling cows. When they came (the gods) extolled them: "An inspired seer, a leader of the people, clever and wise Uśanas found what was hidden: the secret, hidden name of the cows, through poetical inspiration (*kāvya*)."⁷³ (1.125-127)⁷⁴

From a synchronic perspective, we can say that the rivalry between *devas* and *asuras* in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa was an unquestionable fact. The composers did not delve into the origins of the conflict potentially thinking that these were so well known that they did not require any exposition. As we have remarked above the reverential usage of the term has fallen out of use. In

⁷⁰ Ṛgveda 9.87.1.

⁷¹ Verb √ *hā* instead of √ *hr*? Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 245.

⁷² Ṛgveda 9.87.2.

⁷³ Ṛgveda 9.87.3.

⁷⁴ Cf. Rau 1966: pp. 79ff. and Bodewitz 1990: pp. 71f.

the Ṛgveda, the most important of the gods called an *asura* is Varuṇa. Like the god Mitra with whom he is often paired he is called an "*asura* among the gods (*deva*)" and the "god (*deva*) who has been an *asura*."⁷⁵ He is considered to be strictly watching over ethical norms and to punish any trespassers. One of his means of punishment is dropsy after a perpetrator has been caught in Varuṇa's noose.⁷⁶ Interestingly, the intent was not as important as the deed itself. Even if one unwittingly broke one of the rules of communal life one is punished regardless.⁷⁷ Varuṇa is thus the deity of settled life and community. Under his watchful eye, said to be the sun, communities are able to thrive in the knowledge that Varuṇa will guarantee that everyone observes the rules that govern their coexistence. In this regard, he is the conceptual counterpart of Indra who guides the Vedic tribe when on the warpath.⁷⁸ At the same time, Varuṇa is also seen as a benign ruler who is able to cause rain and fecundity. Already in the Ṛgveda, but especially in post-Ṛgvedic texts, he is believed to be the god of the waters⁷⁹ and of the netherworld. In the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, Varuṇa plays only a very reduced role. He is rarely mentioned and there are barely any stories told about him. He is, however, said to be ruler of the gods and we will see two passages in which he is consecrated to rule over the other gods. But this idea is not taken up any further and developed. It remains an isolated reference and it is doubtful if the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa had any particular interest or even faith in Varuṇa. Another passage which we will discuss in the context of beliefs in an afterlife shows Varuṇa teaching his son about life

⁷⁵ Oberlies 2012: p. 139.

⁷⁶ Cf. Ṛgveda 10.97.16.

⁷⁷ Cf. Oberlies 2012: pp. 137f.

⁷⁸ Oberlies 2012: p. 137.

⁷⁹ Oldenberg 1970: pp. 200ff.

after death and a system of retribution that appears to be a precursor of the *karma*-theory. Let us first consider the two instances in which Varuṇa claims sovereignty over the other gods:

"Chief Varuṇa was drinking together, as it were, with the other gods. He desired: "Let me be appointed to rule over all the gods." He spent one hundred years as a student with Prajāpati. (Prajāpati) told him this melody (saying): "This is my royal form. Go (and) the gods will make you (their) chief." He went to the gods. When the gods saw him coming they (respectfully) stood up. He told them: "Do not stand up. You are my brothers. I am like you." – "No," they said, "we see the form of our father Prajāpati in you." They stood up for him. They set up a throne for him. On it they consecrated him, the Vasus to rule (*rājya*), the Rudras to extended sovereignty (*vairājya*), the Ādityas to self-rule (*svārājya*), the All-gods to universal sovereignty (*sāmrājya*), the Maruts to omnipotence (*sārvavaśya*), the Sādhyas and Āptyas to supremacy (*pārameṣṭhya*). This melody is an appointment to high rank (*śrī*). He obtains a high rank and becomes chief who knows thus. As it was seen by Chief Varuṇa therefore it is called Varuṇa-melody." (3.152)⁸⁰

What is remarkable about this passage is not so much that Varuṇa is anointed ruler over the other gods, but rather the fact that the exact same anointment is said to have happened to Indra and to Āditya, the sun, in other parts of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. This just underlines the often mechanical process of composing a Brāhmaṇa-passage. In this case, the story of the consecration has been formulated once and is afterwards reused with the name of the relevant deity "plugged in." These repetitions and the reuse of stories cause a certain doubt of the composers' sincerity, at least to the modern mind. They also raises the issue of priority among contradicting accounts: Which one of the mentioned gods is ruler over the others? There is no indication in the text itself that these questions troubled the composers. Instead of reconciling mutually exclusive ideas and homogenising them, they were all included in the text. It was thus up to the students of the text to reconcile the differences – the text itself did not overtly show preference for one or the other solution. Returning to Varuṇa, his second anointment is even shorter and included in the discussion of the royal consecration:

⁸⁰ Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 259f. Parallel to Indra's consecration in 3.367f. and the sun's (Āditya) in 2.25.

"Now the *rājasūya* (royal consecration). Varuṇa desired: "Let me be consecrated to sovereignty (*rājya*) over all the gods. He saw this sacrifice (*yajña*). He fetched it. He offered with it. Thereupon he was consecrated to sovereignty over all the gods. He who knows thus is consecrated to eminence among his own (people)." (2.196)

In conclusion, the image of Varuṇa as a ruler seems somewhat faded if we consider the rarity of his description as such as well the generic nature of these instances. Remains of the old beliefs are still present but seem to lack conviction. This discrepancy can be observed throughout the Brāhmaṇa-literature. In explaining rituals that are performed with hymns to and invocations of the old pantheon while the living religion is undergoing massive changes the composers of the Brāhmaṇas were walking a fine line. Belief in certain gods might have ebbed but since they are mentioned in the hymns during the ritual they had to be incorporated into the commentary of the ritual. Another example of this is the following quote which refers to Varuṇa's noose. That Varuṇa caught violators of the law with his noose is quite a vivid image in the Ṛgveda. Afterwards, this idea too seems to have lost in importance and is rarely mentioned. The following passage is brief exposition of the *varuṇapraghāsa*-sacrifice. It seems the mention of Varuṇa's noose is entirely accounted for by the general connection of that ritual to Varuṇa. The content of the story does not resemble the content of the ritual except for the barley which, however, is offered, not eaten, in the ritual. At the same time, this passage also shows that tropes like the noose of Varuṇa were not entirely forgotten either:

"The beings having been created (by Prajāpati) ate Varuṇa's barley. Varuṇa seized them with Varuṇa's noose (*varuṇapāśa*). He (= Prajāpati) thought: "Those beings I have created before they have perished. If they perish where will I be then? Well, I will cure them entirely." He saw these two two-day *varuṇapraghāsa*.⁸¹ He fetched them. He offered with them. Through the two (sacrifices) he freed (the beings) from the offence

⁸¹ The *varuṇapraghāsas* (pl.) are the name of the second of the three seasonal sacrifices which are offered every four month (the *cāturmāsya*). See Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 116f. There is also another sacrifice of the same name which last several days. The usage of the dual in this passage is puzzling but may be explained by the fact that the *varuṇapraghāsa* has two *vedis* (altars).

against Varuṇa. One frees the beings from an offence against Varuṇa through these two *varuṇapraghāsa*, which last two days." (2.231)

While old gods like Varuṇa lost in importance, there is one deity in particular that rises from obscurity to meteoric heights in the post-Ṛgvedic period. We have already seen some of Prajāpati's exploits in the first chapter.⁸² He is the creator god of the middle Vedic pantheon – variously creating the world, the gods, ritual entities, the beings, etc.⁸³ This activity is already indicated by his name "lord of the offspring (or beings)." His existence is usually a prerequisite in the numerous versions of creation myths surrounding Prajāpati. Consider this passage which is typical of the various different stories of creation found in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa:

"With a *dasāha*-sacrifice Prajāpati created the beings. Having been created they were scattered in all directions. He saw these two *vaiśvānara-atirātras*. With the two he grasped (the beings) from both sides, with this one from the front (and) with that one from the back. He surrounded them with these two. They are called *vaiśvānara (-atirātras)* because (with them) he surrounded every being (*viśvaṃ bhūtam avārayata*)."
(3.8)

Often, he feels lonely and undertakes his acts of creation for companionship. After his cosmogonic deeds he is often over-exerted and needs rest.⁸⁴ Overall, one gets the impression that Prajāpati was considered a somewhat distant god – not quite as engaged in worldly affairs as other gods still were at this point. But there is another role he is playing in the middle Vedic pantheon: he is also considered a father figure of the gods. The logical consequence of the numerous versions of Prajāpati's creating the gods is the assumption that he is their biological father. This idea also overrides other, earlier theogonic myths as far as we are aware of them. The Ṛgveda is notoriously opaque on the origin of the gods. However, it can probably be

⁸² For potential predecessors of Prajāpati see Oldenberg 1919: pp. 26ff.

⁸³ See Gonda 1986: pp. 5ff. for more examples.

⁸⁴ Cf. Gonda 1986: pp. 47ff.

reconstructed that Indra was the son of father heaven and mother earth while being raised by the god Tvaṣṭar.⁸⁵ This fascinating story gets entirely supplanted by a schematic story of his creation by Prajāpati as we have seen in the first chapter. Even so Prajāpati not only comes to represent the biological father of the gods but also their spiritual father figure and guide. In several passages of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, the gods approach him to ask for guidance.⁸⁶ Above we have seen how Varuṇa studies with him to be made sovereign over the other gods. Many of these stories begin with the gods going to Prajāpati to ask for his help. This emphasis on movement towards him shows his existence as somewhat removed from that of the realm of the other gods. He is not considered to be living with them as in the Ancient Greek idea of Mount Olympus. Little can be said about the abode of the gods who are sometimes assigned to different regions of intermediate sky and heaven.⁸⁷ It is thus unclear where Prajāpati may be residing. His distance to the other gods, however, also manifests itself in the way of his assistance to them when asked for his help. He does not directly intervene in their affairs.⁸⁸ Instead he usually teaches them a particular insight (this being a ritual commentary, the insights are mostly into the inner, mysterious working of the ritual). This is often enough to guarantee the success of the gods. The narrative trope is quite reminiscent of the considerable later Purāṇas and their stories in which the gods go and ask either Viṣṇu, Śiva, or Brahmā for help.⁸⁹ Generally, the mythology

⁸⁵ See Oberlies 2012: pp. 148ff.

⁸⁶ Cf. Gonda 1986: pp. 58ff.

⁸⁷ Cf. Klaus 1986: pp. 175f.

⁸⁸ This, however, can be contrasted with his role in the wish-fulfilling sacrifices, the *kāmyeṣṭi*. Unlike the regularly occurring seasonal sacrifices, *kāmyeṣṭi* could be performed at any time to fulfil a particular desire of the sacrificer. They are often addressed to Prajāpati who did not play a major role in the other sacrifices. See Oldenberg 1919: p. 31. On *kāmyeṣṭi* in general see Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 86f. and p. 120.

⁸⁹ See Zimmer 1992: pp. 4f. for an example involving Brahmā and Viṣṇu.

surrounding Prajāpati appears to be somewhat superficial or as Oldenberg repeatedly says "feeble."⁹⁰ One exception is the following passage which not only contains the incest between Prajāpati and his daughter Uṣas, which we have already noted above, but also another theogony: the creation of the god Śiva who is here also identified with Agni:

"The gods performing a *sattra*⁹¹ said: "Let us separate that of ourselves which is cruel. (So that) we do not perform (the *sattra*) with something cruel. They separated that of themselves which was cruel (and) put it down pressing it between two plates. Then they performed the *sattra*. From it (= whatever cruel thing the gods deposited between the plates) the non-wicked (*akhala*) god⁹² was born. As he was born from the two plates (*śarāva*) therefore that is his name.⁹³ He who was born is (also) Agni.⁹⁴ He (= Agni) does not harm him who knows thus. He told the gods: "Why did you cause me to be born?" – "For supervision (*aupadraṣṭya*)," they said. "Should someone transgress (the prohibition of incest) you will kill him." Prajāpati desired his own daughter Uṣas. Having become a red gazelle she submitted to him. Having become a spotted gazelle he mounted her. (Śarva) thought: "The gods have caused me to be born for the supervision of him (= Prajāpati). He transgresses (the prohibition of incest). Well, I will shoot him (with an arrow)." He shot him (with an arrow). (Prajāpati) having been shot shed this (gazelle) shape and rose upwards.

He is this (asterism called) *iṣu trikāṇḍa* (tripartite arrow).⁹⁵ Therefore the spotted gazelle is quite unpalatable. Therefore it is also lamenting, as it were. Having been shot his semen escaped (him). It became established in the *himavat* (mountains). It became the *mānuṣa* (lake). Gods and seers approached it together and said: "Let it not be spoiled." Since they said: "Let it not be spoiled (*medaṃ duṣat*)." Therefore it is called *māduṣa* (lake). Its (real) name is indeed *māduṣa* but it is (ordinarily) called *mānuṣa*. They kindled fire all around it. The Maruts blew (on it). With the *śrāyantīya* (melody) they cooked (?) it (*asṛīnan*). Therefore it is called *śrāyantīya*. From it the animals (*paśu*) were born." [...] (3.262-3.263)⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Oldenberg 1919: p. 31 and elsewhere.

⁹¹ A Soma-sacrifice lasting twelve days or longer. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 129.

⁹² An euphemistic term for Rudra/Śiva.

⁹³ This is referring to an epithet of Rudra/Śiva, namely Śarva.

⁹⁴ Agni is also identified as Rudra in 3.50.

⁹⁵ For the Avestan parallel see Forssman 1968.

⁹⁶ Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 288f. See also Gonda 1986: pp. 73f. for another version of this myth.

The vividness of this story is in absolute contrast to most other myths pertaining Prajāpati which are usually much more subdued. It also introduces one god who rises to much greater prominence in Hinduism than he ever enjoyed before: Śiva. As the god Rudra, he already play a role in the Ṛgveda. There, he is a terrifying archer who sends diseases to cattle and men and therefore needs to be pacified. Unlike other gods he is not invited to the sacrifice; instead he is compensated with offerings for not coming near the sacrificer or his cattle.⁹⁷ His personality is untamed and he is said to dwell in the mountains apart from the other gods. Furthermore, he is called the lord of cattle.⁹⁸ Given his dreadful nature he is not often mentioned in the Ṛgveda and in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa he still only occurs rarely. He is often called *īśāna* (lord) so that his real name did not need to be spelled out.⁹⁹ He does not appear often in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa but when he does the text often voices concern that he could harm the sacrificer's cattle. Consider the following example in which the sacrificer tries to emulate Rudra's role as the lord of the cattle. At the same time the ritualists are concerned for the safety of the sacrificer's cattle:

"This *jarābodhīya* is indeed the melody of the god Rudra. With it the god Rudra reached sovereignty (*aiśvarya* and) supremacy (*ādhipatya*) over the cattle. Let us reach sovereignty (and) supremacy over the cattle with this (melody), with which the god Rudra reached sovereignty (*aiśvarya* and) supremacy (*ādhipatya*) over the cattle. They say about it: "It is a fierce and unappeased (melody because) the lord (*īśvara*) intends to harm the cattle of the sacrificer." [...]" (3.11)

⁹⁷ See Oldenberg 1970: pp. 215ff.

⁹⁸ Oldenberg 1970: pp. 217f.

⁹⁹ E.g. in 1.133 and 2.221. This avoidance of his name is most strikingly exemplified by his later name Śiva meaning kind or benevolent. We have also seen above the euphemistic term *akhala* (non-wicked). The epithet *śiva* is only used for other deities or entities in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The gods Soma (1.361) and Agni (3.169) are so addressed as well as the sacrifice (*vajña*) in 2.41. The Kaṭha Āraṇyaka explains how Śiva got his name, see Witzel 2004: pp. 39ff.

The fact that Rudra is dangerous for people and cattle, however, can also be harnessed by the ritualists to harm an opponent of the sacrificer. The following example sees the use of a ritual to unleash Rudra onto the cattle of an enemy:

"Now, should he (= the sacrificer) wish on somebody: "Let Rudra kill his cattle," he should place the *puruṣa* (human being) (passage of the *mahānāmnī* verses) between the *vatsa* (calf) and *ūdhas* (udder) (passage of the *mahānāmnī* verses). The *puruṣa* is Rudra. He places Rudra in his (= the opponent's) cow-pen." (3.113)

In conclusion, Rudra is still a rarely mentioned god in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and his later rise to one of the most eminent deities of the Hindu pantheon cannot yet be detected in the text.

Instead, it very much continues the notion of his being a dangerous god who is better avoided.

The other main god of Hinduism, Viṣṇu, is slightly more important in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa.

In the Ṛgveda, he is said to be the companion of Indra whom he assists in his battles against Vṛtra or Vala. Cosmologically interesting, he takes three steps through the worlds to create space for human beings.¹⁰⁰ Viṣṇu is more prominent than Rudra in the Ṛgveda but is still a minor god.

This state of affairs is still mostly true in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. There, Viṣṇu is occasionally mentioned and he is part of a number of stories. One of the most interesting sees Viṣṇu helping the gods but in the process he is compressed to the size of a dwarf:¹⁰¹

"People say: "The gods' evil is warded off. They do not (usually) sleep."¹⁰² (But) due to the multitude of (their) exertions they closed their eyes. The *asuras* took the splendour, power, (and) valour of the heedlessly sleeping gods and led it into the waters. Viṣṇu saw this. When the gods woke up it was disagreeable to them. Viṣṇu told them: "Let it not be disagreeable to you. I have just seen this." He led them (= the gods) to the waters. They saw it in the waters. It (was) like a hump raised from the back would be like. They took

¹⁰⁰ Oberlies 2012: p. 163. See also Oberlies 2012: pp. 53f. and pp. 163f. for Indo-European parallels.

¹⁰¹ It is unclear if Viṣṇu was already considered to be dwarf-sized in the Ṛgveda. Cf. Oberlies 2012: p. 164.

