

The Meaning and Language of the *Rigveda*: Rigvedic *grāvan* as a test case

Karen Thomson
Edinburgh

In reassuring us that the traditional understanding of the role of the *grāvan* in the *Rigveda* is correct, verse IX, 67, 19 has been of central importance. As Hillebrandt explains in *Vedische Mythologie*: “Der Ausdruck *grāvṇā tunnā* (IX, 67, 19), *suwānó ádrībhiḥ* (IX, 107, 10) usw. zeigt, dass auch in *ṚV.* der Stein und nicht das Brett zum Zerreißen der Schossen gebraucht wurde” (1927-29: II, 417). The *grāvan* appears to occupy similar semantic ground to *ádri* in what is understood to be the ritual language of the Soma ceremony.

But there is a difficulty in IX, 67, 19, which has been side-stepped by translators.

grāvṇā tunnó abhīṣṭutaḥ
pavītram soma gachasi
dádhat stotré suvīriyam

Geldner translates: “Mit dem Preßstein zerstoßen gehst du, Soma, besungen in die Seihe, dem Sänger die Meisterschaft bringend.” Renou’s translation begins, “Frappé par la pierre, ô *soma* qui est célébré...” Both translators have moved *abhīṣṭutas*, “praised”, out of the context of the first line into the second. Geldner takes it with *pavītram... gachasi*: “gehst du... besungen in die Seihe.” Renou supplies a relative clause, taking *abhīṣṭutas*, although nominative, together with the vocative *soma*: “ô *soma* qui est célébré.” But the two past participles in the first line, *tunnás* (from \sqrt{tud} “push”) and *abhīṣṭutas* (from \sqrt{stu} + preverb *abhí* “praise”), appear to be grammatically parallel. This is borne out by the iteration in the first line of the next verse, where both are clearly in agreement with the nominative *eṣás* and the verb is in the third person:

eṣá tunnó abhīṣṭutaḥ
pavītram áti gāhate

Renou here gives a literal version of the first line, “Le voici, frappé, célébré”. However, he pads out his translation to make sense of it. “Le voici (donc), frappé (par les pierres, ce *soma*), célébré”. Geldner at this point opts for a loose translation: “Dieser [taucht] mit Lobgesang zerstoßen”. Both versions highlight the problem that these apparently parallel participles, *tunnás* and *abhīṣṭutas*, present for translators.

In the verse we first looked at, IX, 67, 19, the last two lines are to a degree formulaic; they have already appeared in the text. This is the concluding verse of another gāyatrī poem, IX, 20:

krīlūr makhó ná mamhayúḥ
pavītram soma gachasi
dádhat stotrē suvīriyam

The last two lines are repeated word for word in our passage. The line that precedes them in IX, 20, 7, *krīlūr makhó ná mamhayúḥ*, is similar to the first line in our verse: it also contains two adjectives describing the subject of the sentence. The meaning of these adjectives is contained within the sense of that line; Geldner translates “Spielend, schenklustig wie ein nobler Herr [gehst du Soma in die Seihe]”. In our passage, IX, 67, 19, the same should be the case. There is no justification within the text for moving either participle out of the context of the line in which it occurs to join the sense of the next, as the two translators in their different ways have done. Both words appear to depend on the instrumental *grāvanā*.

If the traditional interpretation of *tunnás* is correct (and I shall return to this at the end of the paper), the text suggests that the *grāvan* both “strikes” and “praises”. To be “struck” and “praised” at the same time, and, in particular, to be “praised” by a stone, seems unlikely. Certainly translators from Sāyaṇa onwards (Sāyaṇa supplies *stotr̥bhiḥ*, “by the worshippers” to explain the second participle) have thought so, and have amended the text accordingly. To them, praising seems a human activity.

In the introduction to his book *On the Veda*, Ghose Aurobindo compares the attempts of the medieval scholar Sāyaṇa and modern scholarship to understand the text. “Both of them present one characteristic in common, the extraordinary incoherence and poverty of sense which their results stamp upon the ancient hymns.” He continues, “The

scholar in dealing with his text is obliged to substitute for interpretation a process almost of fabrication. We feel that he is not so much revealing the sense as hammering and forging rebellious material into some sort of sense and consistency” (1956: 4-5). Although we believe the *Rigveda* to have been passed down to us with unprecedented fidelity, the text has always presented enormous interpretative difficulties. Why does it continue to prove so intractable?

Our understanding of much of the vocabulary of the *Rigveda* is inherited from the native exegetical tradition. The language of the Soma ritual is a primary example of this. We know, however, that the original sense of the *Rigveda* was lost very early on. “... dès le VIIe ou le VIe siècle avant notre ère, l’Inde paraît en avoir perdu le sens authentique, car elle composa la littérature des brâhmanas pour en établir une interprétation” (Masson-d’Oursel in Gorce and Mortier 1944-1951: III, 6). Burrow gives the significant example of the difference in meaning between Rigvedic *krātu* “wisdom, insight” and *kratu*, in later texts, “sacrifice”. “[T]he meaning in the later language is due simply to a misunderstanding [...] it emerges quite clearly there existed no reliable tradition as to the meaning of many Vedic words” (Burrow 1955: 41-42). Oldenberg, writing in 1900, was clear that we have to make up our own minds about meaning. “Die Angaben von Sāyaṇa und Konsorten sind auch hier *quantité négligeable*, zum einen Teil sind sie falsch; wo sie zum anderen Teil richtig sind, können wir erst hinterher herauserkennen, nachdem wir unsererseits des Richtigen uns bemächtigt haben, und dann werden wir sie nicht um der Autorität des Sāyaṇa willen, sondern allein aus unseren eigenen Gründen als richtig betrachten” (Oldenberg 1900: 611). A possible explanation for the continuing difficulty encountered by modern linguists at every turn in the interpretation of the *Rigveda*, for its “rebelliousness”, could be that we have inherited translations that are wrong; in other words, that major pieces of the jigsaw have been in the wrong place from the very beginning.

In view of the problem presented by the first line of IX, 67, 19 — the passage that Hillebrandt quotes as confirming the role of the *grāvan* in the *Rigveda* — I propose, as a test case, a reconsideration of the traditional interpretation of the word *grāvan*. This can only take the form of a review of the passages in which the word occurs. “[T]he meaning of a word can be

ascertained *only* by studying its use. There is no short cut to meaning, through introspection or by any other method. The investigator must start by collecting an adequate sample of contexts and then approach them with an open mind, allowing the meaning or meanings to emerge from the contexts themselves" (Ullmann 1962: 67).

Reference to the evidence of later texts, where the use of a word may be based on an early misunderstanding, cannot help here; but the word *grāvan* appears frequently enough in the *Rigveda* for an independent assessment to be made. In questioning the role of the *grāvan* considerable mental detachment is required in order to achieve the necessary *tabula rasa*, the open mind called for by Ullmann. In particular, I shall consider the possibility that existing translations may be influenced, and possibly hampered, by inherited assumptions, not only about the meaning of individual words but about the kind of text that the *Rigveda* is, occasioning the "hammering and forging" to which Aurobindo refers. If modern scholars were approaching the text of the *Rigveda* for the first time, without the explanations of the commentators, would "unsere eigenen Gründe" lead us to the same conclusion as theirs about the word *grāvan*, that is, that it means "stone"?

The word appears 49 times in the text of the *Rigveda*; in addition there are seven compounded occurrences. This paper examines all these in turn, IX, 67, 19, being the first passage. The passages are arranged in groups to facilitate a contextual study, but within each group they are in the traditional order. Other difficulties of interpretation will be mentioned as they arise, as doubtful passages must carry less weight than those of undisputed meaning. Words which have proved resistant to a consistent interpretation and passages which have not been parsed successfully are noted, but to keep the paper within reasonable limits I have tried not to be distracted by them. If the inherited interpretation of another word seems to me to be questionable, and it does not play a significant syntactic role, I have omitted it from my version. In my own translations I have left the word under review untranslated as "GRAVAN".

The Text and the Translations

My first group of passages is based on the finite verb with which the word *grāvan* is most frequently found, which is \sqrt{vad} "speak" ("die Stimme erheben, sprechen, reden", Mayrhofer),

numbers 2-7 and 9. As Macdonell in *Vedic Mythology* (1897: 106) notes, “*grāvan* (generally connected with *vad*, to speak, and verbs of cognate meaning, and hence showing a greater tendency to personification than *ādri*).” The passages are numbered at the end of the text, which is taken from the metrical edition by Van Nooten and Holland (1994). There is an index at the end of the paper.

I, 83, 6.

arkó vā ślókam āghósate diví
grāvā yátra vādati kārúr ukthíyas (2)

Renou takes *kārúr ukthíyas*, “a poet worthy of praise”, as a metaphor for the stone, supplying “(tel)”: “... soit que le chant fasse retentir au ciel l’appel (aux dieux), là où parle la pierre-presseuse, (tel) un barde qui sait l’hymne.” Griffith does the same, supplying “as ’twere”: “Where the stone rings as ’twere a singer skilled in laud”. This is the way that Sāyaṇa had understood the passage. Geldner, on the other hand, supplies “and”: “oder wenn der Lobgesang seine Melodie zum Himmel erklingen läßt, bei wem der Preßstein ertönt (und) der preiskundige Dichter.” But in the text *kārúr ukthíyas* is simply in apposition to *grāvan*. Both Geldner and Griffith, having in mind the kind of sound a stone might make, elaborate slightly on the verb *vādati*, “speaks”, Griffith translating “rings”, and Geldner “ertönt”; Renou renders it literally. I shall return later, in comparing passage number 16 with this, to my reasons for giving “when” rather than “where” for *yátra* here. The gerundive *ukthíyas* (*ukthyàs*) “worthy of praise”, is turned round here by all three translators, and accorded a special meaning, “skilled in praise”, but this seems unnecessary. I follow Mayrhofer’s translation of *ukthyàs*.

“...or the song rings out its melody to the sky
When the GRAVAN speaks, a poet worthy of praise.”

I, 135, 7.

āti vāyo¹ sasató yāhi śásvato
yátra grāvā vādati tátra gachatam
gyhám índraś ca gachatam (3)

¹Accented in the metrical text in error.

