

**Vedic *piśá-* and Atharvaveda-Śaunakīlya 19.49.4 =
Atharvaveda-Paippalāda 14.8.4:
A note on the Indo-Iranian bestiary***

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This paper offers a new interpretation of the Vedic word *piśá-*. On the basis of a philological analysis of the two Vedic passages where this word is attested, as well as comparative evidence from other Indo-European languages, I will argue that this word should be translated as ‘cheetah’ or ‘leopard’, rather than as ‘antelope’ or ‘stag’. A new translation of the difficult Atharvavedic stanza 19.49.4 (Śaunakīlya) is offered.

The seminal encyclopedias of the Proto-Indo-European language and culture, such as Gamkrelidze & Ivanov 1984 (English translation 1995) or Mallory & Adams 1997; 2006, give, *inter alia*, comprehensive surveys of the names of animals known to the Indo-Europeans (Gamkrelidze & Ivanov 1984: II, 492ff. = 1995: I, 413ff.; Mallory & Adams 2006: 142 et passim). The present paper offers critical notes on two passages from the two most ancient Vedic texts, Ṛgveda (RV) and Atharvaveda (AV), that may clarify the meaning of an Indo-Iranian animal name and its position in the Indo-Iranian and, eventually, Indo-European bestiary.

The rare Vedic word *piśá-* is a quasi-hapax of unclear semantics. According to the communis opinio, it refers to a spotted animal, allegedly denoting an antelope or a stag. It

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only once appears in the Ṛgveda, in a hymn dedicated to the Maruts (1.64), in the following passage:

(RV 1.64.8ab)
siṃhā iva nānadati prācetasah' piśā supīso viśvāvedasah

Geldner translates:

‘Sie [sc. die Marut] brüllen wie Löwen, die Verständigen; wie die gefleckten Hirsche sind sie schön gezeichnet (geschmückt), die Allwissenden.’ (Geldner 1951: I, 85)

Next to this single Ṛgvedic attestation, a corrupt form of this word occurs in the Atharvavedic hymn to the Goddess of Night, in stanza 19.49.4 of the Śaunakīya recension (hereafter AVŚ), which corresponds to stanza 14.8.4 of the Paippalāda (AVP):

(AVŚ 19.49.4 = AVP 14.8.4)¹
siṃhāsya rātry usāti' piśāsya' vyāghrāsya dvīpīno vārca ā dade
āśvasya bradhnām pūruśasya māyūṃ' purū rūpāṇi kṛṇuṣe vibhāt

The word which the mss. read as *piśāsya* or *piṃśāsya*² has been correctly identified by Whitney (1905: 980f.) as instantiating the same lexeme as *piśāḥ* in RV 1.64.8, in particular, on the basis of a similar context: in both passages *piśā-* co-occurs with *siṃhā-* ‘lion’. Whitney's emendation is also supported by the Orissa mss. of the Paippalāda recension, where we find *piśāsya*. The confusion of *s* and *ś* is common in the Atharvaveda, in particular, in the context of *i/y*.³

Whitney's translation of the stanza in question runs as follows:

‘The eager night has taken to herself the splendor of the

¹See *Atharva Veda*, ed. by R. Roth and W. D. Whitney, p. 381; *Atharvaveda*, ed. by Vishva Bandhu, p. 1958; *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda*, ed. by D. Bhattacharya, p. 790.

²The analysis of this word as derived from the root *piś* ‘grind’, suggested in the indigenous commentary, can thus be discarded.

³The change *ś* → *s* (attested at least in some manuscripts) is especially frequent before *i/y* (cf. AVŚ 5.20.2, AVP 6.10.1, 6.10.4, 6.10.7, 8.20.4 *vāsītā-* ‘bellowing’ for *vāśīṣ*°; AVŚ 5.19.5, AVP 5.40.1 = 6.22.9 *asya-*° ‘be eaten’ for *āśy*°; AVP 6.15.3 *śiyate* ‘falls’ for *śīy*°; etc.; see Kulikov 2001: 270f.), but also occurs in some other phonological contexts.

lion, of the stag, of the tiger, of the leopard, the horse's bottom, man's (*púruṣa*) roar (? *māyū*); many forms thou makest for thyself, shining out.' (Whitney/Lanman 1905: 980)⁴