¹⁰² This reads like a comment on Ṛgveda 7.86.6d: "Not even sleep keeps away evil (*anṛta*)."

them with various *vyāhrtis*¹⁰³ and gave them to Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu carrying the splendour, power, (and) valour became compressed. Therefore Viṣṇu is dwarfish. Therefore one sacrifices a dwarfish ox for Viṣṇu." (3.354)

Viṣṇu is mentioned several times more in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa but just as Rudra his role is still a fairly minor one. Neither is his role expanded compared to the Ṛgveda nor is there any obvious development in the mythology surrounding him with the possible exception of the cited story about the origin of his small size. The same is true for many of the Ṛgvedic deities. Many are frequently mentioned but there is little development in their characterisation. On the contrary, if anything most of them lose any importance even further. But there are two particular exceptions, which we will turn to now.

As a commentary on the ritual, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa naturally addresses the main two deified ritual entities: Agni, the deified (sacrificial) fire and Soma, the deified beverage, around which most of the solemn rituals revolve. Agni and Soma are indeed ubiquitous in the text, often in quotes from the Saṃhitās. Both of them lack, however, a developed canon of myths surrounding them in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa.¹⁰⁴ Some themes from the Ṛgveda are continued in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa such as the notion of Soma as ruler of the gods.¹⁰⁵ Compared to gods like Indra, however, their characters remain undefined. In concluding our discussion of the middle Vedic pantheon,¹⁰⁶ one important fact should be noted. There is an almost complete lack of

¹⁰³ A kind of interjection. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 121.

¹⁰⁴ The same is mostly true for the Ṛgveda itself. Agni and Soma have few myths to call their own.

¹⁰⁵ In Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 3.15 Soma is consecrated as ruler over the other gods. The passage explains the so-called *soma*-melody. For the general mythology this remains inconsequential.

¹⁰⁶ We should note in passing the divine twins, the Aśvins, whose late addition to the Soma-sacrifice is discussed in 3.123-128 and mentioned in 3.64. Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 253ff. They do not play a particular prominent role in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa but the way they learn about the ritual is highly interesting.

female deities in the stories of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. With the exception of Uṣas, the goddess of dawn, and some supernatural female beings, goddesses are nowhere to be found. This seems a logical continuation of the state in the Ṛgveda. There, goddesses are exceedingly rare and mostly just generic wives of male gods such as Indrāṇī (Mrs. Indra) or the mother of an entire group of gods such as Aditi, mother of the Ādityas. This and the similar state of affairs in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is in marked contrast to Hinduism in which powerful female deities and concepts (*śakti*) play a major role.¹⁰⁷ Even with the major changes the religious beliefs have undergone from Ṛgvedic times to the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, the latter often still conforms to or continues ideas and beliefs of the former. The goddesses or lack thereof are a case in point.

For the remainder of this chapter let us now turn to a discussion of the belief in an afterlife. Clearly of great concern to most religions the Jaiminīyas, too, show an interest in life after death. Concepts of an afterlife in the Ṛgveda are still somewhat vague and undeveloped.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, there are overlapping and competing ideas of an underworld and a heaven. Oberlies connects these to the way of disposing of the bodies of the dead. The notion of an underworld is thus related to the practice of burying the body. Whereas cremation lends itself more easily to a belief in a heaven up to which the dead rise. In the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, notions of a shadowy underworld do not seem to be present. This may, again, be explained by its nature as a ritual commentary. The rituals focusing on the afterlife are concerned with enabling the sacrificer to reach heaven (*svarga loka*). In contrast, the underworld had not been an attractive place to go to after death. While not being explicitly mentioned in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, the concept

¹⁰⁷ Cf. von Stietencron 2006: pp. 71ff.

¹⁰⁸ On this and the following, see Oberlies 2012: pp. 316ff.

probably survived in post-Vedic beliefs in a place for the unfaithful, a hell, in other words.¹⁰⁹

The wish to go to heaven can be clearly seen in the following invocation of the funeral fire which is part of the funeral rites:

""He is from you, you are from him. He is your origin (*yoni*), you are his origin. A father creating space for (his) son, Jātavedas,¹¹⁰ lead him where the world of the virtuous is. You have been born from him, let him be born from you, *svāhā*."" (1.47)¹¹¹

A particularly interesting problem arises in the idea of a repeated death.¹¹² Conceptually, this appears to be a precursor of a full-blown system of rebirth.¹¹³ The re-death seems to occur in heaven but it remains entirely unclear where the person who had died again would go afterwards.¹¹⁴ The text is rather quiet about the mechanics of the concept limiting itself to commenting on ways of averting it. The following quote is a good example and a part of a discussion of the *agnihotra* between chief Janaka and five brahmins:

"He (= Gautama) said: "Lord, I offer the *agnihotra* as fame (*yaśas*). Therefore I am fame. There will be fame within my offspring." (Janaka) asked him: "What is fame, Gautama?" Pointing at the fire he said, "This is fame." (Pointing at) the sun (he said): "That is fame. In the evening, I offer that fame in this fame. At dawn, I offer this fame in that fame. These two will lead me there where all wishes are (fulfilled). They will ward off re-death (*punarmṛtyu*) for me." [...]" (1.23)¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ This seems also to be the intent of the Ṛgveda hymn 7.104.

¹¹⁰ An epithet of Agni.

¹¹¹ Cf. Bodewitz 1973: p. 140. On Vedic funeral rites in general see Caland 1896.

¹¹² Re-death may have been part of the Ṛgvedic belief system albeit never explicitly mentioned. Cf. Oberlies 2012: p. 325.

¹¹³ On Ṛgvedic beliefs in rebirth, see Oberlies 2012: pp. 324ff.

¹¹⁴ See, however, Witzel 2003: p. 39 for an instance of rebirth via a shooting star.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Bodewitz 1973: p. 73.

The danger of re-death did not only concern humans and even the gods seem to be fearful of the possibility that they may die in heaven:

"The gods were afraid of death which (also) exists in heaven (*svarga loka*). Therefore, they ran to Prajāpati. Prajāpati told them: "Do not be afraid. I will lead you beyond this death which exists in heaven." He had them sit together (and perform) a *prṣṭhya śadaha*.¹¹⁶ The *prṣṭha* (-melodies) are the seasons. The seasons are the year. Death is the year. Standing firmly, he had them sit together on the back (*prṣṭha*) of death. With the non-mentioned (*anirukta*)¹¹⁷ (day) of thirty-three (syllables) he led them beyond. He thought: "They should not be non-mentioned." He pronounced them with the mentioned (days). They went stepping on lauds and metres. They went erasing (the traces of) their foot-steps from death.¹¹⁸ That the lauds and metres go asunder in the middle is like someone standing not knowing about two (traces of) foot-steps: "Did he go this (way) or that (way)?" This is like the erasing of (the traces of) their foot-steps from death, so that evil (*pāpman*) does not follow. Re-death (*punarmṛtyu*) does not follow him, he wards off evil, he goes to heaven (who knows thus). Having gone to the other end the gods were afraid again. With the non-mentioned (day) of thirty-three (syllables) he (= Prajāpati) led them beyond. He pronounced them with the mentioned (days). Thus, they ward off the death which exists in heaven. He who knows thus wards off death which exists in heaven." (2.350-351)¹¹⁹

The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa voices one more concern about the afterlife: the possibility that evil deeds may not go unpunished in the next world. The Jaiminīyas feared that the animals and cereals they were consuming for food and the trees they used for fuel could consume them in return. This is briefly hinted at in a short quote:

"(The sacrificer) offers two (oblations) in the evening (and) two at dawn. This amounts to four oblations. Animals are quadruped, the domestic as well as the wild ones. Thus, he redeems¹²⁰ being eaten by them in return." (1.26)¹²¹

¹¹⁶ A six-day-sacrifice with daily changing melodies. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 94.

¹¹⁷ In this case, deities are not invoked by name but rather hinted at. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 29.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Tsuchida 1979: pp. 173f.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Tsuchida 1979: pp. 93f.

¹²⁰ On *pratyāśa* and *pratyapacayati* see Bodewitz 1973: pp.84f.

¹²¹ Cf. Bodewitz 1973: p. 80. See also Schmidt 1997: pp. 214ff. for a discussion of being eaten in return in connection with the concept of *ahiṃsā*.

A much more elaborate discussion can be found in the famous story of Bhṛgu,¹²² the son of Varuṇa. The story sees Bhṛgu being taught a lesson by his father. He travels repeatedly to the other world, most likely the afterlife, and observes puzzling events. These are later explained to him by his father who appears here as the god of the afterlife. This role usually falls to Yama,¹²³ mythologically the first mortal, who after or rather by his death is elevated to rule over the afterlife. Varuṇa's encroachment on Yama's sphere may be related to his connection with the observance of ethical rules. The whole Bhṛgu story certainly has an ethical hue to it. The solution provided, however, is firmly in the realm of the ritual and the correct knowledge about it. Instead of, e.g., exhorting vegetarianism the ritualists recommend performing the ritual including its non-vegetarian parts with the right knowledge to ward off any ill effect. But the myth still contains a potential seed for the later karma-theory.¹²⁴ At this stage, there is fear of a tit for tat in the afterlife – a rather crude idea; but worrying enough that it required countermeasures:

"Bhṛgu, the son of Varuṇa, was learned. He thought himself superior to his father, the gods, and other learned brahmins. Varuṇa thought: "My son does not understand anything. Well, I will make him understand." He took his life-breaths (*prāṇa*). (Bhṛgu) fainted. Fainted he went to the next world. He arrived in that world. A man was cutting up (another) man and then devoured him. He said: "Has this happened? Why (did) it (happen)?" They told him: "Ask (your) father Varuṇa. He will explain this to you." He arrived (in that world) a second time. A man was devouring a crying man. He said: "Has this happened? Why (did) it (happen)?" They told him: "Ask (your) father Varuṇa. He will explain this to you." He arrived (in that world) a third time. A man was quietly devouring a man who did not speak. He said: "Has this happened? Why (did) it (happen)?" They told him: "Ask (your) father Varuṇa. He will explain this to you." He arrived (in that world) a fourth time. Two women were guarding a great treasure. He said: "Has this happened? Why (did) it (happen)?" They told him: "Ask (your) father Varuṇa. He will explain this to you." He arrived (in that world) a fifth time. A river of blood and a river of ghee were flowing evenly. The river of blood was guarded by a black, naked man

¹²² On the complicated background of Bhṛgu, see Macdonell 1912b: pp. 109f.

¹²³ Yama occurs only rarely in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. His rule over the afterlife is hinted at in 3.33.

¹²⁴ On karma in Hinduism, see Michaels 1998: pp. 171ff.

armed with a club. Out of the river of ghee golden men were scooping all desires with golden cups. He said: "Has this happened? Why (did) it (happen)?" They told him: "Ask (your) father Varuṇa. He will explain this to you." He arrived (in that world) a sixth time. Five rivers were flowing abounding in blue waterlilies and lotuses with honey as water. In them were dancing and singing, the sounds of *vīṇās*, groups of *apsaras*,¹²⁵ a pleasing smell, and a great noise. He said: "Has this happened? Why (did) it (happen)?" They told him: "Ask (your) father Varuṇa. He will explain this to you." He returned from there (and) went to Varuṇa. He said to him: "Have you arrived (there), son?" – "I arrived, father." – "Did you see, son?" – "I saw, father." – "What, son?" – "A man was cutting up (another) man and then devoured him." – "Yes," he said, "those who in this world offer the *agnihotra* not knowing thus and cutting up trees and place them on the fire, the trees taking human form eat them in return¹²⁶ in that world." – "What is the expiation for this?" – "The fact that he places fuel on the fire that is the expiation for this. Through this it is avoided. What was it the second time?" – "A man was devouring a crying man." – "Yes," he said, "those who in this world offer the *agnihotra* not knowing thus and cooking crying animals, the animals taking human form eat them in return in that world." – "What is the expiation for this?" – "That he offers the first oblation with speech that is the expiation for this. Through this it is avoided. What was it the third time?" – "A man was quietly devouring a man who did not speak." – "Yes," he said, "those who in this world offer the *agnihotra* not knowing thus and quietly cooking rice and barley which do not speak, rice and barley taking human form eat them in return in that world." – "What is the expiation for this?" – "That he offers the next oblation with (his) mind that is the expiation for this. Through this it is avoided. What was it the fourth time?" – "Two women were guarding a great treasure." – "Yes," he said, "they were faith (*śraddhā*) and non-faith. Those who not knowing thus offer the *agnihotra* in this world unfaithfully, (their sacrifice) goes to non-faith. Those (who offer) faithfully, (their sacrifice) goes to faith." – "What is the expiation for this?" – "That he eats twice with (his) finger that is the expiation for this. Through this it is avoided. What was it the fifth time?" – "A river of blood and a river of ghee were flowing evenly. The river of blood was guarded by a black, naked man armed with a club. Out of the river of ghee golden men were scooping all desires with golden cups." – "Yes," he said, "those who in this world offer the *agnihotra* not knowing thus and squeeze the blood out of a brahmin, that (blood) is that river of blood. The black, naked man armed with a club who guarded it, he is anger. It (= the blood) is his food." – "What is the expiation for this?" – "That he eats here with the *sruc*¹²⁷ that is the expiation. Through this it is avoided. And the water which he tossed northwards after washing the *sruc* that is the river of ghee. Out of it golden men scoop all desires with golden cups. What was it the sixth time?" – "Five rivers were flowing abounding in blue waterlilies and lotuses with honey as water. In them were dancing and singing, the sounds of *vīṇās*, groups of *apsaras*, a pleasing smell, and a great noise." – "Yes," he said, "these were my world." – "By what means are they to be conquered?" –

¹²⁵ *Apsaras* are nymph-like beings.

¹²⁶ On "eating in return" cf. above.

¹²⁷ A group of large ritual ladles. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 139.

"By taking (milk out of the cauldron) five times and lifting it five times." – (Bṛḥgu) said: "Outside of the *agnihotra* there does not exist any opportunity to conquer a world. (Let) today (be) my fast-day before establishing the sacrificial fires."¹²⁸ They made it thus for him. He who knowing thus offers the *agnihotra*, the trees taking human form do not eat him in return in that world, nor the animals, nor rice and barley. His sacrifices and merit do not go to faith and non-faith. He wards off the river of blood. He gains the river of ghee." (1.42-44)¹²⁹

With this description of the worlds of Varuṇa we will end our discussion of the Vedic afterlife.

In this chapter, we have seen some of the major changes the Vedic pantheon has undergone from Ṛgvedic times to those of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. We have encountered gods of diminished importance and on the other hand the rise of a new creator god, Prajāpati. The still commanding presence of Indra is remarkable given his later fall from grace. But it seems the material of the Ṛgveda chosen, developed, and deployed by the Jaiminīya ritualists was too plentiful and pertinent to pass over. Thus, Indra is as in the Ṛgveda still of great importance¹³⁰ but we can already detect the first doubts of his abilities in stories of his flight from Vṛtra or his ritual impurity after slaying *asuras* or other beings now considered part of the brahmin class. Just as in the chapter on cosmogony and theogony, Prajāpati, too, has a role to play in the affairs of the Vedic gods. He is now considered a father figure to the gods and is as their creator set apart from them. The gods approach him repeatedly for help which he often furnishes in the form of religious or ritual insight. His position is curious in that he appears to be more powerful than the other gods but is not their ruler. Instead this position is variously assumed by deities like Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, and even the sun (Āditya). Prajāpati stands somewhat aloof from the normal activities of the other gods. As one of the few exception to this rule we have seen his incestuous desire for his own daughter which is punished by Rudra/Śiva. Śiva and Viṣṇu, the later main

¹²⁸ On the *agnyādheya* see Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 105ff. and Krick 1982.

¹²⁹ Cf. Bodewitz 1973: pp. 102ff.

¹³⁰ Cf. also his survival in the Buddhist Pāli Canon as god Sakka.

gods of Hinduism, are only rarely encountered in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and their later rank cannot yet be intuited from the textual sources. One Ṛgvedic god who has lost greatly in standing is Varuṇa whom we have seen much diminished. But he has also developed, now being connected to the afterlife. In the discussion of beliefs in an afterlife we have also encountered the fascinating notion of re-death; an as yet not quite fully formed concept that may have been one of the building blocks of a full-blown theory of rebirth. The flux of religious ideas and beliefs is almost palpable in these discussions which foreshadow the philosophical debates of the Upaniṣads. For the next chapter, we will turn to the other side of Vedic religion, the ritual, and in particular the manifold ways of malevolent activity in them.

3. Ritual and execrations

In this chapter, we will focus on the ritual, its form and function in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and in a second step its malevolent elements. As a commentary on the Vedic ritual the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is necessarily mostly occupied with the numerous sacrifices and their inner workings. Interestingly enough, the Brāhmaṇas do not usually contain an actual description of the rituals at hand. Descriptions are mostly limited to some particular points of practices divergent from those of other schools. Step by step instructions can only be found in the later Śrauta- and Gṛhyasūtras. These texts describe the ritual acts in minute details. The Brāhmaṇas on the other hand do not explain the how but rather the why of Vedic sacrifices.¹ We have encountered some of the strategies of arguing for the efficacy of the ritual already. Often a previous mythological instance is either referenced or described in some detail, in which a particular sacrifice has shown the desired effect. A different way is the use of identification or correlation of entities with each other which results in the potency of the ritual. These correlation can even be caused by simple parity of syllables, such as "the word for sacrificer (*yajamāna*) has four syllables; the word for the year (*saṃvatsara*) has four syllables. Thus the sacrificer conquers the year." We will discuss correlations in more detail in the fourth chapter as they play a significant role in the justification for a social hierarchy. Beside the explanation why a specific ritual is effective the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa also contains a plethora of desires which can be met by ritual means. Some of the most common wishes are quite basic but naturally of great importance to the sacrificers. Among them are the desire for cattle, for male heirs, for rise to a high position but also more abstract wishes like the desire to reach heaven after death. Sometimes, the goal is rather specific as in the rituals aiming at reestablishing a banished chieftain in his old rank. Without delving into too

¹ See Gonda 1975: p. 339.

much detail let us survey the general state of the rituals as presented to us in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa.² As we have remarked before the number and complexity of rituals as compared to the Ṛgveda has markedly increased. The difference may partially be explained by the difference of the two text types and their different functions. The Ṛgveda is a collection of hymns to the gods and we only learn about possible rituals by self-referential descriptions within the hymns. However, the Ṛgveda is not concerned with any systematic exposition of the Vedic ritual apparatus.³ It references a number of priests and ritual implements, particularly the ones used for the pressing and filtering of Soma. Our understanding of the Ṛgvedic ritual is necessarily limited by these restrictions imposed by the text itself and so far no conclusive account has been given.⁴ Even the underlying justifications of the rituals are still debated.⁵ In the case of the Brāhmaṇas the situation is more favourable. The texts are naturally much more detailed in their discussion of the rituals. While still not actual manuals they allow us to gain a more extensive understanding of the ritual system of their times. This is due to their nature as ritual commentaries but they are also far less subject to formal restrictions: being composed in prose rather than poetry frees the text from limits to describe its subject. Other features were employed to make these texts easier

² On Vedic rituals in general there is numerous literature. Comprehensive and very succinct Hillebrandt 1981, also Keith 1925. For individual rituals: Krick 1982 on the *agnyādheya*, Dumont 1939 and Bodewitz 1976 on the *agnihotra*, Hillebrandt 1879 on the *dārśapaurṇamāsa*, Bhide 1979 and Einoo 1988 on the *cāturmāsya*, Lindner 1888 on the *āgrayaṇa*, Caland 1908 on the *kāmyeṣṭis*, Schwab 1886 on the *paśubandha*, Caland 1906/07 on the *agniṣṭoma*, Garbe 1880, van Buitenen 1968, Rönnow 1929 and Kashikar 1972 on the *pravargya*, Falk 1985 on the *sattras*, Weber 1893 and Heesterman 1957 on the *rājasūya*, Dumont 1927 on the *aśvamedha*, Staal 1983 on the *agnicayana*. For more literature see Jamison 1992: pp. 38ff.