“O Vāyu, passe outre à ceux qui dorment tous tant qu’ils sont! Là où parle la pierre-presseuse, là venez (tous deux, ô Vāyu) ainsi qu’Indra, venez dans la maison!” (Renou)

Henceforth I shall omit Renou’s bracketed explanations where they seem unnecessary, as here. Those who are sleeping in this passage are set against the “speaking” GRAVAN. Tradition assumes that the juxtaposition is metonymous: “sleeping” people are opposed to active ones, causing the GRAVAN to “speak”, the speaking being, as Geldner explains (see number 9 below), “das Geräusch der in Takt geschlagenen Steine”. He again translates here “wo der Stein ertönt”.

“Pass over all sleepers, Vāyu
Where the GRAVAN speaks come there
Come to the house, you and Indra.”

V, 31, 12.

vādan grāvā āva védim bhriyāte (4)

Geldner translates: “Der plappernde (“babbling”) Stein soll auf die Vēdi gesetzt werden.” Griffith had suggested “creaking” for *vādan* in this verse: “the creaking stone is laid upon the altar.” Both interpret the present participle, literally “speaking” again, very loosely here. The traditional understanding of the main verb, *bhriyāte*² with preverb *āva*, has made this necessary. The GRAVAN cannot “be placed” somewhere at the same time as it is “ringing out” as it is being struck (or striking). Comparison with the other occurrence of the verb $\sqrt{bhṛ}$ with *grāvan* (number 23 below) will prompt reconsideration of this translation. But *vādan grāvā*, “the GRAVAN speaking”, is clear.

V, 37, 2.

grāvāṇo yāsyā iṣirām vādanti
āyad adhvaryúr haviṣāva sīndhum (5)

“Während dessen Preßsteine eifrig klappern, soll der Adhvaryu mit der Opferspende zum Fluß hinabgehen” (Geldner; “während” is supplied). Griffith translates *iṣirām vādanti* “ring forth loudly.” Both Geldner and Griffith again elaborate on the verb \sqrt{vad} in their translations, giving “klappern”, “clatter”, and “ring forth”, Geldner again with

²The only hitherto unquestioned occurrence of a passive subjunctive in the *Rigveda*. Macdonell (1910: 334) gives in addition *uhyāte* (*contra* Pada) and *ūhyāthe*, which are differently identified by Lubotsky (1997: 1261, 1280).

considerable licence. As in the previous passage, it is not clear how the two verbs relate to one another in Geldner's translation; is the priest operating the stones as he goes?

Comparison with Homeric *ἱερός* has helped lexicographers to clarify the sphere of reference of *iṣirá*, here translated adverbially ("eifrig", "loudly"). Mayrhofer stresses the relationship between *iṣirá* and *ἱερός*, "Nicht zu trennen von hom. *ἱερός* 'krafterfüllt, vital, heilig' ", and compares *iṣiréna mānasā* in VIII, 48, 7 ("d'une âme fervente", Renou), with *ἱερόν μένος*; Chantraine (1968-1980: 458) cross-refers, under *ἱερός*, to J. Duchesne-Guillemin's observation of cases where Vedic *iṣirá* "s'applique à une force religieuse sacrée".

"Let the adhvaryu whose GRAVANS speak fervently
Go down with the oblation to the river."

VIII, 34, 2.

á tvā grāvā vādann ihá
somí ghóṣeṇa yachatu (6)

Geldner, as in number 4, translates *vādan*, "speaking", as "babbling" here: "Dich soll der plappernde, somavolle Preßstein durch seinen Lärm hierher lenken." He interprets *somín* here, "having or possessing *sóma*", as "somavoll". The word *somín*, which occurs 18 times in the *Rigveda*, usually refers to a man. In most of its occurrences it is taken as nominal, and as a kind of priest, "performer of a Soma sacrifice" (Monier-Williams), "der Somaopferer" or "Somaspender" (Geldner). In five of the six remaining instances where it is understood to be adjectival (and it could again be nominal in the sixth) it describes a priest, and Geldner translates it "somafeiernd", "celebrating soma"; for example at VII, 103, 8, *brāhmaṇāsah somíno vācam akrata*, "Die somafeiernden Brahmanen haben ihre Stimme erhoben". At VIII, 17, 3 it describes "us", *vayám*, the speakers of the verse, and at VIII, 45, 16, friends, *sákhāya[h]... somínaḥ*, glossed in Geldner's translation "Die anwesenden Sänger".

"May the GRAVAN speaking, having *sóma*
Draw you here with sound."

X, 36, 4.

grāvā vādann ápa rákṣāṃsi sedhatu
duṣvápniyaṃ níṛtim... (7)

“Der tönende Preßstein soll die Unholde abwehren, den bösen Traum, das Verderben...” (Geldner)

“May the GRAVAN speaking fend off evil spirits, the bad dream, ruin...”.

(A parallel passage appears at **X, 175, 2:**

grāvāṇo āpa duchúnām
āpa sedhata durmatīm (8)

“O GRAVANS, fend off misfortune,
Keep away bad thoughts...”)

X, 94, 1.

praīte vadantu prá vayāṃ vadāma
grāvabhyo vācam vadata³ vādadbhyaḥ (9)

“Diese sollen ihre Rede anheben, wir wollen unsere Rede anheben. Haltet eine Rede auf die redenden Steine.” (Geldner)

In these two lines the role of the GRAVAN as speaker is repeatedly stressed by the play on words. Their “speaking” is juxtaposed to ours, and what is “spoken” is *vācam*, “speech”. It is difficult therefore to interpret \sqrt{vad} loosely as representing a sound that is not vocal, as translators have done in previous passages. The meaning of the rest of the passage is quite clear to an audience familiar with classical Sanskrit; there are no Vedic obscurities. This is the passage that Yāska chooses to illustrate the word *grāvan*, and in his gloss he merely has to move the preverbs to compound with the verbs as in the later language (see Roth 1852: 135). Geldner therefore is induced to translate the verb literally as “reden” here, although before, with stones in mind, he had interpolated in a variety of ways, with *ertönen* and *tönen* (my numbers 2, 3 and 8), and more loosely, *plappern* (numbers 4 and 6) and *klappern* (5). As a result he feels for the first time the need here to explain to the reader in a footnote: “Das Geräusch der im Takt geschlagenen Steine wird der Priesterrede gleichgesetzt.”

“Let these speak out, let us speak out
Speak words to the speaking GRAVANS.”

In addition to its use with \sqrt{vad} , the word *grāvan* appears on three occasions with a passive form of \sqrt{vac} , “speak”, *ucyāte*,

³Pada *vadata*.

traditionally translated as if active (numbers 10-12). If this is correct the usage is irregular, and according to Grassmann confined to these three passages. Henceforth in quoting from Geldner and other translators I have generally replaced their translations, “Stein”/ “pierre-presseuse”/ “pressing-stone” etc., with the word “GRAVAN”, and changed the gender of the French article accordingly.

V, 25, 8.

[*táva dyumānto arcáyo*]
gráveva ucyate byhát
 [utó te tanyatúr yathā
svānó arta tmānā diváh] (10)

“(tu parles) haut comme parle le GRAVAN.” (Renou)

The subject of the third person singular verb, *ucyate*, is unclear; the noun in the previous line, *arcáyas*, is plural. Geldner translates: “sie tönen laut wie der GRAVAN”—“tönen” for \sqrt{vac} here, as before for \sqrt{vad} , “speak”—and notes, “*ucyate*, der Sg. vom Vergleich attrahiert.” V, 25, 8 concludes, in Renou’s translation, “et ta rumeur surgit d’elle-même comme le tonneur du ciel.”

X, 64, 15

grāvā yātra madhuśút ucyáte byhád
āvivaśanta matíbhīr manīśṇaḥ (11)

“Quand le GRAVAN parle en pressant miel, les (hommes) inspirés ont crié bien fort avec des poèmes” (Renou).

“... da wo der Süßes auspressende GRAVAN hell erklingt, und die Sinnenden mit ihren Gebeten laut gerufen⁴ haben.” (Geldner)

Geldner as usual elaborates on the first verb, *ucyáte*, “erklingt” (“und” is supplied). The GRAVAN is here described as *madhuśút*. This word, translated “pressing sweetness (or honey)” (“Süßes auspressende”, “en pressant miel”), is from *mádhu*, “sweet, sweetness”, with suffixal *-sut*, traditionally derived from the root \sqrt{su} “press”. The word *mádhu* is taken in this context to belong to the ritual language, and *madhuśút* to be synonymous with *somasút*. If so it could of course equally well describe a man, as *somasút* does; see below. The word *madhuśút*

⁴The context here has led translators to render the verb in the second pāda, *āvivaśanta*, from $\sqrt{vās}$, “bellow”, in a more figurative sense, “call out loudly”.

occurs four times in the *Rigveda*, three times with the GRAVAN. Two of these passages are identical: this (X, 64, 15), and **X, 100, 8**, where the line *grāvā yātra madhusūd ucyāte brhād*, (12) is repeated, Geldner there translating “wo der Süßes pressende GRAVAN laut ertönt”. The third passage is IV, 3, 3, number 18 below, where I shall return to consider this word.

I, 89, 4.

tād grāvāṇaḥ somasúto mayobhúvas (13)

“diese... soll (gewähren) die beglückenden somapressenden GRAVANS.” (Gelder).

“Ainsi, les GRAVANS qui pressent le *s o m a*, les reconfortant[e]s!” (Renou)

This passage is the only occurrence of the word *grāvan* with the adjective *somasút*. Elsewhere it is applied to people (VII, 93, 5):

somasútā jánena

“à l’aide du peuple presseur du *soma*!” (Renou); “durch das somapressende Volk!” (Geldner)

The next three passages refer to the sound made by the GRAVAN.

I, 84, 3.

arvācīnaṃ sú te máno

grāvā kṛṇotu vagnúnā (14)

“Que le GRAVAN, avec sa rumeur, rende donc ton âme tournée vers nos parages” (Renou).