The meaning of the word *piśá-* puzzled many Sanskritists. Sāyaṇa glosses *piśá-* as *ruru-* – a word referring to a variety of antelope or (fallow) deer (Germ. Damhirsch).⁵ Most translators follow Sāyaṇa's interpretation, rendering this word as '(spotted) antelope',⁶ 'stag',⁷ or even 'gazelle' (Müller 1891: 64). However, mentioning this inoffensive animal in one list with the lion (in both occurrences) as well as tiger and leopard (in the Atharvavedic passage) appears rather suspect. Müller in his comments (1891: 118) has rightly noticed the unsatisfactory character of this interpretation.⁸ Renou (1962 [EVP X]: 65) in his comments on the translation of RV 1.64.8 expresses some doubts concerning the translation '(spotted) antelope' and renders *piśáh* as 'des œuvres-peintes' (Renou 1962 [EVP X]: 17). Note also that Ludwig (1878: 466), when translating the Atharvavedic stanza, takes the words *piśásya* and *dvípino* (on which see below) as attributes of *vyāghrásya* ('des bunten, fleckigen tigers').

The original meaning of this word, derived from the verbal root *piś* 'carve, adorn' (pres. *piśá-*^{ti}, perf. *pipísé* etc.), should be based on the semantics of *piś* and thus can probably be determined as 'spotted, dappled' (cf., in particular, such cognates as OCS *pōs-trō* 'variegated, spotted', Arm. *pisak* 'spotted; leprous' or Goth. *filu-faihs* 'variegated', OHG *fēh*

⁴Cf. also two other translations of this stanza: Ludwig (1878: 466): 'des löwen, des bunten, fleckigen tigers herlichkeit hat Râtrî angenommen, | des rosses glanz, des menschen ruf, vile formen machst du dir wenn du aufgehst'; Sani (see Orlandi & Sani 1992: 193): 'La Notte desiderosa ha tolto il vigore vitale al leone, all'antilope, alla tigre, al leopardo, il colore al cavallo, la voce all'uomo: tu, splendente, rendi molteplici le forme.'

⁵See, in particular, Zimmer 1879: 83.

⁶Thus Hillebrandt ('gefleckte Antilopen'; see Hillebrandt 1913: 64) and Elizarenkova in their translation of RV 1.64.8 (Elizarenkova 1989: 82), as well as Sani for the AV ('antilope'; see Orlandi & Sani 1992: 193).

⁷Whitney: 'stag'; Geldner (1951: I, 85) in his translation of the Ṛgvedic stanza: 'Hirsche'; Dōyama: 'Wie die (mit Flecken) gemusterten (Hirsche?)'; see Witzel et al. 2007: 121.

⁸'As piśá does not occur again in the Rig-veda, and as Sāyaṇa, without attempting any etymological arguments, simply gives it as a name of deer, it seems best to adopt that sense till something better can be discovered'.

‘colorful, different, dappled’; cf. also *fēhspeht* ‘(spotted) woodpecker’); see Pokorny 794f., Mayrhofer, KEWA, Bd. II, 267f., 288f.; EWAia, Bd. II, 134; Scarlata 1999: 319f. In a broader context, Ved. *piśá-* is thus also related to Av. *paēsa-* ‘decoration’, OP *pīs* ‘leprous, dirty’, OCS *p̄sati* ‘write’, etc. The color term *piśánga-* ‘reddish, reddish-brown’ (as well as such cognates as ON *fā* [*< *faihōn*] ‘paint, carve’, OHG *fēhin* ‘color’, *fedarfēh* ‘woven with colors’), belonging to the same root family, points to the fact that the meaning of *piśá-* must also have incorporated some indications concerning the color, ranking between red(dish), yellow(ish), tan and brown (see also Hopkins 1883: 171; Petersson 1916: 141).

