

On the meaning of the word *śrī* in the kingship hymns of the Atharvaveda

The hymns of PS 10.2~10.4 provide us with some material, from which we may gain the knowledge of the relationship between *śrī* and the kingship in the early Vedic India. In these hymns the word *śrī* is mentioned in the following situations: when plundering *śrī* from the enemy or rival (PS 10.2.4: *śriyaṃ tvaṃ sarveṣāṃ teṣāṃ ādāyogro vi dhāraya* ‘Taking *śrī* for yourself from all of them (i.e. the adversaries), you, as the formidable one, must divide [it]!’ cf., 10.2.5, 10, 3.1, 5), and when providing the king with *śrī* as a power (PS 10.3.6: *śriyaṃ ca kṣatram ojaś ca tubhyaṃ devā asāviṣuḥ* ‘The gods have stimulated to strengthen *śrī*, dominion, and bodily strength for you’ cf., 10.4.8).

Given this background, it might be safely assumed that the word *śrī* in these hymns refers to the spoils of the enemy and the tributes of the chieftains, as exemplified in the following expressions: *rātha/pūruṣa* (PS 10.3.1), *pāyas* (3.5), *gól/ásval/ánnal/īrā/rāsa* (PS10.4.1, 9), *dhāna* (4.6), *páśu* (4.9), *balí* (PS 10.2.6, 4.3), and *śulká* (2.6). In other hymns, the properties and the powers that are said to be borne away by the king may also be considered to be expressed by this term: examples of this are *grāma/ásval/gó* (ŚS 4.22.2), *dhāna/vārcas* (v.3), *gól/óṣadhi/páśu* (v.4), *bhójana* (v.6), *kṣatrá/raí* (ŚS 6.54.2). *Śrī* in this context denotes not only such properties and functions as those belonging to the king, but also his superiority over adversaries and rivals: for example, consider the phrases *tebhiṣ tvam uttaro bhava bhrātrvyāṇāṃ śriyaṃ vr̥ha* ‘You be superior to them. Uproot the property of [king's] rivals!’ (PS 10.3.5), and *śriyā samānān āti sārvaṃt syāmādhāspadām dviṣatās pādayāmi* ‘By property may we surpass all comrades. I cause the haters to fall under foot’ (ŚS11.1.12, 21). Thus the word *śrī* in the royal hymns connotes ‘the superiority of the king founded on the property and the power acquired from his adversaries and rivals’.

This meaning is not inconsistent with the original meaning of this word proposed by Gonda, (namely ‘benefit, prosperity’) and Narten (‘Vortrefflichkeit’). However, that the emphasis is on the broad meaning of the word *śrī* — the spoils and tributes that define the superiority of the king — may reveal the concerns of these kingship hymns. There is few explicit mention of this term to mean ‘beauty’, a meaning proposed by Oldenberg, in the verses of the royal hymns. For example, the expression *śriyaṃ vāsānaḥ* (ŚS 4.8.3), which describes a newly consecrated king, might be literally understood to mean ‘being clothed in superiority’. The coronation ritual accompanying the mantras of ŚS 4.8, which was known as *laghv-/mahābhiṣeka* (KauśS 17.1 — 29), is characterised by simplicity in contradistinction to the major coronation ceremony, *rājasūya*, and, hence, does not prescribe any splendid apparel nor ornaments for the king.