“Der GRAVAN soll durch sein Getöse doch ja deinen Sinn geneigt machen.” (Geldner)

The noun *vagnú*, translated “rumeur”, “Getöse”, elsewhere describes the call of frogs uniting in the rain (VII, 103, 2), or the voice of a wife, *jāyá* (X, 32, 3). At IX, 97, 13 the roar of a bull “va faisant résonner la terre et le ciel” (Renou) and is compared to the voice (*vagnú*) of Indra in battle: *indrasyeva vagnúr ā śṛṇva ājaú*; in Geldner’s version, “Mann hört seine Stimme wie die Indra’s im Kampfe”. (Renou’s translation lapses at this point: “On entend sa voix comme (celle d’Indra)”; Indra doesn’t need to be in parentheses, and *ājaú* is not translated.) As in numbers 3 and 6, above, the sound made by the GRAVAN, which draws Indra, appears to be vocal. Whitney (1885: 151)

derives it from \sqrt{vac} , and Mayrhofer is inclined to agree: “Wohl zu VAC”.

“May the GRAVAN calling⁵ incline your mind hitherward.”

VII, 104, 17.

grāvāṇo ghnantu rakṣāsa upabdaīḥ (15)

“Die GRAVANS sollen mit ihrem Geklapper die Unholde erschlagen”.

Again there are parallels with passages we have already looked at. It is hoped that the sound made by the GRAVANS, as in number 7 above where it is portrayed as vocal, and number 8, will drive away demons. The noun *upabdā* occurs only here, but is presumably related to *upabdī*, a kind of noise. An abstract translation of the verb here, from \sqrt{han} , perhaps fits the context better.

“May the GRAVANS with sound destroy the demons”.

In the next passage the sound made by the GRAVANS is again clearly described as vocal, *vācā*, “with speech or voice” (compare *vācam* in passage number 9 above).

X, 76, 6.

*bhurāntu no yaśāsaḥ sōtu āndhaso
grāvāṇo vācā divitā divitmatā
nāro yātra duhaté kāmīyam mādhu
āghoṣāyanto abhīto mithastúraḥ* (16)

“Die geehrten GRAVANS sollen, um uns Saft auszuschlagen, mit ihrer gen Himmel gehenden, gen Himmel dringenden Stimme klappern—während die Männer die begehrte Süßigkeit herausmelken—, nach allen Seiten ertönend, sich gegenseitig überbietend.” (Geldner)

The word *sōtu* in the first line, again derived from the root \sqrt{su} , has presented problems. Geldner translates, “um ... auszuschlagen”, but as Gotō explains: “Nicht sicher, doch Iptv. 3. Sg. in einem parenthetischen Satz möglich, vgl. Oldenberg Noten z. St. [1912], der den Akk. n. des Stammes *sōtu*-vorzuziehen scheint.” (1991: Anm. 80). Oldenberg had rejected suggestions that *sōtu* might be an instrumental form (Böhtlingk

⁵My translation deliberately avoids the use of a possessive pronoun.

and Roth), or that the text should be emended to read *sótum* (Grassmann) or *sótā* (Caland-Henry); he opts for the accusative neuter reading, although noting “denkbar Lokativ”. Renou follows Oldenberg, but raises a question: “*sótu*, Acc. nt... Mais la traduction ‘qu’elles activent le pressurage’ se heurte au fait que *bhur-* est intransitif.” (16, 143)⁶. Lubotsky (1997) chooses the root aorist imperative option listed by Gotō, but as Oldenberg says this “wäre doch sehr hart”; it is not clear how it should be translated. The dependent word *ándhas*, which is here taken to belong to the ritual language and translated “Saft”, elsewhere in the text is understood to mean “darkness”, as at I, 94, 7: *rātryās cid ándho áti deva paśyasi*, “Du Gott blickst auch durch das Dunkel der Nacht...”

The first verb here, *bhurántu*, is from the root \sqrt{bhur} , “sich rasch hin- und herbewegen, eilen, sich tummeln” (Mayrhofer). Geldner has taken the concrete sense and extrapolated from it the sound that rapid movement might generate, translating “klappern sollen”, “must clatter”. He is thinking of stones; as he was in number 5 above where he offered the same translation for the verb *vādanti*. Rix translates *bhurántu* as abstract, giving “sollen sich tummeln” (2001: 81). Geldner’s translation “ertönend” for the causative *āghośáyantas* is more strictly correct than it was when he used it in the context of the GRAVANS to translate \sqrt{vad} in numbers 2 and 3, and then \sqrt{vac} in number 12, above. He regards the third line here as parenthetical to the sense of the other three lines, with a change of subject. I have therefore left it untranslated; but shall come back to it in number 18, when reconsidering *madhuśút* and *mádhu*.

“Let the glorious ones make haste for us [*sótu ándhasah*],
The GRAVANS with radiant voice reaching up to the sky⁷
... Making resound on all sides, vying⁸ with one another.”

There are some parallels in X, 76, 6 with passages we have already looked at. The second verb, from $\sqrt{ghuṣ}$ with preverb *ā*, also appeared in my passage number 2 (repeated below). Here in its causative form “making resound” (“widerhallen lassen”,

⁶I give references to the “divers hymnes” in the second half of vol. 16, otherwise difficult to locate.

⁷I have followed Oldenberg here (quoted *Ai. Gr.* 1954: 878).

⁸Monier-Williams suggests a different interpretation: “following one another, alternating”.

Mayrhofer) the GRAVANS are the subject; there it was *arkás*, “song”. There seems also to be an echo in *divítā/divítmatā* of *diví*, “to the sky” in that passage.

arkó vā ślókam āghóṣate diví
grāvā yátra vādati kārúr ukthíyas

All three translators, in addition to supplying “like” or “and” to dissociate the GRAVAN from the poet in the second half of the line, as already discussed, distance the GRAVAN from the sense of the previous pāda, “or the song rings out its melody to the sky”, by translating *yátra* “where” rather than “when”. But in X, 76, 6, the GRAVANS themselves are the subject of the causative form of the verb translated “ring out”; in other words, they make it happen. In addition, we have seen the related noun *ghóṣa* used to describe the sound the GRAVANS make, in VIII, 34, 2 (number 6 above). In the light of these parallels “when” is surely the more likely translation:

“...or the song rings out its melody to the sky
When the GRAVAN speaks, a poet worthy of praise.”

X, 85, 4.

grāvṇām íc chṛṇvān tiṣṭhasi (17)

“... stehst du da auf die Preßsteine horchend”.
“You stand listening just to the GRAVANS”.

The verb \sqrt{sr} takes the accusative of the thing, the genitive of the person (as here, *grāvṇām*), heard.

IV, 3, 3.

devāya śastīm amṛtāya śamsa
grāveva sótā madhuśúd yám īlé (18)

“(vor) dem unsterblichen Gotte das Preislied (trag), den der Honigpresser ruft wie der GRAVAN.” (Geldner)

Renou: “au dieu immortel récite ... une louange, qu’invogue le presseur du doux (*soma*) comme (l’invogue ... aussi) le GRAVAN!”

The GRAVAN here is depicted as invoking. This is stressed by Renou’s explanatory brackets, although neither translator remarks upon it.

The word *sótā*, traditionally derived from \sqrt{su} like *sótu* in

number 16 above, is again problematic. It appears here from the position of the accent to be a participle, and therefore adjectival, like *madhuṣút*. Renou notes “*sótā*, vu le ton, devrait être ‘en pressant’, mais cette valeur participiale ne conviendrait pas 7.92,2, ni sans doute 8.33,12. On peut hésiter ici.” He notes to *madhuṣút* at the fourth occurrence of the word, III, 58, 9 (see below): “*madhuṣút* est actif, ép. de *grāvan* ‘qui presse le doux (breuvage)’. If this is so then the text would suggest that both *sótā* and *madhuṣút* describe the GRAVAN, although neither Renou nor Geldner takes them in this way. Griffith, who does, in order to make sense of the line ignores *iva*, “like”: “A song of praise sing to the God immortal, whom the stone presser of the sweet juice worships”. All three appear to conflate *sótā* and *madhuṣút* to make a single noun, “Honigpresser”, “presseur du doux (*soma*)”, “presseur of the sweet juice”. If their interpretation of *madhuṣút* as given in number 11 above was right, there is textual redundancy here. Together *sótā* (which translators read as agent noun *sotā*) *madhuṣút* should literally be translated “der Honigpressende Presser”, “le presseur en pressant doux”, “the presser pressing the sweet juice”. In following the traditional interpretation translators have been forced to assume that the text is wrong (wrongly accented), either contains a meaningless *iva* (Griffith) or is inconsistent (*madhuṣút* is an epithet of the *grāvan* elsewhere but not here), and that it is flawed (repetitious).

The adjective *madhuṣút* occurs only four times in the *Rigveda*. Two of the passages, where the text is exactly repeated, are my numbers 11 and 12 above. One other occurrence remains to enable us to test our translation. But at III, 58, 9, where it appears in its superlative form, *madhuṣúttama*, it agrees with the noun *sóma* itself. “Soma most-pressing soma” cannot be right. In this instance the word is therefore rendered differently by translators, as “emitting sweetness” (Monier-Williams). Griffith translates “Aśvins, your Soma sheds delicious sweetness”, and Geldner “Der für euch bestimmte Soma gibt am meisten Süßigkeit aus”. But if this translation is an acceptable variation, when describing the GRAVAN it could also mean something like “emitting” sweetness. In the context of the verbs that accompany it, here \sqrt{id} , “anrufen, durch Lieder preisen, verehren” (Mayrhofer), and in the first two (identical) passages \sqrt{vac} , “speak”, this then would relate it to compounds like *mádhu-vacas*, “sweet of speech”, or “sweetly speaking” at IV,

6, 5 and V, 43, 2, and *mádhu-jihva* at IX, 85, 10, “sweet-tongued” (“der honigzungigen Seher”, Geldner), like Greek *μελί-γλωσσος*, “honey-tongued”. And to *mádhumant*, “possessing sweetness”, “sweet”, used of words or of song—for example, *mádhumad vācaḥ* at I, 78, 5, “eine honigreiche Rede”, and *mádhumantam... arkám* at VIII, 8, 11 (“ein süßes Wort”), and at VIII, 51, 10, where however Geldner varies his translation of the same collocation to the traditional “vom Süßtrank begleiteten Preisgesang”. And, again, its superlative, *mádhumattama*, “most possessing sweetness”, “most sweet”, also used to describe speech, *vācas*, at V, 11, 5, “diese süßeste Rede”, and songs, *gīras*, again (VIII, 3, 15, “Diese süßesten Lobreden”). And to the word *mádhu* used on its own, as in II, 39, 6, to mean “sweet speech”; *oṣṭhav iva mádhu āsné vadantā*, “wie zwei Lippen Honig zum Munde redend”. But III, 58, 9 is regarded as exceptional, and, in spite of its force as the only occurrence of the superlative, as a lapse in concentration on the part of the poet. Renou notes: “Le renversement d’emploi est dû au fait que l’auteur pense au presseur de soma.”

