

I.179, the dialogue between the seer Agastya and his impatiently amorous wife Lopāmudrā), but there are many treasures to be unearthed among the lesser known hymns. We refer the reader to the introductions to the various hymn collections and their individual hymns.

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The first ten hymns of the Ṛgveda are attributed to Madhuchandas Vaiśvāmitra, with I.11 ascribed to his son or descendant Jetar Mādhubandasa. After the opening hymn to Agni and two hymns (2–3) to the deities of the Praūgaśastra litany, the remainder of the hymns are addressed to Indra, most of them relatively simple and without notable features.

It is of course appropriate that the whole Ṛgveda collection should begin with a hymn to the deified ritual fire as the focal point of the sacrificial system. This hymn in its relative simplicity and its clear exposition of Agni’s ritual role seems almost to have been chosen for this prominent position for pedagogical purposes. It certainly continues to serve such purposes in the modern West, where it is generally the first hymn a student of the Ṛgveda encounters and from which the mysteries of Vedic Sanskrit grammar—accents, subjunctives, unexpected long vowels, variant nominal forms, and so on—and of Vedic ritual are absorbed. It is therefore not surprising that it is often assumed to be typical of Ṛgvedic Agni hymns, but this is emphatically not the case: elsewhere in the Ṛgveda Agni hymns often display especially contorted syntax and complex imagery and glory in enigma and paradox. The choice of this particular Agni hymn to open the Ṛgveda thus seems even more purposeful against the background of more standard treatments of Agni.

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## I.1 Agni

Madhuchandas Vaiśvāmitra

9 verses: gāyatrī

As Oldenberg (1897) has noted, the first verse of this hymn was apparently the first verse of the Ṛgveda already at the time of the composition of X.20–26, a collection that also begins *agnīm īle*. The two hymns that follow, I.2 and I.3, together invoke the principal deities of the three soma-pressings in a day-long soma rite. This hymn forms an appropriate opening for them, since the sacrifice is instituted first by the placement of fire, although the sacrificial fire here is not just the fire of the soma rite, since in verse 7 the poet speaks of revering the fire every day.

Here, as in other hymns to Agni, the poets praise him as the deified Fire of the sacrifice, who moves between the divine and human realms. Agni is a god, and yet he is also the visible fire, accessible to humans. As both god and element, Agni is “placed to the fore” (vs. 1) because the principal fire of the sacrifice is placed in the east of the sacrificial area and because the god Agni leads the appearances of the other gods of the rite. He is a divine priest, who carries the offerings and praises of the human priests to the gods and who brings the gifts

of the gods to mortals. Saussure describes this hymn as a “versified paradigm of Agni,” since it begins by mentioning the god’s name in various cases as the first word in the first pāda of the first five verses: accusative, nominative, instrumental, dative, and again nominative (Elizarenkova 1995: 153). Displaying one of the verbal tricks Ṛgvedic poets delight in, this pattern is broken by modification at the beginning of verse 6, which opens *yád aṅgá*, the latter word being a particle that is also a scrambling of the god’s name. The same verse ends with an epithet of Agni in the vocative, *aṅgiraḥ*, likewise a phonological scrambling of his name. The vocative *agne* is also found in three of the last four verses (vs. 8 is the exception). This structure not only displays the artfulness of the poet, but perhaps also suggests the various forms of the sacrificial Fire that are analogous to the many grammatical forms of the word “fire.”

1. Agni do I invoke—the one placed to the fore, god and priest of the sacrifice,  
the Hotar, most richly conferring treasure.
2. Agni, to be invoked by ancient sages and by the present ones—  
he will carry the gods here to this place.
3. By Agni one will obtain wealth and prosperity every day,  
glorious and richest in heroes.
4. O Agni, the sacrifice and rite that you surround on every side—  
it alone goes among the gods.
5. Agni, the Hotar with a poet’s purpose, the real one possessing the  
brightest fame,  
will come as a god with the gods.
6. When truly you will do good for the pious man, o Agni,  
just that of yours is real, o Aṅgiras.
7. We approach you, o Agni, illuminator in the evening, every day with our  
insight,  
bringing homage—
8. (You), ruling over the rites, the shining herdsman of the truth,  
growing strong in your own home.
9. Like a father for a son, be of easy approach for us, o Agni.  
Accompany us for our well-being.

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## I.2 Vāyu (1–3), Indra and Vāyu (4–6), Mitra and Varuṇa (7–9)

Madhuchandas Vaiśvāmītra

9 verses: gāyatrī, arranged in ṛcas

This and the following hymn constitute what is later called the Praūgaśastra, the “yoke-pole-tip recitation,” which is the second recited litany in the morning soma-pressing. In classical śrauta ritual the śastra consists of seven sets of three verses or