³ See Oberlies 2012: pp. 232ff. for a discussion of the purely Ṛgvedic ritual.

⁴ Cf. Jamison 1992: pp. 37f. See, however, Geldner 2008: pp. 1ff. for a discussion of the Ṛgvedic Soma-ritual.

⁵ See Jamison 1992: pp. 31f. for a brief overview.

to memorise such as the copious use of parallelism.⁶ One other notable feature of the Brāhmaṇa-texts is their local connection to the sacrificial ground. The use of deictic pronouns seems to indicate that these texts were used to teach on the sacrificial ground itself, probably underlined by gestures of the teacher and the pointing out of specific features. They also help us to gain a better understanding of the rituals themselves, which, as has been already stated, are not described in great detail. Instead the texts presuppose knowledge of the rituals and aim to supply the student with the underlying theory.⁷ Generally, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa introduces the general form of a ritual (the so-called *saṁsthā*) and then delves into their variations. In the order of the edition of the text⁸ starts with a discussion of the *agnihotra*, one of the most simple rituals consisting of offerings into the fire in the morning and evening.⁹ This is followed by the *jyotiṣṭoma* as well as a section on expiations for potential mistakes during the ritual. The *jyotiṣṭoma* is an umbrella term for a number of Soma-sacrifices, the most basic of which is the *agniṣṭoma*. The *agniṣṭoma* is a one-day Soma-sacrifice (preceded by a number of days of preparations)¹⁰ which serves as a model for longer and more complicated Soma-rituals. This concludes the first book of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The discussion of the next ritual, the *gavām ayana*, is cut in half by the edition and can be found in the beginning and the end of the second

⁶ This device is a somewhat two-edged sword, however. Multiple repetitions may be easier to remember but also invite scribal and other errors when falsely applied. They also make the reading of some passages rather tedious. This phenomenon can also be detected in later Buddhist scripture in which it is used endlessly.

⁷ Gonda 1975: p. 339.

⁸ Ehlers has proposed a different order based on his analysis of the manuscripts as well as arguments about the internal coherence of the text. See Ehlers's new (preliminary) edition at <http://titus.fkidl.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcc/ind/a/ind/ved/sv/jb/jbx/jbx.htm>

⁹ Jamison 1992: p. 38. On the interpretation of the Agnihotra in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa see Bodewitz 1973: pp. 215ff.

¹⁰ Jamison 1992: p. 39. On the Agniṣṭoma in general, see Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 124ff. and Caland 1906/07.

book. The *gavām ayana* is a one-year-long sacrifice which is divided in two diametrical halves.¹¹ Between the two halves of the exposition of the *gavām ayana* there are a several types of other rituals. First, there are the *ekāhas*, one-day Soma-sacrifices, which are variations of the *agniṣṭoma*. Next are the *ahīnas*,¹² Soma-sacrifices which last between two and twelve days. The variations among them arise from differing combinations of one-day rituals. However, they always end with an *atirātra*, a variant of the *agniṣṭoma* that continues overnight. Finally, there is a discussion of *sattras*,¹³ Soma-sacrifices which are longer than twelve days. These are based on the *dvādaśāha*, the twelve-day Soma sacrifice which is the only ritual discussed in the third book of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The most interesting point to note on the *sattras* is that they are only to be performed by brahmins and that the role of sacrificer and officiating priests is not separate.

One fascinating aspect of the Vedic ritual system has thus far not received too much scholarly attention. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and other texts of the Brāhmaṇa-period are full of references to rituals as a means to harm an opponent. While sacrifices are said to have numerous positive effects for the sacrificer, slight modifications to the ritual activity can be employed to have the opposite effect. Let us turn to the the malevolent elements of Vedic rituals and see how exactly these were used. Just as the rituals can be used to obtain something positive such as cattle or sons they can also be employed to create adverse results for the sacrificer's rivals. These are achieved by minor changes to the way a ritual is normally performed. Interestingly, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa does not contain any moral judgement on these kinds of rituals. They are listed

¹¹ See Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 157f.

¹² See Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 147ff.

¹³ On *sattras* as well as the *dvādaśāha* see Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 154ff. On *sattras* in particular see Falk 1986: pp. 30ff.

matter-of-factly and are presented as a legitimate tool in the struggle with possible enemies. A subset of these rituals concern countermeasures in case the sacrificer himself is cursed by a rival. The malevolent effects of the ritual mirror its usual positive ones. Instead of gaining cattle or a long life one could as well wish the opposite on his rival and attempt to accomplish it through ritual activities. The explanations of these rituals follow the usual pattern of correlations or references to prior instances when they had been successful. This further underlines how they appear to have been considered a natural subsection of ritual activity instead of a possibly objectionable action. Descriptions of malevolent rituals are furthermore scattered throughout the texts. They were not treated separately but instead included as variations of standard rituals. However, they also underline the dangerous potency of the sacrifice. The ritual was considered so powerful that it could have easily harmed the sacrificer if no active countermeasure were taken. In the case of Soma-rituals, these begin with rites of consecration before the actual rituals which symbolise the rebirth¹⁴ of the sacrificer and prepare him for the sacrifice. During the ritual any mistakes made by the priests needed to be atoned for. These atonements (*prāyaścitti*) are an important part of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa.¹⁵ Crucially, not only the positive effects of any sacrifice but also the negative ones, even when they are caused by a priest and not the sacrificer himself, affect only the sacrificer.¹⁶ This fact could also be used by the priests to harm the sacrificer by means of the ritual if they so wished. The following passage is a telling example of this possibility as well as more benevolent options:

¹⁴ See Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 125f. for the prescribed behaviour of the sacrificer which shares characteristics with that of a newborn.

¹⁵ See Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 1.342-364 for a long list of expiations.

¹⁶ Hillebrandt 1981: p. 98.

"If he (= the priest) should wish: "Let him (= the sacrificer) be worse off," he should insert a black (thread) into his (Soma-) strainer (and the sacrificer) becomes worse off. Now if he should wish: "Let him be neither down nor up," he should insert a smoke-coloured (thread) into his (Soma-) strainer (and the sacrificer) is neither down nor up. Now if he should wish: "Let him be better, let him attain splendour," he should make his (Soma-) strainer reddish (and the sacrificer) becomes better and attains splendour. Because it (= the strainer) is here imbued with the sun." (1.81)¹⁷

Unfortunately, it remains unclear why a priest would want to harm the sacrificer since the motivations for doing so are nowhere mentioned in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. We can only speculate that if this did not happen for personal reasons it may have been out of a desire for a higher remuneration or maybe due to bribery by a rival party. A lack of sources prevents us from investigating this further. But it certainly illustrates the power a priest is said to have had over the sacrificer if he could harm him so easily by a small modification to the Soma-strainer. The potentially dangerous power of the sacrifice can also be detected in the discussion of ritual variants of rituals. Some ritual behaviour, while part of one school's teaching, may be seen as harmful by another school of thought. In the following example, the sprinkling of an unidentified substance is compared to the sprinkling of the sacrificer's cremation ashes. The potency of the ritual is said to be so high that this symbolic action will soon be followed by the actual one:

"There are some who go from the *gārhapatya* (-fire) up to the *āhavanīya* (-fire) scattering a handful of *cchādi* (?) with the verse: "Viṣṇu has traversed this." One should not do it like that. One should say in this case: "He has indeed scattered the sacrificer's (cremation) ashes. Soon he will scatter (his actual) ashes; he will lose the paterfamilias." And it would be like that." (1.52)¹⁸

¹⁷ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 46. Cf. also the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa parallel 6.6.10:

"(At a sacrifice) of one whom he (the Chanter) hates, he should make the two strainers (*pavitra*) (partly) of those colours [colours other than white]; with a bad lot, with darkness he smites him, for darkness is black. (At a sacrifice) of one who is dear to him, he should make it purely white; gold, forsooth, is light, he (thereby) brings light unto him." Translation by Caland (1931: p. 114).

¹⁸ Cf. Bodewitz 1973: p. 155.

It should be noted that this critique does not imply that the priests¹⁹ who were performing the criticised action were doing so intentionally to hurt the sacrificer. It may simply have been that they thought their action to be benevolent even if the text states that it is not. However, the potential of the sacrifice to benefit or harm the sacrificer is underlined. Furthermore, this also shows the need for actual ritual experts. Since most priests seem not to have been employed permanently there must have been a constant need of finding employment.²⁰ It seems logical that priests who had particular insight into the workings of the ritual including possible pitfalls had a better chance to be hired to perform a sacrifice than others. Emphasising the negative consequences caused by a sacrifice that had been performed amateurishly may have given a priest a decisive advantage. It also underscores the prestige of the selected group of priests who can ably perform these sacrifices which have such awful powers.

These powers could also be harnessed to harm any of the sacrificer's rivals. In the following example the sacrifice is employed to cause harm to the cattle of a rival. This is in fact the mirror image of what the sacrificer would like for himself, namely to gain more or at least maintain the number of his cows as well as to keep the god Rudra away who is infamous for poisoning people or cattle. The ritual itself seems to be neutral here; it can have malevolent effects just as easily as benevolent ones and it falls to the sacrificer to decide and to the priests to perform the ritual to either effect. In this case the intent is completely clear:

"Should he (= the sacrificer) wish on somebody: "Let him be deprived of cattle," he should separate him from the *vatsa* (calf) (passage of the *mahānāmnī* verses).²¹ The *vatsa*

¹⁹ They remain anonymous in the text, expressed by a non-descript *eke* meaning "some."

²⁰ Cf. also the process of *ṛtvig-varaṇa*, the "choosing of the ritual priests," that precedes the morning-pressing of Soma; Oberlies 2012: p. 247 and p. 441, n. 69.

²¹ A group of three tercets. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 105, and Caland 1931: pp. 317f., n.1.

is cattle. (Thus), he separates him from (his) cattle. Now, should he wish on somebody: "Let Rudra kill his cattle," he should place the *puruṣa* (human being) (passage of the *mahānāmnī* verses) between the *vatsa* (calf) and *ūdhas* (udder) (passage of the *mahānāmnī* verses). The *puruṣa* is Rudra. He places Rudra in his (= the opponent's) cow-pen." (3.113)

Cows are not the only ones to be damaged by rituals performed against them. In the following passage we encounter a fascinating potpourri of ideas that goes far beyond a simple application of malevolent ritual activity. The story is about a chief of the small tribe of the Ikṣvākus who it seems replaced his priests from a family called Gaupāyana with two others of somewhat questionable origin. While not called demons outright Kirāta and Ākuli²² are nevertheless said to be versed in demonic magic (*asuramāyā*) which gives them astonishing abilities. We can only speculate that these abilities may have been a reason for the substitution of the Gaupāyanas. Many details in this myth remain rather unclear but there are some points of particular interest. Besides their ostensibly beneficial abilities (however, with catastrophic consequences for the Ikṣvākus, as it seems) they are also able to take the life-breath of one of the Gaupāyanas and deposit it in the wooden sticks surrounding their sacrificial fire – a deed that is performed apparently by means of the ritual but not explicitly said to be so. But the connections to the sacrifice such as the deposition of the life-breath in a part of the sacrificial "architecture" is telling. The Gaupāyanas being ritual specialists in their own right are able to retrieve the life-breath and reanimate their comrade after petitioning Agni, the ritual fire personified. Seeking revenge afterwards they slay the two priests who have harmed them but only after Kirāta and Ākuli have lost their magically beautified good looks. The passage ends with the advice that the verses used by the Gaupāyanas are able to ward off demons and that they can be used to kill one's enemy. The story is thus a justification for the use of these verses but it is also a fascinating

²² Their story can also be found in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. Cf. Macdonell 1912a: p. 158.

cross-section of Vedic beliefs in magic. The abilities of Kirāta and Ākuli in particular are quite fascinating: their *māyā* appears to have rather negative consequences for everyone but themselves. Even though they can miraculously provide food for the Ikṣvākus, the Ikṣvāku are said to have perished after consuming said food. In addition, they are able to appear good-looking although their natural looks are said to be hideous.²³ The notion of *māyā* thus gains a connotation of deceit that it did not necessarily have in the Ṛgveda. Even there, it is a very enigmatic power that is not well-understood by the composers but is especially connected with the god Varuṇa.²⁴ Tellingly, Varuṇa is also often said to be an *asura*. Indeed: We have seen in the second chapter that this term did not originally mean demon but has been reduced to that meaning at the time of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. With the loss of prestige of the term *asura* there also seems to have been a re-evaluation of their power, the *māyā*. The *māyā* of gods like Varuṇa and other *asuras* is considered mysterious already in the Ṛgveda. It is a force used to bring order to a chaotic, unformed world.²⁵ However, by the time of the Brāhmaṇas, as we can also see in the example below, it seems to be of a more superficial nature: changing the appearance of someone or something but not the underlying nature. Interestingly, in the theologies of the later high gods of Hinduism, Viṣṇu and Śiva, *māyā* plays a major role in cosmogony and cosmology.²⁶ In this instance, though, *māyā* appears in a fairly negative light. It is overcome by the Gaupāyanas and Kirāta and Ākuli get killed:

²³ Interestingly, the Kirātas are said to have been a cave-dwelling tribe living in the mountains. In classical literature they appear as a degraded people and possibly deformed. Cf. Macdonell 1912a: pp. 157f.

²⁴ Cf. Oberlies 2012: p. 96.

²⁵ Oberlies 2012: p. 96.

²⁶ Cf. von Stietecron 2006: pp. 76ff.

"The Gaupāyanas²⁷ (once) considered Asamāti Rāthaprauṣṭha an enemy. They performed a *sattra*²⁸ in the Khāṇḍava (-forest). At that time Kirāta and Ākuli, capable of *asuric* magic (*asuramāya*), were staying with Asamāti Rāthaprauṣṭha. They cooked gruel and meat without placing them on the fire. They went ahead sowing (and the Ikṣvākus)²⁹ followed behind cutting (the immediately grown and ripened crop). So powerful was their magical ability. This is the reason why many Ikṣvākus perished after eating the food of the *asuras*. The offerings (*āhutis*) of the Gaupāyanas distressed Asamāti Rāthaprauṣṭha. He told them, namely Kirāta and Ākuli: "The offerings of the Gaupāyanas are distressing me." They said: "We are healers of this, we are its expiation. We will make it thus that they will not distress you (anymore)." They went and having taken the breath (*asu*) of Subandhu Gaupāyana, who was sleeping heedlessly, they deposited it within the branches surrounding the sacrificial fires (*paridhi*).³⁰ At that time (Asamāti's) fires had branches surrounding them. When Subandhu did not wake up (the Gaupāyanas) realised: "The two capable of *asuric* magic have taken his life-breath." They said: "Come, let us spread his life-breath (in his body ?)." They came forth from the Khāṇḍava (-forest) (reciting): "Let us not veer off the path (and) away from the Soma-possessing sacrifice, o Indra. Let the enemies not come between us."³¹ (They wished): "When we go this (path) and perform a *sattra* then let us not veer off these two." They crossed (the river) Hvṛṇinī eastwards via Subandhu's ford which (still) had the rope of Subandhu's boat and came to Asamāti Rāthaprauṣṭha. Seeing his fire in the distance they realised: "His fire is called Varūthya (giving shelter)." Now, Agni had earlier proclaimed his name: "My name is Varūthya. Should someone propitiate you (by saying) it then do what he tells you to." They approached (Agni) (saying): "Agni, be our closest protector, benign and giving shelter (*varūthya*)."³² He asked them: "Desiring what have you come?" – "We would like to take Subandhu's life-breath back," they said. "It is within the branches surrounding the fire," he said, "take it." They called it forth: "This one has come as the mother, this one as the father, this one as life. This is your refuge, Subandhu. Come, come forth."³³ The life-breath entered Subandhu again. He became as before. This was told to Kirāta and Ākuli: "The seers have called forth the life-breath." The two could not resist and ran forth towards (the Gaupāyas). When they saw them (= the Gaupāyas) in the distance all their *māyā* left them. Their appearance was the worst of appearances. Before that they had

²⁷ A family only known in the context of this story. See Macdonell 1912a: p. 241.

²⁸ A Soma-ritual lasting twelve or more days. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 129.

²⁹ A minor Vedic tribe of which Asamāti Rāthaprauṣṭha was said to be the chief. See Macdonell 1912a: p. 75.

³⁰ Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 87.

³¹ Ṛgveda 10.57.1.

³² Ṛgveda 5.24.1.