The difficulties posed by the two derivatives of \sqrt{su} , at any rate, do not affect the role of the GRAVAN, who is represented as a petitioner in the line.

“Recite a song of praise to the immortal god
Whom he calls upon, like a [...] GRAVAN.”

I postponed a translation of the third line in number 16 above, *náro yátra duhaté kámiyam mádhu*. Geldner had regarded it as parenthetical to the sense of the other three pādas, translating “ – während die Männer die begehrte Süßigkeit herausmelken – ”. He then notes to the fourth line: “Von Sāy. auf die Priester bezogen, besser... auf die Steine in a b”. But the change of subject is awkward. The verb \sqrt{duh} , in addition to the concrete physical sense “milk”, often has an abstract meaning, “give, give forth” (Mayrhofer “*DOGH* melken... spenden”). At VI, 48, 12, for example, it is used of *śrávas* (cognate with Greek *κλέος*), and Geldner translates “[unsterblichen] Ruhm spenden wird”. I suggest that in passage number 16 the verb also has this abstract sense, and *mádhu*, as in the passages above, describes sweet sound:

“Let the glorious ones make haste for us [...],
 The GRAVANS with radiant voice reaching up to the sky
 When the men give forth delightful sweetness
 Making resound on all sides, vying with one another.”

V, 31, 5.

vṛṣṇe yāt te vṛṣaṇo arkām ārcān
īndra grāvāṇo āditih sajośāḥ
anaśvāso yé pavāyo arathā
īndreṣitā abhy āvartanta dāsūn (19)

Geldner translates: “Als dir, dem Bullen, die Bullen, o Indra, den Lobgesang anstimmten, da waren die Preßsteine, die Aditi einverstanden, welche (Steine wie) Radschienen von Indra entsandt, ohne Roß und Wagen auf die Dasyu’s losgingen.” In addition to the bracketed “(Steine wie)” there is no textual authority for “da waren” here. He clearly has had difficulty with the passage. Can shedding assumptions help us to make sense of it?

The most obvious way of reading the first two lines is to take the GRAVANS to govern the verb in the first pāda; they “will sing the song”. This is how Grassmann (110) understands it. However, as he is convinced that *grāvan* means “stone”, he has to explain that they are being described as something other than they are, as Geldner did in passage number 9 above: “...das Aufschlagen der (vergötterten) Preßsteine als Gesang geschildert wird”. Geldner introduces “bulls” here, taking *vṛṣaṇas* as nominal. But it is much more natural to take *vṛṣan* as adjectival (“strong, manly”), and in agreement with the GRAVANS, as indeed it is (*vṛṣā grāvā*) in two other passages, **V, 40, 2** (number 20), and **VIII, 13, 32** (number 21). Geldner’s supplied “da waren” is then unnecessary.

The GRAVANS are singing; and they are *āditih sajośāḥ*. The word *sajośa* is used in the context of worship in an earlier poem, I, 153, 1: “Wir verehren euch Große einmütig [*sajośās*] mit Opfertagen und Verbeugungen” (Geldner); Renou translates it at this point “de concert”. At VII, 38, 4 the word appears again in this context, this time, as here, with Aditi herself as the praiser, “Den die Göttin Aditi belobt... (ihn) beloben einmütig [*sajośās*] die Großkönige”. The GRAVANS in our passage are in concert with Aditi.

“When the manly GRAVANS will sing the song to thee, Indra
 O mighty one, in concert with Aditi...”

Geldner notes to his translation of the next two lines, “Kühne Hyperbel, welche die in Tätigkeit gesetzten Preßsteine zu einer Waffe gegen die Dämonen macht.” In order to interpret the passage in this way he has had to supply, in addition to “wie” to introduce the comparison, a change of subject, “(Steine wie)”, to avoid the infelicity of the suggestion that Aditi, one of the most ancient of the Indian goddesses (“‘Infinity’ or the ‘Eternal and Infinite Expanse’”, Monier-Williams), could be compared to a weapon. But we have already seen the “weapon” of the GRAVANS: it is a kind of sound. In number 15, above, the word describing that sound was a *hapax legomenon*: *grāvāṇo ghnantu rakṣāsa upabdatīh*. But in number 7, *grāvā vādann āpa rākṣāṃsi sedhatu*, “may the GRAVAN speaking fend off evil spirits”, it is described as vocal. I suggest that in this passage—and in the previous two—the GRAVANS drive away demons by means of their song. Griffith, in his translation of this passage, had taken *vṛṣaṇas* to mean “heroes”, and then supplied “and” where Geldner had supplied “da waren” to accommodate the GRAVANS. But he had understood the import of the last two lines, noting “the worshippers of Indra overcame their enemies by prayer and the favour of their God”. Conquering demons by prayer or song is indeed victory “without horse or chariot”.

“When the manly GRAVANS will sing the song to thee,
 Indra
 O mighty one, in concert with Aditi,
 Who [*paváyas*] without horse, without chariot,
 Urged on by Indra overcome the Dasyus.”

The word *paváyas* here is problematical. The traditional version, “wheel rims”, seems inappropriate, particularly when specifically described as “chariotless”. Geldner, attempting to make sense of the word in the context, has supplied “wie”, translating “wie Radschienen”, “like wheel rims”. Similes, flagged by the particles *iva*, *ná*, or *yathā*, are a very frequent literary device in the Rigveda. There are over a thousand occurrences of *iva* alone; it occurred in the previous passage, and indeed appears again in the one that follows this. If there is no such word in the text we should hesitate to supply one in translation. Geldner has supplemented the text to make the traditional translation of *paváyas* fit, and it only “fits” if the change of subject is also supplied, and even then the sense is, as he notes, “bold hyperbole”. He then takes the past participle of

√*iṣ*, *iṣitá* in a concrete sense, “propel”, translating “like wheel rims propelled by Indra”. The image conjured up is somewhat incongruous. I suggest that the sense of the verb here, as in my translation, is again abstract.

This is not the only passage where “wheel rims” seems not to be right. At I, 168, 8, “The rivers shout back to the wheel rims when they raise their thunderous voice” is unconvincing, as also is the conclusion of the first verse of IX, 50, *vāṇāsya codayā pavīm*, “impel the wheel rim of music”. The meaning of *pavī* should perhaps be subjected to review.

The next passage is quite clear; GRAVAN and singer are compared.

V, 36, 4.

eṣá grāveva jaritá ta indra
íyarti vácam bhád āśusāṇáh (22)

“Dein Sänger hier erhebt wie der GRAVAN seine Stimme laut, sich ereifernd” (Geldner) The singer, *jaritṛ*, is here described as “like a GRAVAN”. Compare passage 18, “whom [he] like a GRAVAN, invokes”. Again, Geldner curiously makes no remark about the fact that the singer is portrayed as “like a stone” when he raises his voice. In translating *āśusāṇás* “sich ereifernd”, “getting excited”, he is apparently deriving the word from the root √*śuṣ*, “dry” with preverb *á* in a specialised sense which seems remote from the root (he explains his derivation in *Der Rigveda in Auswahl* (1907-9: I, 181). Böhlingk and Roth, Grassmann, Lubotsky and Mayrhofer all agree in deriving it from √*śvas* “breathe”. Grassmann had translated the verb with preverb “schnaufen bei angestrenzter Arbeit”.

“This singer of yours, Indra, like a GRAVAN
Raises his voice up high, breathing deeply.”

So far an unprejudiced approach to the text appears to suggest that the word is more likely to represent a kind of singer than a stone. The next passage, however, surely presents the evidence we have been waiting for: that the traditional interpretation is likely to be correct.

VII, 33, 14.

grāvāṇam bíbhrat prá vadāti ágre (23)

“Den Preßstein tragend soll er zuerst das Wort haben.”
(Geldner)

In Geldner’s translation the priest “carries” the GRAVAN.

But is this translation of the verb, concrete again, correct? I suggest that it is not. This is the second line of a triṣṭubh stanza. The first two lines together read:

ukthabhṛtam sāmabhṛtam bibharti
grāvāṇam bibhrat prā vadāti ágre

Geldner translates the first line, “Er unterstützt den Liederträger, den Sāmanträger”; “he supports him who brings song, him who brings the Sāman”. He then changes his translation of the verb in the second pāda. But *bibharti* and *bibhrat* are both from $\sqrt{bhṛ}$, one finite and one participial; the word *grāvan* is parallel to *ukthabhṛta* and *sāmabhṛta*. Geldner’s distinction of meaning, taking *bibharti* metaphorically as “unterstützt” in the first line, and *bibhrat* concretely as “tragend” in the second, is based entirely on his understanding of the meaning of the three nouns.

R. N. Dandekar, looking at this passage in *Exercises in Indology*, translates: “(This one here)... supports (*bibharti*) the supporter of Ukthas (the Hotṛ) and the supporter of the Sāmans (the Udgātṛ), (and he also supports him who) is the supporter of the Soma-crushing stone (the Adhvaryu) (elliptical; [*yáh*] *grāvāṇam bibhrat* [*vartate tam api bibharti*])... The Brahman generally supervises and maintains in order (*bibharti*) the activities of the other three principal priests.” (1981: 110). Dandekar’s explanation makes sense of the two lines. But his translation, since it assumes the traditional interpretation of *grāvan* to be correct, depends upon an improbable ellipsis—that the word *grāvan* in the text means “the one who is the supporter of the GRAVAN”.

Dandekar’s translation of $\sqrt{bhṛ}$ here, “support”, seems awkward, but there can be no doubt that an abstract sense of the verb is meant. Perhaps “bring” would be better. I referred to this passage in number 4, above, where again the verb was from $\sqrt{bhṛ}$. I suggest that there also tradition assigns too concrete a meaning to the verb, and that the translation “bring” may help us towards an understanding of the passage.

VIII, 42, 4.