There is nothing in this form which points to stag, deer or antelope. Given the fact that both occurrences of *piśá-* appear in the context of names of wild cat(s), it would only be natural to assume that this word refers to yet another cat species. In particular, it might refer to the leopard or, rather, the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), which would neatly fit the color pattern suggested by this term. Among the wild cats who live or used to live in India, cheetah is probably the only one for which we do not know its Vedic name.⁹

The meaning ‘cheetah’ (or ‘leopard’) better suits both contexts. As already mentioned, this meaning is more appropriate in the list of wild cats in AV 19.49.4. Likewise, in RV 1.64.8, the comparison of the Maruts with cheetahs/leopards parallels their comparison with lions in the preceding pāda (‘They (sc. the Maruts) roar like lions, the perspicacious ones; they are beautifully speckled like cheetahs (/leopards),¹⁰ the omniscient ones’). In general, the meaning ‘cheetah’/‘leopard’ better conforms to the hunting and destructive nature of the Maruts. The notorious quickness of the cheetah (the fastest of all land animals, being able to accelerate up to more than 100 km/h)¹¹ finds its match in the swiftness of the Maruts,¹² while the yellowish color of its skin can easily be associated with their golden ornaments.

It is also worth mentioning that, unlike other wild cats,

⁹For leopard, the Vedic Aryans could use the word *dvīpīn-*, whilst the word for panther is *p̄dāku-*; see Lubotsky 2004.

¹⁰Note that the color pattern of the animal’s skin is additionally emphasized by the word play *piśá iva supīśo*; see Scarlata 1999: 320.

¹¹See, for instance, Eaton 1974: 23f.; 1981: 11ff. Note, incidentally, that the cheetah is 1.5 to 2 times faster than the leopard.

¹²See, for instance, Gonda 1959: 122.

cheetahs are rather friendly and can relatively easily be tamed – in ancient Egypt, Persia and India they were trained for hunting. It is not improbable that this characteristic of the cheetah – the ability to hunt in groups and for the sake of men – could have played some role in their association with the Maruts or with the animals accompanying the Maruts. Note, incidentally, that this feature finds an interesting parallel in the Slavic word for ‘dog’, OCS *p̄sō* etc., on which see below.

The New Indo-Aryan languages do not seem to have preserved the reflexes of Ved. *piśá-*, which is unattested after the AV. It is interesting to note, however, that the more recent word for leopard/cheetah, Skt. *citra(ka)-*,¹³ literally meaning ‘spotted, speckled’, has been made on the same semantic model, thus referring to the color of the leopard/cheetah’s skin.

The interpretation of *piśá-* as a word for cheetah (or leopard) is further supported by Iranian evidence. The Proto-Indo-Iranian etymon of Vedic *piśá-* can be reconstructed as **piśá-* (< PIE **pikō-*), which should have yielded Old Iranian **piśa-*. Such a form is unattested in Old Iranian dialects, but we find possible reflexes of this word in some modern Iranian languages.¹⁴ These include, in particular, Sarikoli *pis* and Wakhi *p̄s* ‘(snow) leopard’. There have been some attempts to connect these forms with the Indo-European word for leopard **p̄ars-* (/ **p̄ard-*), but a much better phonetic explanation obtains from their analysis as reflecting Old Iranian **piśa-*. These Iranian forms have already been compared with Vedic *piśá-* by Tomaschek (1880: 762; see also Morgenstierne 1938: 535; Morgenstierne 1974: 61), who translates the Vedic cognate as ‘bunt gefärbt, falb, Damhirsch’. Now we can group together these cognates as immediate reflexes of the hypothetical Proto-Indo-Iranian **piśá-* ‘cheetah’/‘leopard’.

Evidence for the new interpretation of Ved. *piśá-* can also be found outside Indo-Iranian. The Slavic word for ‘dog’, OCS *p̄sō* etc. (together with OCS *p̄strō* ‘variegated, spotted’), is

¹³This etymon underlies, in particular, the words for (snow) leopard or panther attested in New Indo-Aryan languages, cf. Hindi *citā* ‘leopard’ (the source of the English borrowing *cheetah*), Punjabi *cit(t)rā* id., Sindhi *ciṭro* ‘panther’, etc.; see Turner, CDIAL, 261.