³³ Ṛgveda 10.60.7.

been good-looking through their *māyā*. One of the two sprang towards the fire and said: "Someone acts in this manner who wants to destroy truth (*satya*) by means of untruth (*anṛta*)." They (= the Gauṇpāyanas) dismembered him in this way. The other one came near while (his) throat was being slit and said: "Someone acts in this manner who wants to destroy truth by means of untruth." Thus, the two of them died. These are verses (*ṛc*) which slay the enemy, which slay demons (*rakṣas*). He who praises with these verses kill the enemy who hates (him) and wards off the demon (and) the evil." [...] (3.168-170)³⁴

The above passage is not the only one that shows a connection between ritual and murder. The next example is even more extreme. What it lacks in fascinating mythology or multiple facets of Vedic ritual magic it makes up for in sheer callousness. The passage lists the three main ritual priests, the Adhvaryu, Hotar, and Udgātar, and then proceeds to instruct how to kill any of them when they perform a rival's sacrifice. By manipulating the verses used during the Soma-pressing the ritual is then said to be able to kill the rivalling priests. The explanation ends with ways of killing the sacrificer or all participants in the competing ritual. Stylistically, it is a typical example of the style of the Brāhmaṇa literature. The structure is highly repetitive and the argument mainly mechanical. Again, it is notable how activities such as harming rivals by ritual means do not seem to carry any stigma. It is hard to tell if the practice was wide-spread but the way in which it is not treated differently to any other ritual activity may be telling. Another element may have been the concern that the addressed deities could have chosen to visit another sacrifice. Eliminating the sacrificial rivals appears to be an effective way to diminish that chance:

"If they wish their (= the rival sacrificers') Adhvaryu³⁵ to die they should tell (their own) Adhvaryu at the morning pressing (of Soma): "Offer with verses of Prajāpati." If they wish their (= the rival sacrificers') Hotar³⁶ to die they should tell (their own) Hotar at the mid-day pressing: "Offer with verses of Prajāpati." If they wish their (= the rival sacrificers') Udgātar³⁷ to die they should tell (their own) Udgātar at the third pressing:

³⁴ Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 261ff.

³⁵ One of the main priests who performs the offerings. Mylius 1995: p. 28.

³⁶ The priest who recites Ṛgvedic verses. Mylius 1995: pp. 142f.

³⁷ The priest who sings Sāmavedic material. Mylius 1995: p. 48.

"Offer with verses of Prajāpati." Thus are the places of the priest(s). The Adhvaryu sets to work first. His place is the morning-pressing. Then the Hotar. His place is the mid-day pressing. Then the Udgātar. His place is the third pressing. According to (each) place they gain them. If they wish their (= the rival sacrificers') sacrificer (*yajamāna*) to die they should tell (their own) sacrificer: "Offer with verses of Prajāpati." If they wish all of them to die they should all offer at all pressings." [...] (1.343)³⁸

The harmful effects of a "weaponised" ritual are not limited to rival sacrificers and their priests. The next passage shows what kind of ritualised behaviour should be carried out during the sacrifice to behead one's enemies. The actions performed during the ritual mirror their intended effect: the sacrificer makes little figurines out of grass or groats and beheads them while calling out the names of the people he would like to hurt. The forthright claim of this passage is somewhat astonishing: it says that the effect of the ritual action will translate directly into reality. Instead of a diffuse result such as leaving the intended victim worse off, which would be hard to verify, the outcome is clearly stated and should have been easy to verify or refute. It may be that students of the text understood this to not be literal. It is particularly interesting because the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa were certainly able to express subtle and nuanced notions. On the other hand, the ritual knowledge contained in it was most likely not shared with non-Jaiminīyas. Outrageous claims like rituals that literally behead a rival were thus most likely only shared with outsiders through mediation by ritual specialists. It is logical to assume that they would tone down or exaggerate features of their sacrificial knowledge for their own purposes when they shared ritual insights with non-specialists. Unfortunately, we simply do not know enough about the way priests were chosen to perform rituals for the sacrificer,³⁹ with the possible exception of public ritual discussions (*brahmodya*) which feature prominently in the

³⁸ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 195.

³⁹ With the exception of the *ṛtvig-varaṇa*, see above.

Upaniṣads.⁴⁰ It thus remains unclear to what extent both the composers of the Jaiminīya

Brāhmaṇa and the recipients took such claims literally:

"They say: "The *ukthya* (-sacrifice)⁴¹ should not be performed with a *ṣoḍaśin*." The *ukthas* are cattle. The *ṣoḍaśin* is a *vajra*. One would let a *vajra* turn among the cattle. (Instead) an *atirātra*⁴² should be performed. The waters are an alleviation of everything. With the waters they pacify it (= the *vajra* ?). If the Soma (-sacrifice) is for a malevolent purpose then whoever performs the rite should make a golden *vajra* with spikes⁴³ and throw it at this and that. He throws the *vajra* at it (or: him) to strike it down. When the Soma (-sacrifice) has ended he should turn the *dronakalaśa* (-vessel)⁴⁴ upside down, make human (figurines) out of groats or blades of green grass, and cut off (their) necks mentioning the names (of his enemies): "Thus I cut off the neck of so and so, thus of so and so, (and) thus of so and so." He cuts off the neck of as many people as he names. He gives it to the *brahman* (-priest ?). The *brahmán* (-priest) is the *bráhman*.⁴⁵ The *vajra* is the *brahman*. Thus, he establishes the *vajra* in the *brahman*." (1.202)⁴⁶

The aggressive potential of the ritual can also be seen in the following passage which once more contains instructions how to harm a rival by means of the ritual. This example is much less specific in the fate that will befall the enemy. But it answers the question what to do in case someone else is performing a harmful sacrifice. It is only logical that malevolent rituals can be performed by rivals as well. Conveniently, the ritual itself can be employed as a countermeasure. This once more underlines the necessity for ritual experts to protect themselves against rivalling

⁴⁰ A potential precursor can be seen in Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 1.285 in which a priest gets replaced by a younger rival who furthermore possesses superior ritual knowledge.

⁴¹ A variation of the *agniṣtoma* with 15 *śastras* and *stotras* each, as opposed to the *ṣoḍaśin* which has 16. See Mylius 1995: p. 46 and p. 126.

⁴² Yet another variation of the *agniṣtoma*. See Mylius 1995: p. 27.

⁴³ A very rare case of a contemporary, non-mythical *vajra*.

⁴⁴ One of the Soma-vessels. Cf. Mylius 1995: p. 80.

⁴⁵ The words *brahmán* (for the priest) and *bráhman* (for the concept) not only differ in grammatical gender, the priest is masculine, the concept neuter, but also in accent. Note, however, that the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is an unaccented text. The accent is thus added here for clarification.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 112.

ritual activity. It also is one more testament to the theory that malevolent sacrifices were a regular and not uncommon part of the ritual canon. If other sacrificers performed malevolent rituals it is only natural that priests were devising ways both to counteract these measures as well as counter-attack by similar ones. The passage is a good example how such deliberations may have been expressed in the text:

"When he bewitches (someone) he should make it (= "Agni, you purify the life spans (*āyus*)") the introductory verse. Agni is indeed the *brahman* of the gods. With Agni, the *brahman* of the gods, he lays low whom he hates. [...] When he is bewitched (by someone) he should make it the introductory verse. He who bewitches, who treats (someone) inimically (or) who wishes evil, he is mischief (*ducchunā*). "Drive the mischief far away," with this (verse) he drives the hating, injurious rival far away and down." (1.93)⁴⁷

The creativity of the ritual experts in "weaponising" the ritual is on full display in the following quotation. It starts with a somewhat unclear problem: the sacrificer may be cursed or simply insulted with regard to parts of his sacrifice. Given the context and the drastic ways to respond to these infractions it seems more likely that they are execrations and not just simple insults. The passage is very reminiscent of others in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa in which ritual and other entities are correlated. Here, however, the theme is considerably darker. One by one, a part of the sacrificer's ritual gets cursed by an adversary and the curse is repelled by a counter-curse invoking an unpleasant way to die. The curser is said to die childless, of several digestive diseases, to be struck down by *vajra*, etc. Ritual entities are thus correlated in a way with a number of lethal diseases – a most uncommon correlation. The impressive list of diseases certainly has a deterring effect. Making someone aware of the numerous ways of being harmed by a counter-curse may have been used to discourage ritualists to engage in such activities. It

⁴⁷ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 54.

also must have filled the Jaiminīyas with confidence to counter any malevolent rituals if they had such an imposing armoury of way to harm their opponents and even kill them:

"[...] This is visibly a sacrifice that has warded off evil. No one will curse him (= the sacrificer) or harm him. If someone curses⁴⁸ him in regard to the *Bahiṣpavamāna* (*stotra*)⁴⁹ he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the seed of (your) sacrifice spilt. Your offspring is going to be seedless." If someone curses him in regard to an *Ājya* (*śastra*)⁵⁰ directed to two deities he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have caused the departure of (your) sacrifice. Departing you will die without procreating (?)." If someone curses him in regard to an *Ājya* directed to one deity he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the foundation of (my) sacrifice. You will be without support." If someone curses him in regard to the *Gāyatrī* (-verse) of the *Madhyaṃdina Pavamāna* (*stotra*)⁵¹ he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the downward breath of the sacrifice. Obstruction (*vighāta*) is going to kill you." Then he should tell him: "Diarrhoea (? *avasrava*) will kill you." If someone curses him in regard to the *Brhatī* (-verses of the *Madhyaṃdina Pavamāna stotra*) he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the penis (or: tail) of the sacrifice. Urinary retention (? *mūtragrāha*) is going to kill you." Then he should tell him: "You are going to become seedless." If someone curses him in regard to the *Triṣṭubh* (-verse of the *Madhyaṃdina Pavamāna stotra*) he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the navel of the sacrifice. Faecal retention (*udāvarta*) is going to kill you." If someone curses him in regard to the *Prṣṭha* (*stotras*)⁵² he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the power (and) force of the sacrifice. A *vajra*⁵³ is going to kill you." Then he should tell him: "An unknown killer is going to kill you." If someone curses him in regard to the *Gāyatrī* (-verse) of the *Ārbhava Pavamāna* (*stotra*)⁵⁴ he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the life-breath (*prāṇa*) of the sacrifice. The life-breath is going to leave you." Then he should tell him: "You will die away." If someone curses him in regard to the *Uṣṇih* and *Kakubh* (-verses of the *Ārbhava Pavamāna stotra*) he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the two eyes of the sacrifice. You are going to become blind." If someone curses him in regard to the

⁴⁸ The meaning of anu-vy-ā- √hr̥ seems to be either "to curse" or "to insult." The usual or "technical" root for cursing is √śap.

⁴⁹ A *stotra* sung during the morning-pressing of Soma. See Mylius 1995: p. 101.

⁵⁰ Recitations at the morning-pressing. See Mylius 1995: p. 39.

⁵¹ As the name implies, a *stotra* used at the mid-day-pressing. See Mylius 1995: p. 89.

⁵² Another *stotra* sung at the mid-day-pressing. See Mylius 1995: p. 94.

⁵³ God Indra's weapon of choice. Note also the use of *indriya* (power) in the preceding sentence which ties these two sentences together.

⁵⁴ Used at the evening-pressing. Mylius 1995: p. 89.

Anuṣṭubh (-verse of the *Ārbhava Pavamāna stotra*) he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the speech of the sacrifice. Speech is going to depart from you." Then he should tell him: "You will die of hunger." If someone curses him in regard to the *Jagatī* (-verse of the *Ārbhava Pavamāna stotra*) he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the hearing of the sacrifice. You are going to become deaf." If someone curses him in regard to the *Yajñāyajñīya (stotra)*⁵⁵ he should tell him: "Killing with the sacrifice I have made the head of the sacrifice. Your head is going to fly apart."⁵⁶ These are the answers. He who knows thus does not incur sacrificial injury. (But) he who insults him incurs injury. If someone insults him he should tell him: "I know the entire, full sacrifice with (its) limbs (and its) body. If you know something (to be) defective in this matter then I will cover it with you." He incurs injury who insults someone who knows thus." [...] (1.254-256)⁵⁷

Cursing others by means of the ritual does not have to happen in self-defence or in life-threatening circumstances. Compare the following excerpt in which one of the main priests, the Udgātar, is criticised for the way he has performed the ritual. The Udgātar does not only deny the charge but he also curses the insulting party and "pierces them with darkness and evil."⁵⁸ The possible consequences of this action remain unexpressed. However, it should be noted how aggressive the response to any criticism turns out to be. It seems that attacks on the ritual capability of a priest were seen as major threats that needed to be answered decisively. Considering how important proficiency in the ritual and the resulting prestige must have been for priests, particularly if they were looking for employment, a strong reaction to such an allegation seems natural. Furthermore, priests were rewarded with a sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*) after they had performed a sacrifice. We can speculate that any criticism of the priest during or after the ritual

⁵⁵ The last *stotra* of the evening-pressing. See Mylius 1995: p. 109.

⁵⁶ On the "shattered head" see Witzel 1987: pp. 363ff.

⁵⁷ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: pp. 143f.

⁵⁸ Cf. also Ṛgveda 7.104 which deals evocatively with darkness and annihilation, *nirṛti*, for the enemies of the invokers.

was thus highly unwelcome, especially before he had been remunerated. In any case, the passage instructs the priest how to defend himself against an attack on his ritual performance:

"If they should say (to the Udgātar): "You have sung darknesses (*tamas*) and not brightnesses (*jyotis*)." He should say: "I have sung brightnesses and not darknesses." The verse (*rc*) is brightness; the melody is brightness; the deity is brightness. (Saying): "These brightnesses I have sung. I will pierce you with injurious darkness," he pierces them with darkness and evil." (1.76)⁵⁹

The next passage once more underlines how dangerous the ritual could be if not performed competently. It serves as reminder for the need of professionalism in the performance of sacrifices lest the sacrificer or the priest should be harmed. Somewhat similarly to Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 1.254-256, ritual entities, here metres, are correlated with injuries and disabilities. Inability to sing certain verses in a specific way is said to lead to blindness, deafness, dumbness, and other injuries. Thus, two familiar themes are again underlined: the risk involved in ritual activities and the need for a competent priest to avoid said risks:

"They say: "It is like they create strife among the metres when all the metres are sung during the morning-pressing (of Soma), which belongs to the (metre) Gāyatrī. People become bellicose." He who should wish the people to thrive peacefully he should not sing the *dhurs*⁶⁰ apart.⁶¹ But should he make the sacrifice of the sacrificer headless (by omitting the *dhurs*) he would receive sacrificial fees (*dakṣiṇā*) by means of a wrong (*anṛta*). (Thinking): "Let him not make a *brahman*," the sacrificer gives the sacrificial fees (to the priest). He should wish to do it in such a way that he does not make the sacrificer's sacrifice headless and that he does not receive sacrificial fees by means of a wrong. He should sing (the *dhurs*) apart. If he wishes to sing one of them apart and he does not succeed in singing (them) apart, he incurs injury. If he cannot sing the *retasyā* apart, he becomes seedless by himself, (his) offspring is born seedless. If he cannot sing the Gāyatrī apart, he dies away by himself, (his) offspring is born dead. If he cannot sing the Triṣṭubh apart, he becomes blind by himself, (his) offspring is born blind. If he cannot sing the Jagatī apart, he becomes deaf by himself, (his) offspring is born deaf. If he cannot sing the Anuṣṭubh apart, he becomes tongueless by himself, (his) offspring is born tongueless. If he cannot sing the Paṅkti apart, the seasons become disordered. If he does

⁵⁹ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 43.

⁶⁰ *Stotras* other than the *pavamāna stotras* sung during the *agniṣṭoma*. See Mylius 1995: p. 81.

⁶¹ Bodewitz proposes "to sing in different metres" for *vi-√gā*. See Bodewitz 1990: p. 233, n. 56.

not expect to sing them apart he should sing them in an unintelligible form. The *retasyā* is sung in both (ways)." (1.103)⁶²

In this chapter we have seen and discussed some aspects of the middle Vedic ritual as presented to us by the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. While there is a huge variety of different rituals, from simple to highly complex ones, the reasons to perform them are quite straightforward. Sacrificers desire material things such as wealth, often in the form of cattle, sons, or wives. Another important worldly but immaterial wish is the gaining or restitution⁶³ of power. This also hints at a fascinating facet of the Vedic ritual which is not openly addressed in the Brāhmaṇas: the social prestige entailed by performing sacrifices. The growing complexity of sacrifices made their successful performance more difficult and involved a larger number of ritual experts who also had to be remunerated. This in itself limits the availability of the sacrifice to a wealthy elite who were fiscally able to have sacrifices performed on their behalf. Another goal that sacrificers tried to reach through rituals is a long life and subsequently to reach heaven. Many explanations in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa aim at illustrating how the sacrificer is transported to heaven by means of the ritual. Particular needs to be taken to transport him back to his existence on earth. In other words, the goal is to achieve heaven for the sacrificer only in the afterlife and not to cut his life short.⁶⁴ Apart from these benevolent effects of the ritual we have already encountered a darker side. The use of sacrifices to harm or even kill others and their cattle. Execrations appear to have been a normal ritual activity undertaken for a variety of reasons. Some of these include the use of the sacrifice as a counter-measure to being cursed or just insulted. Other passages can be seen

⁶² Cf. Bodewitz 1990: pp. 59f. See also Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 1.260 for a parallel version.

⁶³ See Rau 1957: pp. 128f. on the expelled king.

⁶⁴ Cf., e.g., Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 3.10.

in light of rivalry between competing ritualists when the sacrifice of others is sabotaged. But in some cases, the described ritual is clearly aimed at hurting others, most likely pre-emptively, in what I have called "weaponised" sacrifices. From the context in which these sacrifices are discussed, we were furthermore able to conclude that they constituted a common part of the ritual arsenal. They were not specifically marked as in any way morally questionable or treated reprehensively. On the contrary, they are included in the normal discussion of the ritual. But they do suggest the potential dangers of sacrificial activity. Rituals are said to be able to harm the sacrificer or the priests if not handled competently. The inherent danger necessitates the employment of ritual specialists which must have been in the interest of the composers of the Brāhmaṇa-texts. As priests in need of gainful employment the emphasis on a risk that only they could successfully minimise must have been a very attractive argument. It may also have led to a better recompense for a successfully performed sacrifice. Leaving the sphere of pure religion and ritual behind we will discuss the (idealised) concepts of Vedic society in the next chapter. However, since the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is a religious text and its composers ritual specialists many arguments for a specific social order and hierarchy are bound up in religious and ritual justifications.