*ā vāṃ grāvāṇo aśvinā
dhībhir viprā acucyavuh (24)*

Geldner, as in the first passage (and elsewhere), supplies “and” here: “Euch, Aśvin, haben die GRAVANS herangezogen (und) die Redekundigen mit ihren (frommen) Gedanken”. But if *grāvāṇas* and *viprās* are both nouns they are again in apposition, as translated by Griffith: “Aśvins, with songs the singer stones have made you hasten hitherward.” More natural, as in number 19 above with *vṛṣan*, would be to take *vipra* as adjectival:

“Aśvins, with prayers have the GRAVANS, the inspired ones, brought you hither.”

This is how Renou translates it. His note conveys his puzzlement, and he explains why he has resisted the temptation to tailor his translation of *vipra* at this point: “On est tenté d’abord de garder le sens étymologique de *vipra*, donc ‘rendues vibrantes par’, mais on s’écarterait ainsi de *gīrbhir viprah* 5.” (7,71)

In the next group the GRAVAN displays further human characteristics.

VI, 51, 14.

Desiring fellowship.
*grāvāṇaḥ soma no hí kaṃ
sakhitvanāya vāvaśúḥ (25)*

“Denn unsere GRAVANS verlangen (nach dir), Soma, zur Kameradschaft.” (Geldner) Geldner in supplying “(nach dir)”, addressed to Soma, is thinking, once more, of the traditional understanding of the meaning of the word *grāvan*. Renou’s translation, taking the verb *vāvaśúr* to govern *na*, is more likely, and “(nach dir)” does not have to be supplied (although he does not translate *hí*, “because”): “les GRAVANS... ont exprimé leur vouloir pour s’associer avec nous.”

“Because the GRAVANS desire fellowship with us.”

VIII, 26, 24.

Being on horseback.
*tuvāṃ hí supsárastamaṃ
ṛṣádaneṣu hū máhe
grāvāṇaṃ ná ásvapṛṣṭham maṃhánā (26)*

“Denn dich, der du den schönsten Genuß bekommst, laden wir zu den Männersitzen, der du auf dem Rücken bereitwillig die Rosse trägst wie der Preßstein das (Soma)roß.” (Geldner)

The compound *ásvapṛṣṭha* is an unusual bahuvrīhi formation: “der von Bopp für die ganze Kategorie empfohlene Name ‘Possessivkomposita’ ist zu eng, vgl. z.B. v. *áśva-pṛṣṭha*- ‘auf Rosses Rücken getragen’ ” (*Ai. Gr.* 1905: 273). The divinity addressed here is Vāyu, the wind, who is compared to the GRAVAN in a passing reference. Geldner struggles with the last line. In his translation, “bereitwillig” translates *maṁhānā*; others take the word differently.⁹ The rest, “der du auf dem Rücken die Rosse trägst wie der Preßstein das (Soma) Roß”, relates solely to *grāvānaṁ nā ásvapṛṣṭham*, literally, and straightforwardly, “like a GRAVAN on horseback.” The complexity—and impenetrability—of his version is entirely due to his assumption about meaning. He then notes: “Es kann ebensogut bedeuten: Rosse auf seinem Rücken (dem Opfernden) bringend, als: seine beflügelten Rosse in ihrem Fluge auf Windesrücken tragend”.

IX, 82, 3.

*sáṁ grāvabhir nasate*¹⁰... (27)

“Mit den GRAVANS kommt er in Berührung...” (Geldner). Mayrhofer explains the root \sqrt{nas} “sich glücklich (zu Hause) vereinen... gr. *véομαι* kehre Heim”. With preverb *sám* the verb usually refers to conjugal affection in the RV: “sich *liebevoll vereinen* mit [I.], besonders von Mann und Weib... sich versammeln.” (Grassmann). Again in rendering it “comes into contact with” Geldner is letting the picture in his mind determine his translation, and he offers a more concrete sense than the verb strictly carries.

“He joins in affection with the GRAVANS...”

X, 92, 15.

Looking at.

grāvāṇa ūrdhvā abhí cakṣur adhvarám (28)

⁹Mayrhofer gives “mit Großzügigkeit, reichlich”. Renou notes to another occurrence of the word: “ ‘avec générosité’ est prob. la nuance la meilleure, en accord avec *mah-* (*maṁh-*) ‘être généreux’. Ge. donne souvent ‘bereitwillig’ qui paraît faible.” (3, 85)

¹⁰SV *vasate*.

“les GRAVANS haut dressé[e]s ont regardé vers le sacrifice”
(Renou)

For *ūrdhvā*, “upright”, see below, numbers 34-37.

X, 94, 10.

Taking pleasure in.

yāsya grāvāṇo ájuṣadhvam adhvarám (29)

“...wann ihr GRAVANS an dem Opfer jemandes Gefallen fandet” (Geldner)

X, 94, 2.

They are parallel here to the sons of Sudhanvan:

viṣṭvī grāvāṇaḥ sukṛtaḥ sukṛtyāyā (30)

“Da die Steine tätig wären, Gutes wirkend mit gutem Werke” (Geldner)

This same formula, *viṣṭvī... sukṛtaḥ sukṛtyāyā*, refers to the Saudhanvans at III, 60, 3, where Geldner translates it appropriately differently, “[nachdem] sie... gearbeitet hatten, kunstfertig mit Kunstfertigkeit”.

X, 108, 11.

... and here to the Ṛṣis:

sómo grāvāṇa ṛṣayaś ca víprāḥ (31)

“Soma, die GRAVANS und die redegewaltigen Ṛṣi’s”.
(Geldner) The word *vípra*, which Geldner takes here as adjectival, could also apply to the GRAVANS: “The GRAVANS and the Ṛṣis, the inspired ones”. This is the second time *vípra* has appeared in the text with the GRAVANS. Is it possible that it does indeed describe them, as it seemed to do in passage number 24, above, when Geldner supplied “and” to enable him to take it as nominal?

In the first passage quoted in this paper (IX, 67, 19), the first line, *grāvāṇā tunnó abhíṣṭutaḥ*, was echoed in the verse that followed it:

*eṣá tunnó abhíṣṭutaḥ
pavíttram áti gāhate*

These lines bear a striking similarity to two lines in IX, 3, 6 (the subject is the same).

*eṣá víprair abhíṣṭuto
apó devó ví gāhate
dádhat rátnāni dāśúṣe*

The last line of this verse is echoed in the last line of IX, 67, 19:

dádhat stotré suvīriyam

The parallels between the two passages are manifest. Only the unshakeable conviction that the GRAVANS are stones stands in the way of the conclusion that they are the same as the *víprās*, the “poètes inspirés” (Renou), or “Redekundigen” (Geldner) of IX, 3, 6.

III, 42, 2.

grāvabhiḥ sutám (32)

“... mit den Steinen ausgepreßt” (Geldner)

The past participle *sutá*, which in the later language also functions as the past participle of both \sqrt{su} “impel” and $\sqrt{sū}$ “give birth to”, is traditionally understood to belong only to the root \sqrt{su} , “press” (unattested outside Indo-Iranian), in the *Rigveda*. Elsewhere in the text this past participle, *sutá*, is regularly found with *nṛbhis*, “by men”. The collocation appears twice in IX, 62, for example: in verse 5, where Geldner translates “von Männern ausgepreßt” and again in verse 16, “von den Männern ausgepreßt.”

IX, 80, 4.

nṛbhiḥ soma prácyuto grāvabhiḥ sut[áh] (33)

“Von den Männern gerüttelt, mit den Steinen ausgeschlagen.”

Here again, both in the text and in Geldner’s translation, the GRAVANS are parallel to men; *nṛbhiḥ prácyutah/ grāvabhiḥ sutáh*.

The past participle *prácyuta* (from \sqrt{cyu} with preverb *prá*) occurs only here in the *Rigveda*. Mayrhofer translates the verb “in Bewegung geraten, sich bewegen, unternehmen”. Geldner understands the past participle here in a concrete physical sense, “gerüttelt”, “shaken”.¹¹ This “shaking” is performed by

¹¹The negative *ápracyuta* also occurs at II, 28, 8, describing *vratá*, “vielleicht...”

men, *nṛbhis*. Geldner notes: “*prácyuta* = *frašūta* in Avesta, dort vom Mörser und Kolben oder von den beiden Preßbrettern des Haoma gebraucht”, that is, “in the *Avesta* used of the pestle and mortar or the two pressing-boards for Haoma”. This is highly disconcerting. These two words are surely related, as Geldner says. If the translation of *frašūta* in the *Avesta* is right, a traditional reading of the text would expect the past participles to be reversed: *nṛbhiḥ sutáḥ* / *grāvabhiḥ prácyutaḥ*—we saw above the occurrence of the former in the *Rigveda*. Comparison with the interpretation of the *Avesta* might compel the conclusion that here *nṛbhis* and *grāvabhis* are synonymous. But as Masson-d’Oursel pointed out in the work quoted at the beginning of this paper, “en gros l’Avesta relève d’une basse époque en comparaison du Véda; et les cultes archaïques des Iraniens... nous demeurent ignorés” (Gorce and Mortier 1944-1951: III, 6). Stanley Insler explains in the introduction to his edition of the Gāthās, “the related Indian Rigveda... has provided the source for establishing much of the fundamental vocabulary of Zarathustra’s lyrics” (1975: 1). Much of our understanding of the meaning of the *Avesta* is based on the traditional interpretation of the *Rigveda*. As Whitney noted in 1873: “There would hardly have been any Zend philology, but for the aid of the Sanskrit” (183). Comparison with the *Avesta* might well be an exercise in circularity.

Renou’s translation highlights the perplexity here. As in the very first passage we looked at, he disregards the parallel structure of the line, and adapts the text in his translation to associate both instrumentals with *prácyutas*. He then supplies “(une fois)” to accommodate the second past participle: “Ebranlé, ô *soma*, par les seigneurs, par les GRAVANS, (une fois) pressé...”.

The traditional interpretation has led both Geldner and Renou to assume the verb, *prácyutas*, to have a concrete, physical meaning. Renou then has “hammered and forged” the text to make it fit. This is an example of what Aurobindo describes in the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper. Translators appear to be trying to squeeze the wrong foot into the glass slipper.

The next section (34-37) is of passages where the GRAVAN

‘Gebot, Anweisung, Regel’ ”(Mayrhofer), where its sense must of course be abstract.

is described as *ūrdhvā*, “upright” (“aufrecht”, Mayrhofer).