¹⁴I am much indebted to Dž. I. Édel’man for having discussed with me evidence from Iranian languages.

the exact correspondence of Ved. *piśá-* and for a long time has been compared with it (see, for instance, Uhlenbeck 1902: 251; Schulze 1910: 802f. = Schulze 1934: 125; Petersson 1916: 140f.; Specht 1944: 121f.; Vasmer 1955: II, 346f.).¹⁵ The meaning ‘cheetah’ provides a much better match with ‘dog’ than ‘stag’ or ‘(fallow) deer’ (adopted in the dictionaries). It is worth mentioning that, unlike other wild cats, cheetahs share remarkably many behavioral features with dogs.¹⁶ This, incidentally, may be (partly) responsible for the noteworthy fact that both animals can be employed for hunting by men.¹⁷

Alongside with cognates in Iranian and Slavic, important, albeit indirect, evidence is furnished by Greek.¹⁸ From Homeric Greek onwards, we find the adjective *ποικίλος* ‘dappled, spotted’, a derivative of the same root (with a different root grade and suffix); see, for instance, Boisacq 1923: 800; Frisk 1970: 572f.; Specht 1944: 121f. Most interestingly, it occurs constructed with the word *πάρδαλις* ‘leopard’,¹⁹ in a well-known Iliad passage (repeatedly quoted by Indo-Europeanists; see, in particular, Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984: II, 501 = 1995: I, 421f.; Lubotsky 2004: 5):

(Iliad, K 29–30)

Παρδαλέη μὲν πρῶτα μετάφρενον εὐρὸν κάλυψε, ποικίλη...

‘He (Menelaos) cast a spotted leopard’s skin round his broad shoulders ...’

¹⁵For other – both formally and semantically less probable – etymological proposals for this Slavic word (~ Ved. *paśu-* ‘cattle’ etc.; ~ Ved. (*s*)*pas* ‘watch, observe’ etc.), see Vasmer, *ibid.*; Derksen 2008: 431.

¹⁶See, in particular, Owen-Smith & Mills 2008.

¹⁷We do not know why this color term has been chosen to refer to (hunting) dogs. Spotted and yellowish or tan dogs are of course well-known from antiquity and are frequently represented in art; see, in particular, Lilja 1976: 41 with fn. 17, 94 et passim on some descriptions of dogs in Ancient Greek poetry. Note, incidentally, that the Indo-European lexicon knows yet another (possible) connection between a word for (a particular variety of) dog and the color term meaning ‘spotted’; see fn. 27 below on suggested etymological relationships between Gr. *κέρβερος* and Sanskrit *karbura-* / *karbara-* ‘spotted, variegated’. It remains largely guesswork, however, if a certain (predominantly spotted and/or tan) species of dog was particularly often used for hunting by some ancient Indo-European tribes.

¹⁸I would like to thank Nick Nicholas and Lucien van Beek for valuable comments on Greek evidence.

¹⁹On the exact meaning of the Greek word *πάρδαλις*, see, especially, Nicholas 1999.

Thus, Greek appears to have preserved the traces of using another term derived from PIE **pik-* to refer to the color of the skin of the cheetah and/or leopard.²⁰

Back to the analysis of the Atharvavedic stanza 19.49.4. Apparently, pādas ab present a fairly complete list of big wild cats living in India at the time of the AV: *siṃhá-* (lion), *piśá-* (cheetah or leopard (?)), *vyāghrá-* (tiger), and *dvīpín-* ((snow) leopard).²¹ Note that the translations suggested for the second and fourth terms in the list are tentative. It is very likely that the boundary between the concepts denoted by *piśá-* and *dvīpín-* could not be drawn with accuracy. Both words are descriptive terms referring to the spotted character of the skin of the corresponding animals. Most likely, these two species could be easily confused by the Vedic Aryans, even in spite of a few distinctive features well-known to modern zoologists.²²

In spite of some important clarifications concerning the character of the list in pādas ab, the general content of the stanza 19.49.4 remains unclear. What kind of splendor pertains to the cats listed in the first distich? Why is ‘man’s roar’ (Whitney) mentioned in the same context? What kind of roar can be produced by human beings?

It seems that we have to reconsider the interpretation of the stanza and, particularly, that of the verbal form *ā dade* ‘has taken’ in pāda b. Although its meaning has been correctly rendered in all translations, the general sense of the passage appears to have been misinterpreted by some scholars. The existing translations do not specify how exactly the deified night deals with the beings listed in the stanza, but they seem to suggest that Night hides distinguishing features of various creatures when putting them asleep, depriving them, as it were, of their characteristics.²³ In reality, however, the

²⁰As L. van Beek suggested to me, this descriptive term might also refer to the flickering image of a swiftly moving animal. Yet this meaning must be secondary with regard to the primary color pattern expressed by this word.

²¹On the word *dvīpín-* (literally meaning ‘having islands [on its skin], spotted’) and some other names of wild cats, see Lubotsky 2004.