4. Society and hierarchies

This chapter deals with the hierarchical organisation of the Vedic society as we find it in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. We will trace the ideological distinction and differentiation into classes, the earliest instance of which can be found already in the Ṛgveda, and through the textual evidence of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The differentiation which we encounter in the text has been a common topic of study for many scholars of ancient India and has arguably survived to the present day in the form of castes.¹ While the four class system we see in the Brāhmaṇa period is very crude in comparison to the sophisticated system of hundreds of different castes, it provides nonetheless the intellectual underpinning to the hierarchies of today in which the emergence of new castes are said to have resulted from the intermingling of different classes and subsequent differentiation.² The composers of the Brāhmaṇas, however, did not stop at the sorting of people into different classes. In fact an entire worldview was drawn up in which every entity, natural, religious or mythological, would have a specific place within a hierarchy: metres, domesticated animals, melodies, deities, they all are of a certain ranking in what Smith has described as a system of "vertical and horizontal connections."³ Since the system was so expanded parts of it could not be disassembled without destroying the entire edifice. This strategy would ensure that, at least ideologically, beneficiaries of the hierarchy could not be efficiently challenged. These

¹ A discussion can be found in Smith 1994: pp. 316ff.

² See Brinkhaus 1978 for the connection between class and caste and Vigasin 1990 for the explanation of *jātis* in the Mānava Dharmasāstra.

³ Smith 1994: pp. 11f.

beneficiaries were members of the two upper classes, brahmins and *kṣatriyas*, whereas the lower two classes only had the role to sustain and serve their superiors.

The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa uses the same devices as other related texts in proclaiming the superiority of its brahmin composers.⁴ One strategy we encounter is the way hierarchies are presented even in those instances where the four classes are not mentioned. In the rankings the brahmins or entities associated with them always come first. There is no instance where another class is listed first. This intra- and intertextual coherence gives the whole ideology a normative force. It simply is impossible that any class could be considered higher. But there are also considerations of a more practical nature. Brahmins seem to have felt the need to ally themselves with the class they consider inferior to themselves but that most likely held the actual power: the *kṣatriyas*. Time and again, we will see exhortations for the two classes to work together and ensure that they will be able to dominate the lower classes. But we will also encounter moments of tension when the cooperation of brahmins and *kṣatriyas* is endangered or challenged. These instances must have presented an existential threat to the status and even livelihood of brahmins and therefore needed careful mediation in the texts. *Kṣatriyas* are either literally or symbolically made aware of their place in society as we will see in an instance of a *kṣatriya* cursing a brahmin and the resulting counter-curse of the brahmin's father. Finally, a study of Vedic life and society would not be complete without a discussion of the status and role of women in society. The

⁴ A thorough if somewhat outdated discussion of the entire worldview found in the Brāhmaṇa texts can be found in Oldenberg 1919. The usefulness of Oldenberg's work is unfortunately diminished to some degree by his polemic standpoint. Admiring the earliest Vedic texts for the trueness of their "emotions" on the one hand and early Buddhist texts for the stringency of their philosophy on the other, Oldenberg considers the period that falls between the two as inferior. He is often unjustifiably harsh in his criticism and some of his opinions border on contempt. This attitude nevertheless did not stop him from devoting an entire book on the topic. His attempt remains the last one to describe the entire worldview of all Brāhmaṇa texts making his work useful despite all shortcomings. Subsequent authors usually tackled only a more limited problem or used only one of the texts. Oldenberg was certainly not alone in his criticism of the Brāhmaṇa-texts (see Witzel 1979: p. 1). But even in Oldenberg's time we already find scholars who are more tolerant of their idiosyncracies, e.g. Stanislav Schayer.

Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is uncharacteristically quiet on this topic, but there are some hints at the inferior and subjugated position of women in Vedic society.

The division of Vedic society into four classes (*varṇa*),⁵ i.e. brahmins, *kṣatriyas* (or *rājanyas*),⁶ *vaiśyas*, and *śūdras*, has already been theoretically postulated and justified in the oldest of the extant Vedic texts, the Ṛgveda, albeit in one of its latest hymns. The Ṛgvedic hymn 10.90 to the primordial man contains a stanza in which the four classes are said to have been born from different body parts of the primordial man. Thus, the brahmin is born from his head,⁷ the *kṣatriya* (here: *rājanya*) from his arms, the *vaiśya* from his thighs, and the *śūdra* from his feet. The hierarchy is so clear that it did not need to be clarified in the hymn, but later texts, including the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, have felt the need to expound the superiority of the upper two classes, but especially of the brahmins, more explicitly. In discussing the passages, there are two issues that need to be kept in mind: There is the question of authorship and audience, but there is also the need to critically examine to what extent the text is presenting society as it should be rather than

⁵ The term *varṇa*, literally "colour," has most often been translated by the misleading term caste. What we know as the caste system today has developed over centuries into a highly complex worldview which even prescribes specific professions to all of its members. The concept of *varṇa*, however, is a much looser sorting into four different classes, the boundaries of which are not necessarily completely fixed. Below, we will see examples of people who cross class-boundaries. The division of society into three classes, priests, warriors, and farmers, appears to be Indo-European heritage. See Puhvel 1987 for Iranian and Celtic parallels.

⁶ If the term *rājanya* had a more specific meaning than just being synonymous with *kṣatriya*, it seems to have lost it by the time of the composition of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Often, both terms are used in the same passage and both are correlated with the abstract notion of *kṣatra* (power, rulership) of which *kṣatriya* is a grammatical and semantic derivative. But see Rau 1957: pp. 67ff., for an attempt to establish different meanings for the respective terms.

⁷ The body parts of the primordial man correspond to some extent to the functions of the individual classes. Brahmins did not only carry out rituals but also mentally preserve the religious texts. *Kṣatriyas* wield their power by means of strength of which arms are an apt symbol. The case for *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* is more difficult to make and we will see below how the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa modified the limbs to make the imagery more striking.

as it actually is. As far as authorship and audience is concerned, it is quite clear that the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa has been composed by brahmins for other brahmins; a kind of text-book for the next generation of priests within the same school.⁸ This leads to an astonishing openness in the way these priests talk about the society they lived in. But also how they sought to influence it and maintain a position of high, if not the highest, rank in it. We will encounter this frankness in passages where collaboration between the two upper classes is recommended because they depend on each other. And we will see strategies of gaining a position as a *purohita*, the main priest of a Vedic chieftain (*rājan*), in a passage that can almost be compared to an academic job-talk. On the same topic of rank, we also see time and again descriptions of hierarchies. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa contains a large number of correlative⁹ systems of hierarchies, which comprise the natural and supernatural world. Lists are drawn up and the place of natural entities, like different sorts of domesticated animals, and ritualistic ones, like poetic metres, melodies, and lauds, are mapped out. In other words, the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa develop a worldview in which every deity, every person, every animal has a specific place in the hierarchy. Conceptually, this is often more of a theoretical construct than of practical concern. Nevertheless, it gives us an insight into the Vedic mind¹⁰ and the ideal of how society should be according to the composers. It also enabled the composers of the Brāhmaṇas to point to a natural and god-given order that governed not only human society but the entire known universe. Thus, instead of

⁸ Cf. Gonda 1975: pp. 339ff., where Gonda gives a more general introduction to the Brāhmaṇas and the various schools they belong to.

⁹ On the topic of correlations (Skt. *bandhu*) from a purely Indian perspective see Oldenberg 1919: pp. 110-123; Schayer 1924 and Schayer 1925: pp. 277ff. More recently, *bandhus* have been studied by Michael Witzel in his inaugural lecture (Witzel 1979) and Brian K. Smith, see Smith 1989 and Smith 1993. What has been often overlooked is that the correlations are not confined to ancient Indian culture but can also be found in other cultures, such as ancient China and Greece. See Farmer 2002: pp. 51ff.

¹⁰ On questions of entering the Vedic mind and translating Brāhmaṇa texts see Witzel 1996.

criticising an arbitrary and man-made hierarchy potential opponents had to attack an entire worldview and the religion underwriting it. The hierarchy was made more secure in this way whereas challenges to it could hardly be mounted from within the religion.¹¹ It is an astonishing indication of the system's efficacy that a minority of society with limited means of physical force was able to claim, at least ideologically, its highest rank. The question remains, however, what society actually looked like.

Given how little information we have about middle Vedic society it is rather challenging to discern between idealised and faithful depictions of it. Virtually all information¹² we have is based on Vedic texts which all have been composed and transmitted by a priestly elite.

Additionally, we should not forget that all our source texts are religious in nature and mostly concerned with the ritual.

Under these circumstances it is remarkable how much can be learned about Vedic life not only in the margins of these texts but often expressively woven into the discussion of ritualistic details. It cannot be underestimated to what extent the application of the ritual has been multiplied

¹¹ One should note how massive challenges to the late Vedic religion, worldview, and social hierarchy were launched by the religious movements of Jainism and Buddhism, both of which have a somewhat more egalitarian outlook on society. The Vedic religion itself barely survived these onslaughts and was reformed by exterior as well as interior pressure into the many forms of what today is collectively called Hinduism. Remarkably, the four class system survived all upheaval and remains noticeable even today. On the difficulty of challenging a tradition from the inside, see also Gluckmann 1982: pp. 444ff.

¹² The material culture was still characterised by the use of perishable materials such as wood. What has mostly survived are potsherds and metal implements. Given India's usually humid and hot climate most other artifacts have not survived. The ones which have are notoriously difficult to attribute to any specific tribe or even society. The archaeological evidence therefore cannot help us much in the reconstruction of Vedic life. There have, however, been some attempts to study the archaeology of the Vedic period, see Rau 1971, Rau 1972, Rau 1974, and Rau 1983. Furthermore, we have no other textual sources from the same time and region, so that only the Vedic texts themselves can shed light on this period in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

compared to the early Vedic period. Rather than just petitioning a god to intervene favourably the ritual has become an all-pervading way of manipulating reality. The proliferation of rituals and ritual theory in the form of the Brāhmaṇa texts is naturally in the interest of the class directly benefiting from this development: the brahmins who performed and officiated at rituals. In the process the ritual was given more and more meaning until it changed from a petition to a manipulation with proven effect. Deities and other entities are somewhat diminished in their abilities and personalities and have been likened to mere cogs in the machine of the ritual.¹³ Since the ritual became all-encompassing it starts to be understandable that the ritual commentaries did not stop at the interpretation of the ritual alone but instead widened the scope to nature and society as well. Nature and society become relevant to the discussion because they too can now be influenced and manipulated by the ritual and its priests. As the manipulators of reality it becomes more understandable that brahmins claimed the first rank for themselves. The belief in the power of ritual was taken to remarkable extremes as can be seen in the following quote from the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa:

"By him who knows thus that sun is led westward by means of his (soma) pressings, led eastward again by means of the *pariyāya* (a regularly recurring formula),¹⁴ (and) raised in the east by means of the *āśvina (śāstra)*."¹⁵ (1.212)¹⁶

If the priests claimed that kind of power over nature it is no wonder that they portrayed themselves as the leading class of society. But brahmin priests did not use their ritual-derived powers as the only argument for their own superiority. One other way, as we will see below, is

¹³ See, e.g., Oldenberg 1919: pp. 10ff., and Jamison 1992: pp. 60, 70ff.

¹⁴ See Mylius 1995: pp. 88f.

¹⁵ A *śāstra* is the recitation of verses by the Hotar priest and his assistants. See Mylius 1995: p. 123.

¹⁶ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 118.

the use of correlative hierarchies. Many passages contain schematic models of society with brahmins at the top or, more realistically, with brahmins and *kṣatriyas* at the top. There are, however, a small number of passages where difference of rank and its difficulties are mentioned as an aside. The potential reasons to be worried were manifold. Problems could arise when brahmins were challenged by *kṣatriyas* or when the lower classes did not cooperate in their own exploitation. It is these almost Freudian slips that allow us to catch glimpses of Vedic life. We have mentioned above how the Ṛgveda explains the four different classes of society. The same theme of primordial birth is picked up in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Here, it is Prajāpati¹⁷ who brings forth¹⁸ the different classes and other entities:

"In the beginning Prajāpati was (all) this. Prajāpati was the sense organ mind. He wished: "May I become many. Let me procreate. May I become abundant." From (his) top, from (his) head, he created the *trivṛt* stoma,¹⁹ the metre *gāyatrī*, the *rathantara* melody, the deity Agni, the human being brahmin, (and) the animal goat. Therefore the brahmin has the metre *gāyatrī* and the deity Agni. And therefore he is the head of the beings because (Prajāpati) created him from (his) head. He wished: "Let me procreate." From (his) two arms and from (his) chest he created the *pañcadaśa* stoma, the metre *triṣṭubh*, the *bṛhat* melody, the deity Indra, the human being *rājanya*, (and) the animal horse. Therefore the *rājanya* has the metre *triṣṭubh* and the deity Indra. And therefore he acts powerfully with (his) two arms because (Prajāpati) created him from (his) two arms, his chest, his power. He wished: "Let me procreate." From his abdomen, his middle, he created the *saptadaśa* stoma, the metre *jagatī*, the *vāmadevya* melody, the deity All-gods, the human being

¹⁷ The rise of Prajāpati ("lord of the beings") is probably the most remarkable development of the Vedic religion. He rises to the position of main and creator god. However, unlike his earlier Ṛgvedic forbears Prajāpati somewhat lacks personality. He is a more abstract god and does not seem to have any noticeable character traits (cf. Jamison 1992: p. 60) with the exception of his incestuous desire for his own daughter. And even this trait is borrowed from another deity, i.e. Dyaus and his daughter Uṣas, the dawn (see Oberlies 2012: p. 172.).

¹⁸ Remarkably enough, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa contains dozens of similar stories in which Prajāpati finds himself alone in the beginning and starts to create entities of all sorts. It seems the composers of the text did not see any contradiction in the reiteration and constant adaptation of this trope. Rather, it seems to be a formulaic strategy that could be made to fit into whichever context it was needed. These seemingly ad-hoc cosmogonies, however, play a very important part in the justification of the social hierarchy. See Smith 1994: pp. 58ff. They are also typical for this class of texts, in which many explanations are variations on a theme.

¹⁹ A *stoma* is the way verses are sung by the Udgātar priest and his assistants. See Mylius 1995: p. 138.

vaiśya, (and) the animal cow. Therefore the *vaiśya* has the metre *jagatī* and the deity All-gods. And therefore he is procreating because (Prajāpati) created him from (his) abdomen, from (his) sexual organ. He wished: "Let me procreate." From (his) two feet, from (his) support, he created the *ekaviṃśa* stoma, the metre *anuṣṭubh*, the *yajñāyajñīya* melody, no deity whatsoever, the human being *sūdra*, (and) the animal sheep. Therefore the *sūdra* has the metre *anuṣṭubh* and the master of the house²⁰ as (his) god. Therefore he desires to live by washing feet because (Prajāpati) created him from (his) two feet, (his) support." (1.68-69)²¹

As we can see the Jaiminīya version follows the Ṛgvedic original quite closely while adding a number of entities to the picture. A remarkable change is the shift of the *vaiśya*'s birthplace from thighs to abdomen and/or penis of Prajāpati. Since the *vaiśya* class is mostly identified with the production of food and other goods this is a logical innovation that ties the explanation closer to the implied symbolism. The four different classes have here clearly demarcated functions in the public sphere: brahmins are literally the brain of society managing religion and the secret knowledge relating to it. *Kṣatriyas* are power personified, leading others in battle and elsewhere. The *vaiśyas* are the class of production being heavily identified with fertility. The contrast to the lowest class is striking: Not only has the *sūdra* no associated deity except his landlord, his rank is marked as one of servitude washing other people's feet.²² It seems self-evident that this hierarchy was not in the interest of the lower classes, particularly the *sūdras*. But in tying the ranking of society to the divine will of a creator-god the composers imbued it with religious significance. As a god-willed order this model of society was nigh impossible to attack or change from within. It enabled brahmins to defend their high rank while assigning other classes what to do. We

²⁰ The term *veśmapati* appears to be a *hapax legomenon*. Given the semantical, if not genetical, closeness of *veśmapati* and *grhapati* I assume that the former is but a variation of the latter. Rau 1957: p. 39, mentions this passage as the only instance of the term.

²¹ The passage has been translated into German by Caland and into English by Bodewitz. See Caland 1919: pp. 14f. and Bodewitz 1990: pp. 38f.

²² The washing of feet is a universally understood sign of humility. One is reminded of the same action performed by the Pope and other clergy on Maundy Thursday.

should consider, too, that *kṣatriyas* even though they only attain the second rank are nonetheless beneficiaries of this model. Their de-facto rulership is ideologically underpinned and thus easier to defend. Brahmins are providing *kṣatriyas* with a religious justification for their exalted rank just as they are doing for their own class.

Implicit or explicit hierarchies, however, are not only found in remarks about human society. They can also be detected in the natural world and particularly the animal kingdom. The next passage correlates the syllables of a *prastāva* (prelude of a melody)²³ with bipeds and eight-hoofed animals, artiodactyla, respectively:

"He (the priest) sings the *prastāva* with eight syllables. The following two with two syllables. Thus he raises the bipeds above the eight-hoofed animals. Therefore the biped stands above eight-hoofed animals." (1.135)²⁴

This explanation of the superiority of man over animal is almost completely identical with the one found in a later discussion. There, man is raised above quadrupeds in general. This example also helps illustrate the flexibility and adaptability of certain explanations to fit the desired context. In the first case, the explanation was used in the context of the *agniṣṭoma* ritual and the number of syllables used in the *prastāvas*. In the second case, the ritual is the *atirātra* and the object under discussion the melody and metres:

"There is one melody (and) two metres. He (the priest) raises the bipeds over the quadrupeds. Therefore the biped stands above the quadrupeds." (1.213)²⁵

²³ See Mylius 1995: p. 98.