I, 28, 1.

yātra grāvā pythūbudhna
ūrdhvó bhāvati sótave (34)

Geldner translates: “Wo der GRAVAN mit breitem Fuß zum Ausschlagen aufgerichtet wird”.

In his entry for *ūrdhvā* Mayrhofer draws attention to cognate Greek *ὀρθός*, “straight”. The text here literally reads “is (or becomes) upright”, but the image in Geldner’s mind is of a stone being lifted up in the hand of a priest, ready to strike a lower stone. As in passages 4 and 5, there is an inherent paralogism here; why is the GRAVAN described as “broad-based” (Geldner’s “mit breitem Fuß”), suggesting stability, as it is being lifted up?

The verb $\sqrt{bhū}$ occurs elsewhere in the text with *ūrdhvā*. At the beginning of IV, 4, 5 *ūrdhvó bhava* is addressed to Agni. This imperative is employed as a variant of a different imperative at the beginning of the previous verse, *úd agne tiṣṭha*, “stand up”. Renou’s translation brings out the parallel: “O Agni, dresse toi (*úd agne tiṣṭha*)... Soit haut (dressé) (*ūrdhvó bhava*).” In our passage *grāvā* [...] *ūrdhvó bhāvati* could therefore be translated “the GRAVAN stands up”.

The word *sótave*, translated by Geldner “zum Ausschlagen”, appears only here. It is understood to be a dative infinitive from the verbal noun *sótu*. The word *sótu* appeared in X, 76, 6, my number 16 above, where Lubotsky takes it to be a finite form of the verb, although Geldner had understood it as infinitival. Lubotsky gives only two infinitives from *sótu*, this, and the ablative *sótos* at X, 86, 1. There the subject is again understood to be human, Geldner noting “Subjekt die Menschen”.

X, 70, 7.

ūrdhvó grāvā bṛhád agníḥ sámiddhaḥ (35)

“Up stands the GRAVAN, high burns the fire enkindled” (Griffith).

X, 100, 9.

ūrdhvó grāvā vasavo astu sotári (36)

“Der pressende Stein soll sich aufrichten, ihr Guten!” (Geldner)

“Que se dresse haut le GRAVAN, ô Vasu’s, à presser!”

(Renou)

The interpretation of the word *sotári* again has been the subject of much debate. In Geldner's version it has apparently been absorbed into "der pressende Stein". Renou translates it "à presser", and at the previous occurrence of the word, X, 76, 2, Geldner had also understood it to be infinitival. It appears to be the locative of the agentive noun *sotṛí*. Oldenberg had expressed grave doubts about the interpretation of this apparent locative as an infinitive, describing it as "gezwungen", and, following suggestions made by Ludwig and Neisser, posited a nominative form (1901: 302). Renou notes to X, 100, 9, with a reference to Oldenberg, "Enchaînement par *grāvā*. - *sotári*, 'pour presser'... cf. aussi 10.76.2, dont le rapprochement inclinerait plutôt à 'qui pressure' ". But Oldenberg had been circumspect. "Doch wird man mit seinem Urteil zurückhalten müssen bis eine überzeugende sprachgeschichtliche Erklärung solcher Nom. gelungen ist." This linguistic explanation appears not to have been forthcoming, and Mayrhofer rejects the suggested alternative. He takes *sotári* as a locative but with irregular meaning: "*sotár-* m. Pressender (RV), *sotári* beim (Soma-)Pressen". Once more, words traditionally understood to be derivatives of \sqrt{su} are highly problematical.

The formula *ūrdhvó grāvā* also occurs at X, 92, 15, a passage we have already looked at (number 28 above), *grāvāṇa ūrdhvā abhí cakṣur adhvarám*, where Renou had translated, "les GRAVANS haut dressé[e]s ont regardé vers le sacrifice".

Compounded forms usually arise from existing un-compounded forms in the *Rigveda*, and this collocation leads to the compound *ūrdhvágrāvan*.

III, 54, 12.

ūrdhvágrāvāṇo adhvarám ataṣṭa (37)

"Vous avez façonné l'aire-sacrificielle (en mettant) les GRAVANS bien droit[e]s." (Renou)

Renou supplies "(en mettant)" to explain the relationship between *adhvarám ataṣṭa* and the compound, but the meaning remains opaque, and the finite verbs that accompany the un-compounded forms of *ūrdhvá* with the GRAVANS are verbs to be, *bhávati* and *astu*, not verbs to "put".

For singers being *ūrdhvá* see X, 115, 9.

*tāmś ca pāhī gṛmatás ca sūvrīn
vāṣaḍ vāṣaḥ ity ūrdhvāso anakṣan
nāmo nāma ity ūrdhvāso anakṣan*

“Protège à la fois ces chantres patrons! Salut! Salut! (Entendant parler) ainsi, ils se sont approchés droit. Hommage! Hommage! (Entendant parler) ainsi, ils se sont approchés droit.” (Renou) Geldner notes to *ūrdhvāsas* in this passage: “aktionsbereit oder erwartungsvoll”.

The next section contains passages whose interpretation has given scholars difficulty (38-43).

II, 39, 1.

*grāvāṇeva tād id ārthaṃ jarethe
gṛdhreva vṛkṣāṃ nidhimāntam ācha
brahmāṇeva vidātha ukthaśāsā¹² (38)*

The verb *jarethe* in the first line could mean either “wake” or “sing, praise”. Griffith had understood the latter: “Sing like two GRAVANS for this same purpose”. Geldner, in his version of the first four books published in 1923, made the assumption of textual corruption; that *jarethe* here should read *carethe*. He translated the first two lines: “Wie zwei Preßsteine betreibt ihr das gleiche Geschäft, wie zwei Geier zum Baum, kommt ihr zu dem, der aufgetischt hat.” In his footnote he noted the difficulty with this: “obwohl das Med. bei dem einfachen *car* Schwierigkeiten macht”. Later he revised his translation, deriving the verb from \sqrt{gy} “wake”: “Ihr seid früh wach, wie zwei Preßsteine an dasselbe Geschäft (gehend), zu dem, der aufgetischt hat, wie zwei Geier zum Baume (kommend).” The problem with this alternative reading he had also noted in his first edition: “Behält man *jarethe* (‘ihr seid wach’) bei, so ist in beiden Vershälften *yántā* zu ergänzen.”

At no point does Geldner consider “sing, praise”, to be a possibility (although in an earlier passage, I, 92, 17, the Aśvins, the subject of the verb *jarethe* in our passage, *ślókam... cakráthuh;* for *ślōka* see passage number 2, where Geldner translates “Melodie”). In both of his attempts to make sense of the passage he is thinking of two pressing-stones going to work to press soma. In order to find a translation that fits this interpretation he originally assumed the text to be corrupt, and

¹²Pada *uktha-śāsā*.

in his revised version he has not only supplied two verbs of motion, “gehend” and “kommend”, but also the word “früh” has no textual authority.¹³ Without these additions his translation does not make sense. To get round the perceived difficulty here (and elsewhere) Böhtlingk and Roth, followed by Monier-Williams and Grassmann, posit a verb of motion \sqrt{jg} (*jar*). Renou however thought that “rendre *jar-* par ‘aller’ serait plat”, and the suggestion is entirely dismissed by Mayrhofer: “Nicht zu rechtfertigen sind Ansätze eines *JAR*² ‘to move’” (I, 575).

Geldner’s translation rendered into English reads: “You wake (early), like two pressing-stones (going) to the same task, to the one that has served up, like two birds of prey (coming) to the tree.” He has removed the verb in the text, *jarethe*, from the simile, taking only *grāvāṇeva tād id ārtham* (with a supplied *yāntā*, “going”) together; and he also supplies an unstated object to agree with *nīdhimāntam*, rather than taking it with *vykṣām*, which would be much more straightforward. In order to accommodate the image in his mind of the two stones at work, pressing soma, his translation is considerably distorted. This is surely another example of the “hammering and forging [of] rebellious material into some sort of sense and consistency” that Auribondo wrote about.

Can abandoning assumptions about meaning help us to a better understanding of the passage? The second line, parallel in structure to the first and with preverb *ācha*, needs a verb. This should be a verb either of moving or of speaking: “Die Bedeutung [of *ācha*] ist überall *zu*, und zwar bei den Verben der Bewegung und des Redens” (Grassmann). Given the parallel structure of the first two lines, the most likely verb to belong with the second would be that in the first line. If this is taken to mean “wake”, then another verb, either of going or of speaking, has to be supplied for *ācha*.

Geldner, thinking of pressing-stones, understands *tād id ārtham* to refer specifically to the activity of the GRAVANS, not the two Aśvins. However the phrase is echoed by a denominative form, *tād id arthayethe*, in the opening lines, as here, of X, 106, where it describes the Aśvins:

¹³He is thinking perhaps of X, 40, 3, where the verb *jarethe* again refers to the Aśvins, and there is accompanied by *prātār*; but it possible to praise, as well as to wake, in the morning.

*ubhā u nūnām tād id arthayethe
vī tanvāthe dhīyo vástrāpāseva*

Geldner translates, “Ihr beide habt gewiß nur dieses eine Ziel: Ihr spannet die Gedanken an wie die Meister die Gewänder”. (The verbal usage in the second line, clearly abstract, is highly poetic.) In our passage too, surely, the phrase refers to the two Ásvins, twins with the same aim.

Both Geldner and Renou point to the parallel (*tād id ártham/ tadídarthās*) with VIII, 2, 16, where the verb, *jarante*, accompanied by *ukthébhī*, “with hymns”, presumably means “praise” or “sing”, and is so translated by Geldner (although he notes “Oder: wachen dich heran”). Even more apposite would be comparison with I, 2, 2, where the meaning of the verb cannot be doubted.

*vāya ukthébhī jarante
tvām áchā¹⁴ jaritārah*

“Vāyu! Mit Lobgedichten singen dir die Sänger” (Geldner). Not only is the subject “singers”, and the verb again explained by *ukthébhī*, “with hymns”, the verb *jarante* here is also accompanied by *ácha*, as in our passage. As Mayrhofer notes in his entry for *JAR* “erwachen”: “Mehrere ved. Belege eines Präsens *jar-a-*gehören zu *JAR^l = GAR^l* ... ‘singen, preisen’ ” (I, 575). Griffith’s understanding of the first line of II, 39, our passage number 38, must be right. Only the assumption about the meaning of *grāvan* stands in the way. The third line confirms the interpretation.