²²It is interesting to note that this lexicological situation resembles in some respects the case of the Greek words for cheetah and leopard, *πάρδος* and *πάρδαλις*, which could be used interchangeably, see Nicholas 1999: 256ff.

²³It is in this vein that Sani (see Orlandi & Sani 1992: 193, with fn. 37) explicates his translation of *rātry* [...] *ā dade ásvasya bradhnam* ‘La Notte [...]’

emphasis probably lies on borrowing several characteristic features from these creatures. By applying these features (splendor etc.) to herself (which may resemble putting clothes on oneself), Night makes her representations so variegated – this seems to be the main idea of pāda d (*purī rūpāṇi kṛṇuṣe vibhāt* ‘You make for yourself [i.e. you take] many forms, shining out’). It remains to figure out which kinds of characteristics are borrowed by Night.²⁴

(i) Splendor, prestige (*vārcā[s]*)

The word *vārcas* is common in the RV and AV, referring to a class of prestige (thus consistently rendered, for instance, by Gonda (1980: 91, 101 et passim)) or to a prestigious appearance; for a detailed discussion of this concept, see Gonda 1984. Its etymological meaning may be ‘brilliance, splendor’ or the like (see Mayrhofer, EWAia, I, 231f.; II, 516; see also Gonda 1984: 11 [= 1991: 367] on the close association of *vārcas* with the sun). Cf. especially the hymn AVP 5.29, where various human beings and animals,²⁵ natural phenomena and deities are associated with (different kinds of) splendor; see Lubotsky 2002: 129ff. It remains to clarify which kind of prestige/splendor might be associated with (and shared by) the wild cats. It may refer to the threatening appearance of these dangerous predators. More specifically, a comparison of Night with a king in verse 6 (AVŚ 19.49.6 = AVP 14.8.6 *stómasya no vibhāvāri* ‘*rātri rājeva joṣase* ‘you will enjoy our prayer, O wide-shining Night, like a king’) must point to the fact that *vārcas* denotes royal splendor, represented by the wild cats listed in pādas ab (A. Lubotsky, p.c.). Besides, in the context of a hymn dedicated to Night, and, in particular, in a stanza focusing on different appearances of Night (see below), one might also perhaps assume that this term refers here to yet another visual feature shared by all cats: a peculiar

ha tolto [...] il colore al cavallo’: “l’espressione potrebbe significare che la notte con la sua oscurità rende impossibile distinguere i colori”.

²⁴Note also that some of the creatures mentioned in this verse can represent constellations / nakṣatras of the night sky (M. Oort, p.c.). Thus, *áśva-* may refer to Archer, Sagittarius; while *púruṣa-* is the name of the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th signs of the zodiac.

²⁵In particular, cats and other wild animals, cf. AVP 5.29.6 *siṃhe varca uta varco vyāghre* ‘*vṛke varco madhuhāre ca varcaḥ* ‘The splendor in the lion and the splendor in the tiger, the splendor in the wolf and the splendor in the honey-getter [= bear (?)]’ (Lubotsky 2002: 131).

construction of their eyes, which produces the impression that cats' eyes glow in the dark, as it were. This feature may resemble the stars glowing at night.

(ii) Reddish / yellow color (?) (*bradhnām*)

Whitney adopts the reading ⁺*budhnām* 'the horse's bottom', suggested by Sāyaṇa, and follows the quite forced explanation of the indigenous commentary, according to which the horse's bottom is associated with its swiftness.²⁶ The word *bradhnā-* is a horse color term, meaning 'pale red, ruddy, yellowish, reddish yellow color'. In the Vedas, this color is often associated with the dawn. In the context of our hymn, it might refer to the color of the sky growing bright before dawn, during the last hour of the night; cf. also Ludwig's translation: 'des rosses glanz [hat Rātrī angenomen]'.