²⁴ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 76 and Caland 1919: pp. 37f. One should note here that the text singles out eight-hoofed animal while ignoring the ones with four hooves like horses or asses. This is most likely due to the necessities of the ritual discussion. The number of syllables was eight and so an analogous counterpart needed to be used. Vedic Indians, however, were keen observers of the natural world and divided animals into different classes depending on the shape of their feet or teeth. See Smith 1991: pp. 529ff. for an excellent discussion.

The power human beings have over animals is also expressed in another striking image: the eater (*attar*) and the eaten (*ādyā*); as can be seen in the following discussion of the metre *virāj* which contains 10 syllables:

"Now the human (*virāj*). There are four eaters and six who are eaten. Brahmin, *rājanya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra* are the eaters. Cow, horse, goat, sheep, rice, and barley are eaten." (1.252)²⁶

We find this differentiation between eater and eaten not only with respect to human beings²⁷ and animals. It is used within the animal kingdom as well:

"(The melodies) *bṛhat* and *rathantara* were created. Afterwards the animals were created. The ones which belong to the *rathantara* were created after the *rathantara*. The ones belonging to the *bṛhat* after the *bṛhat*. The animals belonging to the *rathantara* are the ones who are eaten. The ones belonging to the *bṛhat* are eaters. Since he (the priest) sings the *prastāva* with the verse of the *rathantara* without embellishing it with *stobhas* therefore the *rathantara* animals stand on bones (=hooves) (and) are eaten. Since he sings the *prastāva* with (the verse) of the *bṛhat* embellishing it with *stobhas*²⁸ therefore the *bṛhat* animals stand on flesh (and) are eaters." (1.297)²⁹

The image of eater and eaten might be crudest expression of a power relationship, but differentiation of social strata along class lines can be found in various guises, often in the correlation of metres or melodies and *varṇas* which are then ranked. What is noteworthy here is an absolute lack of fluidity in the hierarchy. We never find passages that place *kṣatriyas* for example at the highest rank, instead this spot is always claimed for the brahmins. On the other hand, the text propagates collaboration of the two highest classes in order to dominate the lower

²⁵ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 119.

²⁶ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 140

²⁷ It is indeed used in many instances to denote on the one hand someone who receives food or goods (the eater) and on the other hand the person who has to offer these goods (the eaten). See Rau 1957: pp. 32ff. for a discussion of this and related terminology.

²⁸ *Stobhas* are sung verses in which certain words are replaced by interjections. See Mylius 1995: pp. 137f.

²⁹ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 168 and Caland 1919: pp. 121f.

ones. This is probably to be expected since both brahmins and *kṣatriyas* were dependent on the *vaiśyas* and to a lesser extent the *sūdras*. It was after all the *vaiśya*-class that produced food and other goods. It seems that society became differentiated enough that division of labour came about.³⁰ With brahmins concentrating on the production, application, and transmission of sacred knowledge and the *kṣatriyas* as a class of rulers and warriors it fell to the lower classes to plough the fields, tend and milk the cows, goats, and sheep, etc. It is the tension between assumed superiority and dependency that is negotiated in many instances. We end up with a society in which, at least according to the brahmin composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, brahmins and even more so *kṣatriyas* controlled the means of production, but had other people work for them. This is, however, not how the text expresses it. Ritual analogy is again used to explain why higher ranking people enjoy a better life:

""Cut it (=the evil that had been attached to Prajāpati) into three parts!" (said Prajāpati to the *brahman*). (The *brahman*) cut it (=the evil) into three parts. That became his (=Prajāpati's) splendour: one third the cow, one third sleep, one third shade. Therefore someone high ranking (*śreṣṭha*) has the most of these: the most animals, the best shade, (and) he sleeps (the most)." (2.370)³¹

In order to justify the stratification of society, the text uses a number of strategies. There is the appeal to a natural ranking as we have seen in the founding myth of the four classes. But there are also exhortations for brahmins and *kṣatriyas* to work together and not to become divided. The following passage, while being a discussion of melodies, has to also be read as an example for the futility of rivalry amongst their two classes. Two melodies engage in a fruitless competition only to realise in the end that neither is superior:

"When Prajāpati created the *brhat* and the *rathantara* (melodies) he first saw the mind, the *brhat*. (Then) he uttered speech, the *rathantara*. Since he uttered speech, the

³⁰ Cf. Rau 1957: pp. 20ff. Rau cites a number of rather specialised occupations on page 27.

³¹ Cf. Tsuchida 1979: p. 116, and Caland 1919: p. 206.

rathantara (first) therefore the *rathantara* obtained the earlier application. But because he saw the mind, the *br̥hat*, first therefore they are called *br̥hat* and *rathantara* (instead of *rathantara* and *br̥hat*). The mind is indeed the earlier, then comes speech. The *rathantara* is *brahman* (the brahmin class), the *br̥hat* is *kṣatra* (lit. power, rulership, but also the *kṣatriya* class). Now the mind, i.e. the *kṣatra*, valued speech, i.e. the *brahman*, less than itself. The *rathantara* knew: "It (=the *br̥hat*) values me less than itself." It created the *vairūpa* (melody). With it (the *rathantara*) went around and in front of (the *br̥hat*). Having become two (the *rathantara* and the *vairūpa*) valued (the *br̥hat*) less than themselves. The *br̥hat* knew: "It (=the *rathantara*) values me less than itself." It created the *vairāja* (melody). With it (the *br̥hat*) went around and in front of (the *rathantara*). Having become two (the *br̥hat* and the *vairāja*) valued (the *rathantara*) less than themselves. The *rathantara* knew: "It (=the *br̥hat*) values me less than itself." It created the *śākvara* (melody). With it (the *rathantara*) went around and in front of (the *br̥hat*). Having become three (the *rathantara*, the *vairūpa*, and the *śākvara*) valued (the *br̥hat*) less than themselves. The *br̥hat* knew: "It (=the *rathantara*) values me less than itself." It created the *raivata* (melody). With it (the *br̥hat*) went around and in front of (the *rathantara*). Having become three (the *br̥hat*, the *vairāja*, and the *raivata*) valued (the *rathantara*) less than themselves. The two of them (= *br̥hat* and *rathantara*) reached the end. They realised: "We two are equal. One is not above the other." (3.316)

The need for unity is expressed in other passages as well and seems to be one of the defining features of any discussion on class in the text. We should not underestimate the potentially precarious situation brahmins must have found themselves in. They did not only depend on *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* for sustenance and manual labour, but also on *kṣatriyas* in several ways.³² It is probably safe to assume that *kṣatriyas* wielded actual power in ancient India while brahmins nevertheless claimed the highest rank in society. However, we can see in the brahmanical desire to obtain the position of a *purohita* an expression of dependency. A *purohita* worked as the main and permanently employed priest of a Vedic chieftain.³³ The occupation entails high prestige, but more importantly a level of security in the standard of living not enjoyed by freelance priests. It

³² It would be of great interest to know which percentage of the population were brahmins, *kṣatriyas*, or other classes. Unfortunately, the paucity of our sources does not allow us to draw clear conclusions. It seems fairly certain, however, that the upper two classes found themselves in the minority. Hence the need to maintain and justify their superiority. Cf. Smith 1994: pp. 42ff. Even today, the situation is rather unclear because of the confusion between class and caste as well as sensitivities of the population when asked about their class. See Rothermund 2008: pp. 203ff.

³³ See Oldenberg 1970: pp. 375ff.

could happen, however, that a *purohita* got replaced if his religious activities did not bring about the desired effect such as victory in battle. Or if he would be challenged by another priest whose insight into the workings of the ritual was more sophisticated.³⁴ Obtaining gainful employment tied brahmins to wealthy and powerful *kṣatriyas*. In this light, the call for unity among these two upper classes is logical if not downright self-preserving on the part of brahmins. Time and again, the theme of unity and equality gets woven into the discussion of ritual intricacies. As in the following passage which is a discussion of the melodies used on the third day of a twelve day ritual:

"(This third day) becomes solely the reigning order (*kṣatra*). That the *yauktāśva* (melody) is (used) in the beginning (and) the *vāsiṣṭha* (melody) in the end, i.e. two melodies of the seers, that is for the equilibrium of the *brahman* (and the *kṣatra*). The *brahman* should be *samadyāmy*³⁵ with the *kṣatra*." (3.26)

We can conclude from this passage that the ritual commentators felt the need to reach an equipoise among brahmins and *kṣatriyas* symbolically in the ritual. Since the ritual was considered to have life-changing abilities these instructions must be aiming at the fear that brahmins might be dominated by *kṣatriyas*. This social reality is mentioned in a discussion of the different metres:

"Then Saṃgamana Kṣaimi sent out by (his) teacher Āruṇi asked Satyayajña Pauluṣi: "Satyayajña Pauluṣi, even though the (metre) *gāyatrī* is praised (and) they praise the

³⁴ Cf. the following passage in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa:

"Keśin Dārbhya once expelled Ahīnas Aśvatthi from the office of *purohita* (and replaced him) with Keśin Sātyakāmi. Ahīnas was older, Keśin (Sātyakāmi) younger. (Ahīnas) said: "Keśin, knowing what did you take the *rājanya* away from me?" He answered: "Now, we consider the *anuṣṭubh* to be all metres (and) the *bṛhatī* to be cattle, the sacrifice, (and) heavenly space." He (Ahīnas) was afflicted by pain and lamented. (Keśin) said to him: "Do not lament! If you lament wishing for a *rājanya* then this *rājanya* is yours. We will look for another *rājanya*." He said: "Keśin, this is not because I wish to have a *rājanya*. Remembering my student days I felt despair. And I did study. Now, (only) near old age we have heard what such a young boy as this has told. Remembering this I was afflicted by pain." (1.285). Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 161, and Caland 1919: p. 111. On the term *asra*, see Hoffmann 1982: pp. 62f.

³⁵ The word is nowhere else attested if this is even the right reading. The meaning is unclear.

(metre) *triṣṭubh*, but the (metre) *jagatī* is unpraised, how is it that they all unite and offer the midday pressing?" He did not answer. With this he (= Saṃgamana) defeated him (= Satyayajña). If only he had answered: "Since brahmins and *vaiśyas* approach a *kṣatriya* respectfully from below, (and) since they are his subjects (*ādyā*),³⁶ (and) because this quarter of the verse has twelve syllables."" (1.285)³⁷

This passage is on the other hand almost immediately followed by a reaffirmation of brahmins' and *kṣatriyas*' mutual dependence. Here, their respective food is considered collective property and the two classes choose each other as guarantors of that livelihood. Yet the discussion ends on a twist when *kṣatriyas* get cast into the role of the protectors of brahmins:

"Then (the metre) *Brhatī*. Then (the metre) *Triṣṭubh*. Thus, food is grasped from both sides by *brahman* and *kṣatra*. The food that is grasped from both sides by *brahman* and *kṣatra* serves him who knows thus. Therefore a brahmin should not harm a *kṣatriya* nor (should) a *kṣatriya* (harm) a brahmin because (their) food³⁸ is (their) common (property). When a brahmin reaches a high position³⁹ he therefore chooses a *kṣatriya* as the second protector of his food. (In the same vein) a *kṣatriya* (chooses) a brahmin. He who knows thus finds a *kṣatriya* as a protector." (1.287)⁴⁰

According to the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa the priest can work towards the support of both classes while at the same time gaining the position of a *purohita*. Under discussion is a variation of the melody sung during the *ukthya*-part of the *jyotiṣṭoma* ritual. Different melodies can bring about different results for the user. In this case the priest wishes to obtain the position of a *purohita*:

"Someone who desires to become *purohita* should use the *daivodāsa* (melody during the first *uktha stotra*). The brahmin belongs to Agni, the *rājanya* to Indra. This melody belongs to both Agni and Indra. Agni is *brahman*, Indra is *kṣatra*. Thus he supports⁴¹ the

³⁶ Literally "to be eaten" as we have seen above in the discussion of eater and eaten.

³⁷ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 162 and p. 301, notes 37 and 38.

³⁸ It is common sense to assume that the term *annādya* does not only denote food in this instance. It seems logical to take it in a broader sense encompassing property in general. On the terminology of *anna* and *annādya*, see Weber-Brosamer 1993: pp. 7ff.

³⁹ For a short discussion of the phrase *mahad √gam* see Bodewitz 1973: p. 286.

⁴⁰ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 163, and Caland 1919: pp. 113f.

⁴¹ The reading should be "dādhāra" instead of "dadhāra." Cf. Kümmel 2000: p. 68.

kṣatra with the *brahman* and the *brahman* with the *kṣatra*. Thus his dominion does not dissipate, he gains the position of a *purohita*, they place him in front." (1.182)⁴²

In their power over reality by means of controlling the ritual brahmins find a justification for their alleged superiority over the other classes. Brahmins claim this position in a number of instances in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. The following passage contains an interesting double entendre. It can be read as brahmins' being superior to *kṣatriyas* or simply as brahmins' being *purohitas* of *kṣatriyas*:

"There is an *agniṣṭut*⁴³ that has a *trivṛt* (stoma) as (its) *agniṣṭoma*. The *trivṛt* is *brahman*. The six-day offering with *prṣṭha* (melodies) is *kṣatra*. Since they perform the *agniṣṭut* before the six-day offering with *prṣṭha* (melodies) therefore they place *brahman* before *kṣatra*. Therefore the brahmin is placed in front⁴⁴ of the *kṣatriya*." (2.340)⁴⁵

The following, rather lengthy, quote presents the claim to superiority much clearer and demonstrates a certain self-interest in the discussion of ritual details. It is the first half of a discussion that deals with the possessions of brahmins and other classes and how they might be shared:

"The morning pressing (of soma) relates to the *gāyatrī*, the midday pressing to the *triṣṭubh*, (and) the third pressing to the *jagatī*. The *anuṣṭubh* is connected to them. When he (the priest) sings a *gāyatrī* (verse) during the morning pressing which relates to the *gāyatrī*, he thereby puts *brahman* in its own place – (because) the *gāyatrī* is *brahman*, (and) the morning pressing is *brahman*. When he sings a *triṣṭubh* (verse) – the *triṣṭubh* is *kṣatra*, (and) in the *kṣatra* there are these ornaments: the elephant, the golden neck ornament, the cart drawn by a she-mule, the chariot drawn by a horse, the golden chest ornament, the drinking vessel – he offers (all) these to *brahman* and adorns (it with them). When he sings a *jagatī* (verse) – the *jagatī* is *viś* (the *vaiśya*-class), (and) in the *viś* there are these ornaments: the cow and the horse, the elephant and gold, the goat and the sheep, rice and barley, sesame and beans, ghee, milk, wealth, (and) prosperity - he offers (all) these to *brahman* and adorns (it with them). The *anuṣṭubh* is connected to them. When he

⁴² Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 103, and Caland 1919: pp.73f.

⁴³ A specific one-day soma sacrifice. See Mylius 1995: p. 24.

⁴⁴ Or: "Therefore the brahmin is the *purohita* of the *kṣatriya*."

⁴⁵ Cf. Tsuchida 1973: pp. 81f.

sings an *anuṣṭubh* (verse) – the *śūdra* belongs to the *anuṣṭubh* – he (takes) it⁴⁶ from the *śūdra*, offers it to *brahman* and adorns (it with them)." (1.263)⁴⁷

Finally, the following discussion of the *prṣṭhya śaḍaha* and the stomas that should be used makes the ranking of the social classes clear. One class is explicitly called better than another. There is one detail, however, that complicates the status of the *śūdra* as we have seen it so far: He is called the eater of domesticated animals. It is difficult to ascertain if those animals were actually in his possession or if he was sustained by the upper classes.⁴⁸ In any case, the normal hierarchy of society remains the same that we have already encountered:

"He should say: "The *trivṛt* (*stoma*) is *brahman*. The *pañcadaśa* (*stoma*) is *kṣatra*. The *brahman* is indeed superior (*jyāyas*) to the *kṣatra*. Therefore it (= *brahman*?) has gone from something similar to something similar. The *saptadaśa* (*stoma*) is *viś*. The *kṣatra* is indeed superior to the *viś*. Therefore it (= *kṣatra*?) has gone from something similar to something similar. The *śūdra* (comes) after the *ekaviṃśa stoma*. The *vaiśya* is indeed superior to the *śūdra*. Therefore he (= *vaiśya*?) has gone from something similar to something similar. The domesticated animals (come) after the *triṇava stoma*. The *śūdra* is indeed superior to the domesticated animals because he is their eater. Therefore he (= *śūdra*?) has gone from something similar to something similar. The wild animals (come) after the *trayastrīṃśa stoma*. The domesticated animals are indeed superior to the wild animals. The first move around being afraid, the second approach and kill the first. Therefor it has gone from something similar to something similar." (2.32)

Usually, it is the class of the *vaiśyas* that is connected to the possession of cattle and the production of food. Their cattle, as we will see, could be taken by someone stronger in what amounts to little more than the law of the strongest. In the following excerpt, Indra takes cows from the Maruts, his own people:

"Having told king Soma, Indra captured one thousand (cows) from the Maruts, his own people (*viś*). Accordingly, they now capture (something) from the people after having told the chieftain." (2.249)

⁴⁶ Unfortunately, it is unclear what exactly the *tad* is referring to here. It seems the *śūdra's* unspecified property is implied. Note, however, that the text does not list a single specific possession of the *śūdra*-class which is somewhat reminiscent of passage 1.68-69 where the *śūdra* does not have his own deity.

⁴⁷ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 149.

⁴⁸ Rau assumes that *śūdras* could indeed possess herds of animals or other wealth, given that they are called *bahupuṣṭa* (greatly prosperous) and *bahupaśu* (rich in cattle) in other texts. See Rau 1957: pp.48f. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, however, does not mention a *śūdra* in connection to any possible property except potentially in the instance above.