“You sing to the same objective, like two GRAVANS,
Like two birds of prey the tree with treasure
Like two brahmans offering praises...”

V, 48, 3.

*á grāvabhī ahaníyebhī aktúbhī
váriṣṭham vájram á jigharti māyīni (39)*

“Mit den täglichen GRAVANS Nacht für Nacht schleudert er die beste Keule auf den Zauberischen.” (Geldner)

“(L’homme pieux, tel Indra), brandit (le *soma* pareil au meilleur (des) foudre(s) sur le (démon) artificieux, à l’aide des

¹⁴Pada *ácha*.

GRAVANS, à l'aide des nuits qui comportent (aussi) des jours.”
(Renou)

If we keep in mind Whitney's “determination to call nothing “translated” that is not made thorough good sense of” (1873: 146), we must confess to being a long way from deciphering this passage. Explanatory brackets are often required in a translation, to convert from the idiom of one language into another. But here the text supplied in Renou's brackets also needs to be supplied for the source language; in other words the assumption is made that the original is either highly elliptical, or defective. We should hesitate to supply words to the text when the words that are not supplied are of doubtful interpretation, particularly when the end result is meaningless.

One of Renou's additions, “(le *soma* pareil au)”, is only justified by the presence of the GRAVANS; the word *sōma* does not appear in this poem. But if the “weapon” of the GRAVANS is, as I have argued, song, could this perhaps be the *vāriṣṭhaṃ vājram*, the “best weapon” of this passage? A figurative interpretation would make more sense of the verb, *jigharti*, which is not, as might appear at first glance from the translations, a form of \sqrt{han} , but from \sqrt{gh} , “sprinkle”.¹⁵ But my suggestion is a tentative one. Much of this poem is obscure. Geldner comments “schwieriges Lied, vielleicht Fragment”.

VIII, 27, 1.

agnir ukthé puróhito
grāvāṇo barhír adhvaré
ṛcā yāmi... (40)

“Agni ist zum Leiter des Loblieds bestellt, die Preßsteine, das Barhis (zum Leiter) der Opferhandlung. In gebundner Rede wende ich mich...”

Framed by speech and song in the first and third lines, the GRAVANS in Geldner's translation of the second have no apparent syntactic place. The only way of making syntactic sense of *grāvāṇas* here would be to take it, not as nominative, but as vocative:

¹⁵The other passage, IV, 17, 14, where the verb \sqrt{gh} with preverb *á* and a locative is traditionally similarly translated makes no more sense than this one: Geldner, noting “Ganz unsicher” suggests “Er schleudert ihn auf einen Abweg führend auf den schwarzen Boden der Haut”.

“Agni is placed first in the eulogy,
O GRAVANS...”

IX, 113, 6.

*yátra brahmá pavamāna
chandasíyām vācam vādan
grāvṇā sóme mahīyáte* (41)

“Là où l’officiant-formulaire, ô Pavamāna, qui dit la parole prosodique, / se valorise en Soma avec la pierre (presseuse qu’il tient en mains)” (Renou)

“Wo, o Pavamāna, der Hohepriester in gebundener Rede sprechend mit dem Preßstein (in der Hand) bei Soma sich erhaben fühlt”.

The first two lines are relatively straightforward. “Where the brahman, o Pavamāna, speaking the melodious word¹⁶...” However, the meaning of the three words of the third line is not clear. Translators have not been able to find a satisfactory translation for *mahīyáte* to fit all the contexts in which the verb appears. It is generally taken to be denominative from *māhi*, literally “be great”, although Böhtlingk and Roth and Monier-Williams, translating “be delighted”, had derived it differently. Geldner elsewhere gives, for the same form of the verb, “sich großtut”, and, in another context, “ward gefeiert”. “En Soma” and “bei Soma” are attempts to interpret the locative *sóme*. Both Geldner and Renou, in order to make sense of the instrumental *grāvṇā*, supply in brackets “in the hand”. But the text merely gives *grāvṇā ... mahīyáte*, “is great” (however we understand this) “with the GRAVAN”. It is important to note at this point that there is no collocation in the *Rigveda* of the uncompounded word *grāvan* with any form of any word meaning “hand”. The most obvious way to take the instrumental *grāvṇā* would be as sociative, as in number 39 above, where Renou had translated “à l’aide des GRAVANS”. The verb occurs again in the next passage, so the two can be considered together.

X, 175, 3.

*grāvāna úpareṣu ā
mahīyānte sajóśasaḥ
vṛṣṇe dádhatō vṛṣṇiyam* (42)

¹⁶I follow Mayrhofer and *Ai. Gr.* 1954: 222 in the interpretation of *chandas*.

“Die GRAVANS fühlen sich einmütig erhaben über die unteren Preßsteine, da sie dem Bullen Bullenkraft verschaffen.” (Geldner)

Here the GRAVANS themselves are the subject of the verb *mahīyānte*. In the previous passage the singular verb *mahīyāte* had the brahman as subject. This confirms the likelihood that in that passage *grāvṇā* is, as it appears to be, a sociative instrumental: the brahman “is great” together with the GRAVAN.

In this second passage, in addition to the uncertainty as to the exact sense of *mahīyānte*, the meaning of the locative plural *ūpareṣu* is unclear. The comparative of *ūpa*, *ūpara*, occurs 26 times in the *Rigveda*. It is usually adjectival and has a range of meanings, “unterer, unten gelegener, näherer, hinterer, späterer” (Mayrhofer). It most frequently means “nearer in time”, “later”, contrasted, for example, with *prathamā* and *pūrva*. Geldner follows tradition in translating it “lower pressing-stone” in this passage. He takes the verb to govern it; “[they] feel themselves... raised over the lower pressing-stones”, although this is not how he had translated the same verb with locative in the previous passage (“bei Soma sich erhaben fühlt”). This very specific sense for *ūpara* is suggested by Böhtlingk and Roth for three passages. Geldner rejects one of these, translating the word in this way only here and at X, 94, 5. The translation “lower pressing-stone” depends upon the assumed context. To take the traditional interpretation of *ūpara* here as evidence for the GRAVANS being stones would be entirely circular.

But there are some further parallels that it may be useful to draw in the attempt to decipher the two passages in which the verb *mahīy* occurs. The GRAVANS in X, 175, 3 *mahīyānte sajōśasaḥ*. The adjective has been attached to them before, at V, 31, 5, passage number 19 above, where I suggested that it meant “in concert with [Aditi]”, referring to their singing. In the first *mahīy* passage the priest who governs the verb is also described as singing, *chandasiyāṃ vācam vādan*. The parallel between X, 175, 3 and passage number 19 is reinforced in the third line here, *vīṣṇe dādhatō vīṣṇiyam*, which seems to echo *vīṣṇe yāt te vīṣaṇo arkām ārcān* in that earlier passage. Could the verb *mahīy* have the sense of being or growing in vocal harmony in these two passages, either *sajōśasas*, “in concert with”, or *grāvṇā*, “with the GRAVAN”? The suggestion is tentative, and needs to be tested against the other occurrences of the verb.

But we can at any rate rule out the need to supply “in the hand” to explain the instrumental *grāvā* in IX, 113, 6.

X, 78, 6.

grāvāno ná sūrāyaḥ śindhumātara[h] (43)

The word *sūrī* has been translated in a variety of ways in this passage. Max Müller had suggested “noble”: “These noble sons of Sindhu are like GRAVANS” (1891: 416). Renou understands “patrons”: “(Eux qui jouent le rôle de) patrons comme les GRAVANS, (ces dieux) dont le Sindhu est la mère...” His bracketed “Those who play the role of” has however no textual authority. He explains *śindhumātara*s in his notes as a “trait unique” of the Maruts. Geldner, on the other hand, suggests an adjectival interpretation for *sūrī* here, “freigebig”, which enables him to take *śindhumātara*s to describe the GRAVANS: “Freigebig wie die sindhugeborenen GRAVANS.” He is again trying to make sense of the passage in the context of “pressing-stones”, and notes: “*sūrāyaḥ* von den Preßsteinen, weil sie viel Somasaft ausgeben”. This is not however how he understands *sūrī* elsewhere (see below). To justify his exceptional translation of the word in this passage Geldner had suggested in *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*: “In X, 78, 6 wohl doppelsinnig, von *sū* und von *su*.” (1907-1909: I, 201)

Böhtlingk and Roth, thinking along the same lines as Geldner, had suggested that here and in two other passages (of the 114 times that the word occurs) the word could mean “Kelterer-, Opferer des Soma”, although Geldner translates the word in a special way only here. As with *ūpara* in the previous passage, the alternative translation is based entirely on the presumed context, again provided by the traditional understanding of the meaning of the word *grāvan*. This assumption of homonymy is not admitted by Mayrhofer, who, like Renou, translates *sūrī* “patron”.

The word *sūrī* frequently occurs in collocation with words referring to vocal sound. At X, 13, 1, for example the poet describes *ślōka[h]... sūrēḥ*, which Geldner translates “Der Ruf des Opferveranstalters” (elsewhere “Melodie”, as quoted in passage number 38 above). At IV, 29, 5 the *sūrāyas* are apparently singing, *vayāṃ te syāma sūrāyo gr̥ṇāntaḥ*, although Geldner supplies “and” and takes the participle as nominal, translating “Lohnherren und Sänger”. And I have already quoted, in number 37, above, verse X, 115, 9:

tāmś ca pāhī gṛṇatās ca sūrīn

in Renou's translation, "Protège à la fois ces chantres patrons!"¹⁷

The next three passages are difficult for a different reason: not because of obscure vocabulary, but because they are deficient in grammatical context.

VII, 35, 7.

śāṇ no grāvāṇaḥ (44)

"Zum Glück sollen uns die GRAVANS [sein]"; "heur nous soient les GRAVANS".