(iii) Mutability (?) (AVŚ *māyūṃ*, AVP *māyam*)

The existing translations connect this word with the verbal root *mā* 'bellow, roar' (Whitney: 'The [...] night has taken [...] man's roar'; Ludwig: 'des menschen ruf'; Sani: 'La notte [...] ha tolto [...] la voce all'uomo'). However, the link between human speech and the roaring or bellowing of animals (most often, of cows) denoted by the root *mā* is quite problematic. Perhaps we are dealing here with a derivative of another root, *mi* '(ex)change, alternate' (*MAY*²), attested, in particular, in Vedic *māyā-* 'illusion, deception, sorcery' and YAv. *māiū-* 'powerful, skillful'; see Mayrhofer, EWAia, Bd. II, 314f., 349f. The exact sense of this comparison is not quite clear; perhaps *māyū-* refers in our context to the skills proper to human beings and/or their ability to change their appearances. The idea which might lie behind this last comparison is that the sky is able to change colors and appearances at night. Most likely, precisely this topic is further developed in the concluding pāda d.

The content of the stanza AVŚ 19.49.4 = AVP 14.8.4 can now be tentatively rendered as follows:

'The eager night has taken (to herself) the splendor of
the lion, of the cheetah (/ leopard) (?), of the tiger, of
the (snow) leopard [~ threatening appearance and/or

²⁶*budhnam mūlam* | *aśvavīryasya vego hi mūlam* (Atharvaveda, ed. by Vishva Bandhu, p. 1959).

stars shining in the night sky]; the horse's reddish yellow color (?) [~ the night sky growing bright before dawn], man's mutability [~ the ability of the night (sky) to take different shapes/colors] (?). You make for yourself [i.e. you take] many forms, shining out.'

To sum up, the Vedic lexeme *piśá-*, attested in two early Vedic stanzas, supposedly a word for cheetah (or leopard), can be traced back as far as (at least) Proto-Indo-Iranian. It can be added to the list of wild cats known to the Indo-Iranians (see, in particular, Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984: II, 500ff. = 1995: I, 420ff.; Blažek 2005). Quite remarkable is the semantic parallelism with the Slavic word for dog (OCS *pъsъ* etc. – the exact cognate of *piśá-*) – another hunting animal, which certainly shares more with the cheetah than with the stag (or antelope). The reinterpretation of Ved. *piśá-* thus supports the old comparison with OCS *pъsъ*. It would be tempting to see here the reflexes of the Indo-European word (**pikō-*) denoting a spotted animal used by Proto-Indo-Europeans for hunting.²⁷ But this hypothesis probably goes too far and cannot (yet) be supported by evidence from other ancient Indo-European languages and cultures.

²⁷Another possible – and semantically similar ('spotted, dappled') – name for this hypothetical hunting animal might be reflected in Gr. κέρβερος (another dangerous, but tamed dog-like animal!), which has been compared with Sanskrit (post-Vedic) *karbura-* / *karbara-* 'spotted, variegated', and, perhaps, might be related to Vedic *śábala-* 'spotted, variegated' and *śárvar[a]-* 'night' as well. This old comparison (see Müller 1856: 148ff.; Schulze 1910: 802f. = Schulze 1934: 125) is much less certain, however, and the Indo-European origins of the Indic *k*-forms is questioned by most scholars; see Mayrhofer, KEWA, I, 175f.; EWAia, I, 318; II, 609; III, 69; and Lincoln 1979 (but see also Mallory & Adams 1997: 265f.). Yet it is interesting to note that the only R̥gvedic attestation of the alleged *ś*-variant of *karbara-* appears (in the feminine form *śárvari-*) in a hymn dedicated to the Maruts: *té syandrā so n,óksāṇó ,ti śkandanti śárvariḥ* (RV 5.52.3ab). The passage puzzled many Vedic scholars: both the referent of *śárvariḥ* and the exact character of the activity is unclear. The hapax *śárvariḥ* is now considered as referring to the nights; cf. Geldner (1951: II, 57): 'Sie springen über die Nächte weg wie die sprunglustigen Stiere (auf die Kühe)'; see also Eich 1957: 42-46. In earlier Vedic scholarship this word was interpreted as referring to "die bunten Thiere der Marut(s)" (Böhtlingk/Roth, PW VII, 105; Grassmann 1873: 1386); i.e.: 'they [sc. the Maruts] cover / mount the śárvaris = female spotted animals (?) [= female cheetahs (?)]'. Provided the assumed connection between the Maruts and cheetahs (/ leopards), this latter sense does not seem impossible; perhaps we are confronted here with an instance of deliberate ambiguity.

Abbreviations

AV(Ś) – Atharvaveda(-Śaunakīya), AVP – Atharvaveda-Paippalāda, RV – Ṛgveda

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