Considering this quote, it appears to have been acceptable to take the possessions of *vaiśyas* as long as the chieftain was informed before. One should note that the mythological example is Indra, the god most associated with the class of the *kṣatriyas*. It seems then that *kṣatriyas* could rightfully take away cattle and potentially other animals or things from *vaiśyas* – probably by violent means too if necessary.⁴⁹ This status of powerlessness might also be a reason that the term *vaiśya* could effectively be used as an insult⁵⁰ to someone higher ranking. The seer Vasiṣṭha is remarkably insulted as such by other seers. It remains entirely unclear from the context why they would do so, but the allegation is stinging enough that Vasiṣṭha employs ritualistic countermeasures:

"The seers insulted Vasiṣṭha (saying): "You are a *vaiśya*, a non-brahmin (*abrāhmaṇa*)."
He desired: "I want to overcome the difficulty, the evil." He saw this melody. He praised with it. With (the melody, the finale of which is) "e, we want to overcome all difficulties" he overcame the difficulty, the evil." (3.195)

It seems that this allegation attacks a vital interest of Vasiṣṭha. Why else would he need to counter this insult so drastically, calling it a difficulty (*durita*) and an evil (*pāpman*)? We must not forget that being employed as a priest brought palpable material benefits with it. However, to be employed as a priest it was helpful to have a certain renown.⁵¹ This might be one of the

⁴⁹ A very interesting parallel can be found in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (Mādhyandina recension): "When he desires it the kṣatriya says: "Vaiśya, bring to me what you have stowed away!" (1.3.2.15). Cf. Eggeling 1882: p. 82.

⁵⁰ Amusingly, the term for farmer is even today used as an insult in Modern High German to berate someone's intellect. However, at the same time the term "*bauernschlau*" describes a particular kind of shrewdness, said to be particular to farmers. Cf. also the English term "horse-sense."

⁵¹ Cf. the case of Janaka, the chief of Videha, and the brahmin Sucitta Śailāna:

"There are three *virāj*- (metres): the divine, the ritualistic, and the human. Sucitta Śailāna discussed them with Janaka Vaideha. He (Janaka) said: "The desire to sacrifice has befallen me. Let them summon some priests (*ṛtvij*) for me!" They summoned some Kuru-Pañcāla priests for him. When they arrived Śailāna feared: "The foreigners, who are like brahmins, have arrived. This one (Janaka) should not think lightly (?) of them." He said: "Lord, this is my statement. The three *virāj* are not thirsty, fulfilling all wishes, and are called food (*anna*). Choose as your *Udgātar* (-priest) him who places you among them! He is indeed

reasons Vasiṣṭha reacts so tetchily to the insult. Ritual experts depended on their knowledge and their rank as brahmins⁵² to obtain gainful employment. To be deprived of that rank must not only have meant a loss of face but also loss of income. Therefore, even the insinuation had to be ritually mitigated.

Another passage notes that *kṣatriyas* specifically are higher than *vaiśyas*. It seems this is another instance where social reality is couched in religious terms; here, by correlating the *kṣatriya* class with the sun. A particularly apt image as the sun towers high above the world:

"That sun is *kṣatra* (the *kṣatriya* class). They raise the *kṣatra* up (and place it) on the couch of the gods. Therefore the *kṣatriya* is raised above the *viś* (the *vaiśya* class)."
(2.344)

One aspect, so far undiscussed, is the question how one actually becomes a brahmin, *kṣatriya*, or *vaiśya*. This is not discussed much in the texts, maybe because the concept was already established enough that it did not need further elucidation. However, it seems clear that one normally became a member of one of these classes by birth. The boundaries between the classes appear to have been fairly rigid. But we can see some instances where individuals transcended their respective class boundaries as we will see below. Another way to deal with the rigidity was

the conveyor of these wishes which are among (the *virāj*). He who knows thus crosses over re-death (punarmṛtyu)." He (Śailana) went away. About it (Janaka) summoned (the priests). He asked them about the success of these *virāj*. They did not obtain it. One who obtained it, obtained only one (of them). (Janaka) sat (thinking): "I saw a brahmin, a (real ?) brahmin who was investigating them. Run (and fetch) Śailāna!" The *viyajana* (?) was as Śailana had desired it." (1.245-246) Cf. Bodewitz 1990: pp. 136f.

We can see that Śailana was able to outwit the ritual experts summoned by chief Janaka thus potentially gaining a position as priest himself.

⁵² See, however, Rau 1957: p. 63, who argues that to become a brahmin was solely depending on one's knowledge instead of one's ancestry. All in all, I do not find his conclusion warranted. But his citations highlight that class boundaries were somewhat fluid.

to simply acquire what befit other classes. Brahmins, for example, tried to gain fame equal to that of *kṣatriyas*:

" He who knows thus, even though he is a brahmin, has the fame (*prakāśa*) of a *kṣatriya*." (3.34)⁵³

Importantly, even though the status of a brahmin is attained by birth, it needs to be maintained by appropriate conduct. Later, late and post-Vedic, texts excel at the enumeration of behaviours inappropriate for brahmins or other classes.⁵⁴ The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is much curter but uses the opportunity to claim that *kṣatriyas* are dependent on brahmins and that *vaiśyas* are different from either class:

"...therefore, when a brahmin is born he is born having (this) rank.⁵⁵ But he makes it better or worse through (his) conduct.

...therefore the position of a *rājanya* is to be made by sacrificial merit, faith, and friendliness towards brahmins.

...therefore the *vaiśya* is different in rank from brahmin and *rājanya*, because he does not have the same position as a brahmin or *rājanya*." (1.244)⁵⁶

The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa gives the following reason why the behaviour of brahmins needs to be (ritualistically) pure:

"He who knows the gods' drinking vessel becomes worthy to partake of a meal among his own people. The brahmin is indeed the gods' drinking vessel. He who knows thus becomes worthy to partake of a meal among his own people. Just like they want to drink from a clean and pure drinking vessel the gods want to drink from a clean and pure brahmin. Therefore a brahmin should desire to be clean and pure." (1.282)⁵⁷

⁵³ Complete parallel in 1.137; cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 77.

⁵⁴ See Olivelle 2005: pp. 95ff.

⁵⁵ The term *lokin* denotes someone who has a position or rank, literally someone who has space.

⁵⁶ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 136.

⁵⁷ Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 108f.; Bodewitz 1990: p. 160.

As far as the transcendence of one's class is concerned there is very little information in the text. The surmounting of the class barrier between *kṣatriyas* and brahmins is found only twice in the entire Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. We do not see any other cases where people attain a new class, such as *vaiśyas* becoming *kṣatriyas*. The question in how far this categorisations mattered in the realities of middle Vedic society has unfortunately to remain unanswered. There is simply no unbiased or non-brahmin source to provide us with information about those realities. We can assume that a system, that is so inflexible and schematic at the same time, was constantly undermined by the messiness of real life. It should not be underestimated, however, what kind of pressure an ideal of life and society could exert. Especially a system that was so enmeshed with religious thought could be used to justify existing power differentials or create new ones. If superiority is claimed often enough, it seems that it becomes more acceptable until a system is reached where different classes of society enjoy different rights and their lives different value.⁵⁸ Be that as it may, it point to note here is that it was displayed as desirable to reach the rank and status of a brahmin implying a prestige inherent in this class that could not normally be matched by *kṣatriyas* and certainly not by *vaiśyas* or *śūdras*. Consider the following passage where a chieftain desires to become a brahmin and seer:

"Divodāsa Vādhryaśvi desired: "Let me obtain both *brahman* and *kṣatra*. Even though I am chieftain, let me (also) be a seer." He saw this melody. He praised with it. Then he obtained both *brahman* and *kṣatra*. Even though he was a chieftain, he (also) became a

⁵⁸ The post-Vedic dharmaśāstras are a case in point; see e.g. Olivelle 2005: pp. 221f. At the same time these texts also present us with the same problem that we are facing with the Brāhmaṇas as well. They are descriptions of an idealised society composed by brahmins not a faithful depiction of reality. Cf. Olivelle 2005: pp. 39ff.

seer. He who knows thus obtain both *brahman* and *kṣatra*. Even though he is a chieftain, he becomes a seer (as well). (1.222)⁵⁹

Outside the four class system, we can also detect instances of hierarchies: certain kinds of behaviour are said to be adopted or avoided when dealing with someone of higher ranking. The terms most often used in these instances are *śreyas*, *śreṣṭhin*, *śreṣṭha*, all of which are derived from the word *śrī*. This presents us with the problem of how to translate these expressions because *śrī* itself denotes several concepts in Sanskrit. Most fundamentally denoting splendour or lustre it has taken on several additional, albeit related, meanings such as prosperity, wealth, power, or high rank. How, then, should the derivative terms be understood? Are they simply denoting people who are richer than others? Or do they indicate that someone is inherently of higher rank irregardless of his wealth? Again, the scarcity of sources does not allow us to decide this question unequivocally.⁶⁰ But we can note that the difference in rank, whatever the cause, entails subservient behaviour⁶¹ on the part of the lower ranks. E.g. lower ranks copy what the higher ranks say:

"...This is the reason that someone low ranking (*pāpīyas*) repeats the words which someone high ranking (*śreṣṭhin*) has uttered." (3.21)

⁵⁹ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 126, and Caland 1919: p. 86. This passage is found verbatim in 3.97 with the exception of the dramatis persona, which in this case is called Anūpa Dhītoni. It notably foreshadows the treatment of Viśvāmitra in the Epics. In virtually all Vedic texts, Viśvāmitra is considered purely a seer and the composer of the third book of the Ṛgveda. In the Epics, however, he is a king being in constant competition with the seer Vasiṣṭha. Through means of austerity he subsequently becomes a seer and brahmin. Cf. Macdonell 1912b: pp. 310ff.

⁶⁰ Rau mitigates the questions by claiming that higher ranking people probably enjoyed respect based on their wealth. See Rau 1957: pp. 32ff.

⁶¹ We have already seen above that *vaiśyas* and even brahmin are said to be subjects of *kṣatriyas* and should approach them respectfully.

This quote can be read with a fairly confined interpretation, i.e. that a specific utterance or sentiment is repeated by someone of lower rank. However, the expression used in Sanskrit is *vāc* which can be understood as speech more generally. It is possible that people of lower rank tried to explicitly copy the prestigious sociolect of the higher classes. The composers of Vedic texts certainly had a good ear for different speech patterns as witnessed by a passage where the son of a chieftain is (presumably) insulted as someone who speaks like an Easterner:⁶²

"His (the chieftain of the Kosalas) son spoke like an Easterner." (1.338)⁶³

The following passage has another account of how one should approach people of high rank and it also introduces the trope of criticising the way food is served to them:

"...therefore when they (the priests) are going to praise with the *Bahiṣpavamāna*- (laud) they creep bowing and trembling, as it were. This is like the serving of a superior (*śreyas*). Therefore one must not speak during its *stotra*. For who would be allowed to speak ill of the serving of food to a superior? He (the superior) bends him (the inferior), who speaks ill of the serving of food to a superior, with whichever injury he likes." (1.278)⁶⁴

The exact meaning of this behaviour remains unclear to me. It is a rather specific grievance that has found its expression in the text. Furthermore, the retaliation for this transgression seems hardly proportionate. The concern might not have been the insult itself but rather the capriciousness of the superior. It appears that being powerful gave people licence to mistreat lower ranking people when insulted. We encounter the same punishment in two more passages where, however, the nature of the insult is even more obscure than before:

⁶² On Vedic dialects in general, see Witzel 1989.

⁶³ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 191, and Caland 1919: pp. 129f.

⁶⁴ Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 158. See also Rau 1957: p. 33. The last two sentences of the quote are found word for word in 3.303.

"The superior (*śreyas*) hurts him, who climbs up (to the superior) unbeknownst.⁶⁵ He (the superior) bends him (the inferior) with whichever injury he likes." (2.336)⁶⁶

The question if this "climbing up" (*upa-adhi-√ruh*) should be understood literally or figuratively is, it seems to me, undecidable. Both interpretations would offer us an interesting glimpse into the way hierarchy was conceived of. Taken literally, this quote would imply that people of higher rank were actually standing in or sitting on an elevated place, maybe a platform.

Understood figuratively, this would imply that the composers of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa saw society ordered vertically with people of lower rank trying to climb up the "greasy pole" to the higher ranks. The figurative meaning can be made more probable through the following passage which discusses details of the 24-day-ritual:

"He who reaches prosperity (*śrī*) reaches the "sitting-above" (*upariśadya*). Let us reach "sitting-above," seniority (*jyaiṣṭhya*), superiority (*śraiṣṭhya*), (and) prosperity!" (2.348)⁶⁷

We encounter the term *jyaiṣṭhya* again in a passage where it is correlated with the metre *Gāyatrī*.

It is implied that an exalted position in society could be achieved by means of the ritual:

"The *Gāyatrī* is indeed seniority (*jyaiṣṭhya*). They (= the sacrificers) are thus firmly established in seniority." (2.346)⁶⁸

The highest rank in society is something that the brahmin composers of the Brāhmaṇa texts quite openly coveted and claimed. In order to achieve that goal they also occasionally reminded *kṣatriyas* of their lower rank. 2.269-272, e.g., discusses the *Aśvamedha*, the horse sacrifice, employed to further the power of a chieftain and to proclaim his suzerainty over neighbouring

⁶⁵ Or potentially: unauthorised.

⁶⁶ Cf. Tsuchida 1979: p. 77. The passage is repeated verbatim in 2.340.

⁶⁷ Cf. Tsuchida 1979: p. 91.

⁶⁸ Cf. Tsuchida 1979: p. 88. Also repeated in 2.361.

territories. This is one the costliest, most complicated, and ostentatious rituals in the Vedic repertoire.⁶⁹ Even though the focus of the ritual is almost entirely on the chieftain and his power, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa uses almost the entire discussion to relate the story of a feuding chieftain and a brahmin. The story is rather long but worth quoting extensively because it gives us a fascinating insight into the tensions between the upper two classes:

"Maunḍibha Udanyu, chieftain of the Udanyus, sacrificed once with this (horse sacrifice). Yavakrī Saumastambi sat down at the *āstāva* (a certain place on the sacrificial ground).⁷⁰ They made "*ayaṃ pūṣā rayir bhaga*"⁷¹ the initial verse of the sacrifice. He (Yavakrī) said then: "Maunḍibha, you have thrown at me in vain. You have missed (my) life-breaths!"⁷² This was the insult (*anuvyāhāra*). But Maunḍibha Udanyu had the threefold knowledge. He said: "Tear down my *sadas*- and *havirdhāna* (-huts), stow away my (Soma-) vessels after besmearing them with clay! When this insulting brahmin dies I will sacrifice." They stored his vessels after besmearing them with clay." (2.269)

[This is followed by a long description of Yavakrī Saumastambi and finally how he died which is most likely unrelated to the actions of Maunḍibha Udanyu].

"After Maunḍibha heard about it he said: "Erect my *sadas*- and *havirdhāna*(-huts), assist me, brahmins! The brahmin who has insulted (me) is dead." They made it for him in such a way. After Saumastamba (the father of Yavakrī) heard about it he came. He said down at the *āstāva* as well. They made "*ayaṃ pūṣā rayir bhaga*" the initial verse (of the sacrifice). There Saumastamba said: "This *kṣatriya* (verbatim: this *rājanyabandhu*)⁷³ does not know this form of the sacrifice. He did not kill my son with this utterance. My son's lifespan was (simply) that long." He cursed him: "This *kṣatriya* will die. His offspring will live in humiliation." They live in humiliation and call themselves the Gotamas." (2.272)⁷⁴

⁶⁹ See Oldenberg 1970: pp. 470ff.

⁷⁰ See Mylius 1995: p. 43.

⁷¹ Ṛgveda 9.101.7a

⁷² The reading of the insult is very corrupt. This translation is based on emendations proposed by Gerhard Ehlers.

⁷³ On this term and its possibly negative connotations, see Rau 1957: p. 68.

⁷⁴ For a more detailed discussion of this passage and related Vedic curses see Schwerda 2015.

Instead of enumerating the benefits of the horse sacrifice, the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa uses this opportunity to demarcate the boundaries of brahmins and *kṣatriyas*. Brahmins are in possession of ritual knowledge that enables them to curse (√ śap) their opponents with dire consequences for the target of their ire. *Kṣatriyas* on the other hand might try to emulate such behaviour but ultimately lack the necessary knowledge for their actions to have the same effect. Applied to the case of the horse sacrifice and what it tries to achieve, this story sends a powerful message: *Kṣatriyas* ultimately derive their power from the knowledge and ritual actions of brahmins. Without them their actions would not have the desired effect⁷⁵ because *kṣatriyas* did not know the intricacies of the ritual and of the correlations that govern the universe. We also encounter this affirmation of brahmin superiority over *kṣatriyas* in another important ritual of state, the royal consecration (*rājasūya*),⁷⁶ where the priests (symbolically) flog the chieftain⁷⁷ and

⁷⁵ This interpretation is borne out by a very explicit discussion in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Mādhyandina recension):

"His (the sacrificer's) intelligence (*kratu*) and ability (*dakṣa*) are (the gods) Mitra and Varuṇa, and it belongs to his self. When he desires in his mind: "Let this be mine. Let me do this." That is his intelligence. When it succeeds for him, that is ability. Mitra is intelligence, Varuṇa is ability. Mitra is (also) *brahman*, Varuṇa is *kṣatra*. *Brahman* is the comprehender, the *kṣatriya* is the doer. In the beginning these two, *brahman* and *kṣatra* were not differentiated. Thus, *brahman*, i.e. Mitra, could stand without *kṣatra*, i.e. Varuṇa. But not *kṣatra*, Varuṇa, without *brahman*, Mitra. Whichever action Varuṇa performed unimpelled by *brahman*, Mitra, that did not succeed for him. Then *kṣatra*, Varuṇa, addressed *brahman*, Mitra: "Turn to me, let us unite. I will put you in front; impelled by you I will perform actions." – "So be it." The two united. Therefore there is a libation (*graha*) for Mitra and Varuṇa. This is the office of the *purohita* (*purodhā*). A brahmin should therefore not desire the office of the *purohita* of just any *kṣatriya* because that way good and bad deeds unite. (Likewise) a *kṣatriya* should not employ just any brahmin as his *purohita* because that way good and bad deeds unite. But which action Varuṇa performed afterwards impelled by *brahman*, Mitra, that succeeded for him. It is therefore fitting that a brahmin might be without a *rājanya*. If he obtains a chieftain (*rājan*) that would be fortunate. But it is not fitting that a *kṣatriya* is without a brahmin because whichever action he performs unimpelled by *brahman*, by Mitra, that does not succeed for him. Therefore a brahmin should be approached by a *kṣatriya* who will perform an action because the action impelled by *brahman* succeeds for him." (4.1.4.1-6)

Cf. Eggeling 1885: pp. 269ff. For the technical term *graha*, see Mylius 1995: p.65.

⁷⁶ Descriptions of this ritual can be found in Weber 1893 and Heesterman 1957; more abbreviated in Hillebrandt 1981: pp. 143ff., and Mylius 1995: p. 111.

proclaim that they are only subjects of the divine Soma⁷⁸ and not the human chief they are consecrating. The purpose of flogging the chieftain has been interpreted as an act solely⁷⁹ to ward off future beatings, which is also the native explanation. However, it seems unnecessary to restrict the meaning of this action to only one dimension. There is no reason that the implied meaning of flogging the chieftain could not have been two-fold: Overtly, and explained in this fashion by the commentators, by striking away future beatings from the chief. But the image of brahmin priests striking their political leader was bound to also send a far from subtle message about the social hierarchy as perceived by brahmins. It might even be possible that brahmins occasionally were followers of other brahmins. This reading, however, hinges on the interpretation of the term *anucara*. There seem not to be enough passages to firmly establish the meaning of *anucara* and its implications for society. One instance in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is as follows:

"A *trivṛt* (*stoma*) becomes the follower of (another) *trivṛt* (*stoma*). Therefore a brahmin becomes the follower (*anucara*) of (another) brahmin. He (who knows thus) finds followers (*anucaritar*), his followers (*anucara*) become many." (2.352)⁸⁰

One the other hand, priests were able to positively influence reality to further the interests of the sacrificer. They were able to shore up his control over his people or could even cause the successful return of a chieftain who had been expelled by his own people. Consider the two

⁷⁷ See Heesterman 1957: p. 141.

⁷⁸ See Smith 1994: p. 41.

⁷⁹ E.g. Oldenberg 1970: p. 490. There also a more general explanation about "striking away" evil.

⁸⁰ Cf. Tsuchida 1979: pp. 95f.

following quotes in which the ritual enables the sacrificer to satiate his dependents and to establish control over people:

"The completely satiated dependents (*bhārya*)⁸¹ honour him who knows thus and he is completely satiated (as well)." (1.117)

"He satisfies his rivals who hate him and they fall into his power who knows thus. [...] Having brought his own people into his power he rejoices who knows thus." (1.118)⁸²

Supporting people in one's power seem to have been one of the duties of the ruler. If that support took the form of physical goods or maybe the providing of security cannot be said with certainty. But there is the expectation that a chief should share the spoils of a raid:

"As the chief should distribute (a part of) his own acquisitions to his dependents after he has conquered (something)." (2.140)⁸³

Priests were also able to help rulers who were not in control anymore: by means of rituals they could assist in the return of a deposed chief back to power. The deposed chieftain (*aparuddha*) is a fairly common trope⁸⁴ in the Brāhmaṇa-texts and occurs in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa as well.

The following discussion elucidates the way to regain control:

"The deposed (*aparuddha*) chief Sindhuḥṣit Bhārata had been wandering about for a long time. He desired: "I want to return to my own home." He went to the Sindhu (river). That was his home at the Sindhu. He saw this (*sainduḥṣita*) melody. He praised with it. Thereupon he returned to his own home because this is a wish-fulfilling melody. This was the wish he had and it came true for him. Whichever wish he has, praising with this melody, the wish comes true for him. It is (also) prosperity (*śrī*) and sovereignty (*rājya*) because (Sindhuḥṣit) attained sovereignty. He who knows thus obtains prosperity and attains sovereignty." (3.82)

⁸¹ See Rau 1957: pp. 35ff. for a discussion of the terms *bhārya* and *bhartar*.

⁸² Cf. Bodewitz 1990: p. 67.

⁸³ Cf. Rau 1957: p. 36.

⁸⁴ See Rau 1957: pp. 128f.

There were other ways short of deposing a chieftain in which people could challenge authority. In one instance, the assembly of the chief, the *rājasabhā*, is policed so that there cannot be an effective challenge:

"They drive off the one of lower rank (*pāpīyas*) who surpasses them in the debate (*ativadant*)⁸⁵ and keep him away from the assembly." (3.289)

Finally, to complete our discussion of middle Vedic society we have to turn to the position of women in society. This topic has unfortunately not been discussed much by scholars of ancient India.⁸⁶ The texts, too, are uncharacteristically quiet about women in general and as members of society. This is not entirely surprising because the Brāhmaṇas are after all commentaries on the rituals from which women were to a large extent excluded. The wife of the sacrificer spend almost the entire time of the solemn ritual inside the *patnīśālā*, the wife's hut, without playing an active role in the proceedings. This may be one of the reasons women are not mentioned too often by the ritual specialists. There are some remarks scattered through the body of the texts that give us some insight into the fate of women in middle Vedic society.

One such glimpse can be gathered from the rather famous story of Cyavana Bhārgava. Cyavana is an old man who asks his sons to leave him behind at an old ritual ground. They at first decline but he convinces them that he will regain his youth. After they have left him some herdsmen come and daub him with clay and dung. In return, Cyavana causes them not to recognise each other anymore. To fix the situation, the leader of the group, Śaryāta Mānava, approaches Cyavana to discuss a solution:

⁸⁵ This is one interpretation of *ati-√vad*. Another possible meaning could be someone who talks excessively, thus curtailing the possibility of others to speak.

⁸⁶ See, however, Jamison 1996 and Jamison 2005.

"Hastening towards him (Śaryāta) said: "Seer, greetings to you. Forgive the Śāryātyas, venerable one." Now there was one of the Śāryātyas, Sukanyā (= Śaryāta's daughter), who was beautiful. (Cyavana) said: "Give me Sukanyā." (Śaryāta) answered: "No. Name a different prize (*dhana*)." (Cyavana) replied: "No. I know the *brāhmaṇa* of Vāstupa. Put her down here close to me and go on with your trek today until evening." – "We will tell you (our decision) after we have discussed it." (The Śāryātas) were discussing it and said: "With her we will obtain one, two, or a maximum of three prizes. Here, however, we will obtain everything with her. Let us give her to him." They gave her to him."

[She is later approached by the divine twins, the Aśvins, who would like to marry her themselves since Cyavana seems to old to them to carry out his spousal duties. But she rejects the offer.]

"She said: "No. To whom my father has given me I will be his wife."" (3.122-123)⁸⁷

There are two aspects in the treatment of Sukanyā that give us a better understanding of the way women were treated. First of all, she was given as compensation to Cyavana without even being consulted. It seems that the leader of their group was able to give her away like chattel and that Sukanyā herself did not have a say in that transaction. Amazingly enough, she accepts the decision to such an extent that she rebuffs the Aśvins' offer to elope with them instead. She is thus being presented to us as a paradigm of filial piety and obedience. At the end of the story she gets rewarded by the rejuvenation of her husband.

The second remarkable phenomenon is that of the *dhana*, the prize, that could have been achieved if she had been given away to someone else, presumably to marry him. In fact, as Rau reports, women were apparently "sold off" and the contract was between the father of the bride and the groom.⁸⁸ Apart from marriage, we do not encounter women in any important role in the text: They are not represented among the political and religious leaders, nor did they actively

⁸⁷ Cf. Caland 1919: pp. 253ff.

⁸⁸ Rau 1957: p. 41.

participate in the more solemn rites the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is most concerned about. One exception can be found in the realm of myth. The seer Atri is said to have had female seers among his descendants:

"Then Atri desired: "May most seers be born among my descendants." He saw this *Triṇava stoma*. He fetched it and sacrificed with it. The *Triṇava* is fieriness among the *stomas*. And most seers were born among his descendants. More than thousand *mantra*-makers were among his descendants. Even female *mantra*-makers were among them." (2.219)⁸⁹

It has to be noted that this was presented as an absolute exception. The passage mentions five other seers and their descendants, none of whom was a woman. Furthermore, by referring to the families of those seers the discussion is firmly grounded in the realm of mythology and not lived reality. The mentioned seers, like Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, and others, are said to be the composers of Ṛgvedic hymns; compositions which are hundreds of years older than the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Thus, as remarkable as this occurrence of possible female seers is it most likely cannot teach us about the lived realities of women during the time of the composition of the Brāhmaṇas.

Another case that could either be entirely mythological or actually reflect a living tradition is polygamy. The text mentions polygamy in the context of the sun which is "visiting" the different directions:

"(The sun) visits them (= the directions) one after another like a husband visits his wives one after the other." (2.28).⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Cf. Caland 1919: p. 182. Similarly, we can see the desire to have a learned (*paṇḍitā*) daughter in Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad (M) 6.4.

⁹⁰ Cf. Caland 1919: p. 132. Another astronomical parallel is the case of the moon and the lunar mansions (*nakṣatra*). The moon is said to be married to the lunar mansions and to visit them successively. See Macdonell 1912a: pp. 410f.

In conclusion, we can probably say that women did not enjoy many rights in Vedic society. They were married off with no say in the matter and were unable to participate in most rituals.⁹¹ It seems that their role was limited to the management of the household.⁹²

In this chapter, we have seen how the ideal middle Vedic society was divided along class lines. People were born into one of four classes: brahmins, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, and *śūdras*. The first three classes were underpinned by the abstract notion of their class, i.e. *brahman*, *kṣatra*, and *viś*, respectively. Brahmins represented the religious elite that saw itself as the pinnacle of human society and its natural leaders. *Kṣatriyas* were the political elite governing people and maintaining order. The *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* were in charge of the production of foodstuffs and other goods and supplied manual labour. Their rights were markedly curtailed as opposed to those of the upper classes. The division into those four classes was thought of as natural and primordial. In tying the class system to the cosmogony and divine creator of their religion, proponents made the edifice of their ideas unassailable from within the tradition. The class system was presented as divinely ordained; to the benefit of the upper classes and the detriment of the lower. We have also encountered hierarchies in nature and among entities of the ritual. These helped to establish hierarchies in society even more firmly. Vertical hierarchies were considered prevalent in the cosmos and among humans. They can be seen in the relationship between the eater and the eaten (*attar* and *ādya*, respectively) or the maintainer and the dependent (*bhartar* and *bhārya*). That the upper classes depended on the lower ones for the

⁹¹ The horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*) presents an interesting exception. There the wives of the chief took a more active role in the ritual with the main wife of the chieftain interacting with the slaughtered horse while being taunted by the other wives. That part of the sacrifice evokes quite clearly images of fertility. Incidentally, we also encounter another case of polygamy as the chieftain has more than one. On the *aśvamedha* see, e.g., Oldenberg 1970: pp. 470ff. For the purely R̥gvedic version, see Oberlies 2012: pp. 280f.

⁹² Rau 1957: p. 42.

provision of food and goods can be concluded from the text, even though it is not explicitly mentioned. However, the interdependency of brahmins and *kṣatriyas* is repeatedly brought up: brahmins depend on *kṣatriyas* for safety, *kṣatriyas* on the other hand need brahmins for the religious justification of their rule. At the same time, there are considerable tensions between the upper two classes. This might be based in part on the difference between the ideal as presented in the Brāhmaṇa-texts and the reality. *Kṣatriyas* as the de facto wielders of authority might not always have seen the need to accept a subordinate role to brahmins. We have seen how the superiority of brahmins was maintained by them ritually when they performed sacrifices for *kṣatriyas*. Conversely, we have also encountered ritual means to support chieftains in their rule or even to regain power if they had been deposed. In rare instances, the boundaries of class could be overcome. But given how little the text mentions this it appears to be ideologically undesirable. The realities of the class system remain inaccessible to us due to the nature of our sources. We have no convincing way of verifying what the text presents us with. Lastly, we have discussed the role of women in society. This is not elaborated in great detail in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and large gaps remain in our understanding. But the findings point to a inferior position and a state of subjugation where women are treated as chattel and without a role in public life.

5. Epilogue

Having surveyed the realms of cosmogony, pantheon, ritual, and society it is now time to draw some conclusions from our analysis. Generally, I hope that the discussion of these topics has shown the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa to be a fascinating and engaging text, notwithstanding the occasional tediousness, as well as a valuable source for our understanding of the middle Vedic world. We have seen that the way it has been composed, as a ritual text-book for the next generation of the priestly elite, makes it difficult to take every assertion at face value. Due to its nature as a normative and deeply propagandistic text we are mostly limited to an analysis of the expressed ideology rather than the lived reality. Accepting these limitations, however, enables us to appreciate the worldview expressed in the text; especially since the frankness and candour of its composers is with few exceptions rather unparalleled. Like other Brāhmaṇa-texts the Jaiminīya did not need to show consideration for any kind of political correctness. We have seen this particularly in the discussion of malevolent ritual action and social hierarchies.

This candidness does not play too much of a role in the topic of the first chapter, the creation of the cosmos and of certain deities. Nonetheless, we have had an interesting insight into the way middle Vedic cosmogony had been conceived. We have observed a conflation of biological ideas of birth, as seen in the cosmic waters and the egg, and metaphysical processes. Notions are often not clearly delineated but added to a composite structure of a myth. Furthermore, Prajāpati, nominally nothing less than the creator god, plays a surprisingly ambiguous role in the earliest creation. While he is said to have created the beings, ritual entities, gods, and sundry other creatures he does not seem to have created the cosmos itself. The question of who created the creator remains unanswered as well. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa does not give a definite and non-

contradictory account of the creation of the world. The closest and most detailed description has been the discussion of the Ṛgvedic Nāsadīya hymn, found in 3.360-367. Acts of creation often result in a chaotic world that is not inhabitable. Therefore, many creation myths contain a second step in which the cosmic chaos is ordered and the world made liveable. We have also encountered theogonic accounts of how Indra and Agni have come into being. Notable here is the unnatural way of their creation. Both are said to be born from the male god Prajāpati. Agni burst forth from the head of Prajāpati.¹

In the second chapter, we turned towards the middle Vedic pantheon as well as the afterlife. Of considerable interest and prominence are two rather different gods: the creator god Prajāpati who represents an innovation of the post-Ṛgvedic pantheon and the old warrior god Indra. We encountered Prajāpati already in the first chapter and discussed his many acts of creation. A different aspect is his role in the world and among the gods after the creation of the cosmos and its beings. Prajāpati appears as the head of the gods but at the same time removed from them as well. The gods seek his advice and help and go to study with him. But he does not actively engage in the endeavours of the other gods. The actual leadership falls to others, most prominently to Indra. Indra is of course well known from the earliest Vedic period onward and is the most prominent god in the Ṛgveda. But from his exploits in the Ṛgveda, ranging from cosmogonic deeds to heroic behaviour in battle, to his actions in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa we see a marked shift. Many of his earlier triumphs are referenced or glossed over and not discussed in any great detail. On the other hand, Indra's more questionable actions are addressed. He is thus, e.g., considered ritually impure because of his slaying the *asuras*; an idea that rises to some

¹ An interesting parallel to the birth of the ancient Greek goddess Athena. The unnatural birth of gods and heroes is of course a common feature of many mythologies.

prominence in post-Ṛgvedic literature. We have also briefly touched upon other gods and noticed that the later high gods of Hinduism, Viṣṇu and Śiva, do not as yet display any prominence. A discussion of the afterlife concludes the chapter and one of the most noteworthy features here has been the concept of re-death (*punarmṛtyu*) which seems to be an antecedent to a full-blown theory of *karma* and rebirth.²

In the third chapter, we discussed the Brāhmaṇa-period ritual and particularly the ways of using the ritual for malevolent purposes. Most astonishing perhaps, cursing rivals, priests, or even the sacrificer himself does not seem to have carried any stigma. Rituals are routinely modified to achieve negative outcomes for the persons cursed. We have seen that numerous different rituals could be changed to become malevolent. Instead of long life, wealth, or offspring, the modified rituals could be performed to harm or kill an opponent, or to bereave him of his descendants. If the frequency and the distribution of these actions throughout the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa are anything to go by the practice must have been rather widespread. The "weaponisation" of the ritual must also have enabled the ritual priests to underline their claim to power in Vedic society.

This was our main concern in the fourth chapter. The idealised society of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa is broken down into four classes, brahmins, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, and *sūdras*. These represent the priestly elite, the political and military elite, the class of farmers and artisans, and a servant class respectively. Brahmins, even though often without actual physical power, claim the first rank in the social hierarchy. Arguments often evolve around religious standards and divine examples. Together with the *kṣatriyas*, the brahmins form a small elite which rules over the rest

² For an earlier form of rebirth, in which the dead returned to the world of the living as falling stars, see Witzel 2003: p. 39.

of society. *Śūdras* in particular appear to be almost without any rights. The idea of a hierarchy in the mind of the Brāhmaṇa-composers is not limited to society alone. Instead, hierarchies can be found (or rather: are constructed) among the gods, ritual entities, and even animals. These are often correlated with the classes of human society and together this hierarchisation is mutually reinforcing. Questioned why brahmins should be on top of the hierarchy they could point to deities, poetical metres, and animals which are the first among their hierarchies and are correlated with the brahmin class. In other words, brahmins come first because the "brahmins" among the gods or the animals come first as well. Human hierarchy is thus not only grounded in religion but seems to be a law of nature.

In conclusion, I hope this work can help to give an impulse to further study the endlessly fascinating period of the Brāhmaṇas. What we have seen in our discussion is a society in flux, in which old beliefs and convictions undergo fundamental changes, in which a religion and the attached ritual are massively modified and adapted to changing circumstances, and in which a rigid model of social hierarchy is developed that has lasting effects until today. Even with the limitations we had to concede the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa together with the other Brāhmaṇa-texts remains one of the few sources that allows us to study the middle Vedic period. Since that period is unjustifiably understudied³ any attempt has to be made to further our understanding of that era and help to (re-) establish its rightful place in the canon of Indian studies in general and Vedic studies in particular. I hope this thesis can be a modest contribution to the field and can also provide an encouragement to study these engaging types of text.

³ See introduction.

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