This appears in a poem which contains a list of blessings, the litany lasting for 13 verses, summarised in verses 14 and 15. The only information provided by the grammar is that the word *grāvan* is a noun, and the context indicates that it is beneficent. The poem addresses many different kinds of blessing, some of which are heavenly, some earthly, as the text tells us in verses 11 and 14.¹⁸

No further information can be gleaned from the text. However, the word *ādri* appears in verse 3, translated by Geldner "zum Glück uns der Stein", and by Renou "heur nous soit la Pierre (à *soma*)". No other blessing is invoked twice in the poem. If the words *grāvan* and *ādri* are, as translators suggest, synonymous, there would be no point in the repetition four verses later; it could only be explained, once more, as a lapse in concentration on the part of the poet, and a flaw in the text.

I, 15, 7.

*draviṇodā draviṇaso
grāvahastāso adhvaré
yajñēsu devām īlate* (45)

¹⁷See also II, 2, 12, II, 4, 9, III, 31, 14, IV, 37, 7, V, 10, 3, VI, 23, 10, and X, 167, 4.

¹⁸The identity of a number of these is uncertain.

“Der Reichtumgeber des Reichtums (soll trinken); mit den Preßsteinen in der Hand berufen sie während der heiligen Handlung zu den Opfern den Gott.”

Both this and the next compound, *grāvagrābhá*, differ from the one already encountered, *ūrdhvágrāvan*, in that they do not arise out of inflected forms elsewhere in the text. Both are *hapax legomena*. This passage is the only one in which the word *grāvan* is connected with a word meaning hand.

The passage is problematical. The other compound in this verse, *draviṇodās*, “giving wealth, wealth-giver” appears to be the subject. It is repeated in the next two verses, which are clearly parallel but have singular verbs; the verb here however is plural. Geldner takes *draviṇodās* as also singular here, but then has to supply a verb for it: “(soll trinken)”. Roth, who had looked at the verse in isolation in his edition of the *Nirukta*, had made the logical assumption that *draviṇodās* was plural and governed the verb: “draviṇodās ist wie man sieht Nom. pl. zu *īlate*” (1852: Erläuterungen 115). A change of subject, from plural in this verse to singular in the next two, would seem to be the most plausible explanation. However, the verse that follows these three indicates that this is also not right: *yāt tvā turīyaṃ .. draviṇodo yājāmahe*, “When we offer to you, wealth-giver, for the fourth time... ” In our verse the (singular) compound *draviṇodās*, wrongly accented for a vocative, has no apparent syntactic place. The difficulty here is grammatical: subject and verb are not in agreement. Translators have been unable to parse the passage satisfactorily, and the context for the compound *grāvahasta* is as a result somewhat uncertain.

Geldner takes the genitive that follows *draviṇodās*, *draviṇasas*, to depend upon it (but again the verb is missing); he notes: “Ellipse oder starke Anakoluthie”. Renou does the same: “*draviṇodā draviṇasaḥ*, extension du type de base *gāvāṃ gópatih...* d’où l’ellipse du verbe.” (16, 77) However, the two words occur together again at I, 96, 8, where the context shows that the genitive depends rather upon the verb, and is so translated by both Geldner and Renou. I therefore take this also to be the case here, and *draviṇasas* to depend upon *īlate* as partitive genitive of the thing sought, as in VII, 24, 5, where the verb is also from *√id*: *índra tvāyám arká itte vásūnām*, “Indra, it is you the song calls upon for wealth”.

The *bahuvrīhi* compound, *grāvahastāsas*, “GRAVAN-handed”, occurs only here. Compounds ending in *-hasta* are

common in the later language. “In appositional possessive compounds, the second member, if it designates a part of the body, sometimes logically signifies that part to which what is designated by the prior member belongs, that on or in which it is... In the later language, such compounds are not infrequent with words meaning hand: thus, śastrapāṇi *having a sword in the hand*, laguḍahasta *carrying a staff*.” (Whitney 1941: 507-508). This compound, which is the first appearance of any form of the word *grāvan* in the *Rigveda*, has always hitherto been translated “those with GRAVANS in their hands”.

But is this way of analysing it correct? Other bahuvrīhi compounds in the *Rigveda* where the second element is a body part are understood differently. Take, for example, *mayūra-roman* at III, 45, 1 (*róman*, “hair”), “pfauenhaarig” (*Ai. Gr.* 1905: 277), “having hair like a peacock’s”, not “with peacocks in their hair”; or, indeed, *áśva-pṛṣṭha* (*pṛṣṭhá*, “back”) in number 26 above, “on horseback”, not “with a horse on its back”. The preferred translations are based on our understanding of the meaning of the component parts of these compounds. To take them otherwise would be counter to common sense. In the same way, the compound *grāva-hastāsas* could be analysed differently, and interpreted “having hands like GRAVANS”, or even “in the hands of GRAVANS” (the subject, however one takes it, is unstated.) Only our understanding of the meaning of the word *grāvan* itself can direct us how to analyse it.

In passage number 18 the person entreating was compared to a GRAVAN. Geldner translated *grāveva sôtā madhuśúḍ yám īlé*, “den der Honigpresser ruft wie der GRAVAN”. The verb *īlé* is again, as in the passage we are now considering, from the root *√īḍ*. I suggest that the same comparison is being drawn here. Elsewhere in the *Rigveda* gods are appealed to with outstretched hands, *uttānāhastā*: see III, 14, 5, VI, 16, 46, VI, 63, 3, and X, 79, 2. In the context of calling upon a god, and, particularly, of entreating for wealth, it seems most probable that the structure of this compound is like that of *mayūra-roman*, and that it should be translated “with hands like GRAVANS”.

“... They, with hands like GRAVANS
Call upon the god for wealth...”

I, 162, 5.

*hótādhvaryúr āvayā agnimindhó
grāvagrābhá utá sámstā súviprah (46)*

“Der Hotṛ, Adhvaryu, der Āvayāj, der Agnimindha [Feueranzünder], Grāvagrābha [Preßsteinhalter] und der redegewandte Śamṣṛ.” (Geldner)

Here, too, the compound, *grāvagrābhás*, does not originate in any inflected relation in the text to help us to analyse it, and its appearance here (also early in the text) is the only occurrence of the word. And, curiously, once again subject and verb are not in agreement; *grāvagrābhás* is one of a list of nominatives, but the only verb in the verse is in the second person plural.

Geldner follows tradition in taking it as the name of a priest, one of six, and therefore leaves the word untranslated while describing the priestly role in brackets “[Preßsteinhalter]”. However, this cannot be quite right. The position of the word *utá*, “and”, is against it. When it appears in the *Rigveda* with a list it follows the final item in that list. Grassmann explains with reference to this particular passage: “...in der mehrfachen Aufzählung 162, 5 die zwei letzten Glieder *grāvagrābhás* und *sámstā súvipras* [sind] durch zwischenstehendes *utá* zu einem Gliede verbunden” (248). So *grāvagrābhás* is either adjectival, and like *súvipras* in agreement with nominal *sámṣṛ*, or it is a noun in apposition to it; either way, it is closely connected with *sámṣṛ*, “proclaimer”.

The verb $\sqrt{\text{grabh}}$ (“ergreifen, nehmen”, Mayrhofer) does not appear elsewhere in the text in connection with the word *grāvan*. How, then, should we understand it within this compound? In the *Rigveda* $\sqrt{\text{grabh}}$ has a wide range of senses, many of which are abstract. With preverbs *ānu* and *prāti* it most often means “welcome” (see Renou 16, 113 “accueillir amicalement”, of one frog greeting another, and 16, 128), or when referring to a song of praise, “accept”, as at V, 42, 2, *prāti me stómam áditir jagrbhyāt* (there is also at least one passage, IX, 113, 3, where verb with preverb *prāti* is simply understood to retain the meaning “take”). But the verb without preverb, in both active and middle forms, also frequently appears in an abstract sense, as is regularly established by the contexts. For example, it cannot be interpreted in a physical sense when the thing taken is someone’s name, as at I, 191, 13, and X, 145, 4,

or when it is *medhā*, “mental ability” (VIII, 6, 10), or a kind of sound, the word *śloka* again, at I, 139, 10. (The last two examples have perfect forms of the verb.)¹⁹ It is clearly used metaphorically when the instrument of the “taking” is *jihvā*, the tongue, at VIII, 72, 3 and VIII, 17, 5, or *svadhā*, “etwa Eigenheit, Eigenkraft” (Mayrhofer), at I, 164, 38. It means “grasp mentally, understand” at I, 145, 2, *svēneva dhīro mānasā yād āgrabhit*, “was er wie ein Weiser mit eigenem Verstand erfaßt hat” (Geldner); and at IV, 23, 4, another perfect, the context makes clear that the verb must have an abstract sense, “accept”, or “receive”, as translated by both Geldner and Griffith: *nāmo jagrbhvāñ abhī yāj jūjoṣat*, “die Huldigung annehmend, an der er seine Freude haben wird”; “Having received the homage which he loveth”. All these are active forms of the verb. Similarly, the middle form at IX, 70, 3 clearly means something like “welcome” or “receive”, as Geldner, Griffith, and Renou all agree: “Dann erst haben die Nachsinnenden den König in ihren Besitz bekommen”, “Yea, even for this have sages welcomed him as King”, and “Alors (les êtres) réfléchis ont adopté le roi.” At I, 148, 3, again, “seize” is clearly not literally meant:

*nītye cin nū yām sādane jagrbhré
prāśastibhir dadhiré yajñīyāsaḥ*

“... him in his constant seat men skilled in worship have taken (and) with praises have established” (Griffith). Geldner, preferring a concrete interpretation of $\sqrt{\text{grabh}}$, moves *nītye... sādane*, “in his constant seat”, out of the context of the first verb, *jagrbhré*, to the second: “Den die Opferwürdigen nun eingefangen und mit Lobesworten an seinen rechtmäßigen Sitz gebracht haben”. This seems unjustified. Perhaps “welcome”, again, would be better here.

Of the two other occurrences in the *Rigveda* of nouns compounded with *-grābha*, both of which, like this, occur once only, *hastagrābhā* at X, 18, 8, is understood, not as literally “seizing the hand”, but in the figurative sense of “taking the hand in marriage”. The other is *udagrābhā* at IX, 97, 15, with *udān* “water” as its first part. Geldner devotes a long footnote to the possible ways of understanding “Wasserrasser”; but the

¹⁹Rix (2001: 201) gives for the perfect, in addition to “habe ergriffen”, “besitze”, quoting Kümmel 2000: 163-165. The more abstract sense however is not confined to the perfect.

meaning is perhaps also most likely to be figurative, water being innately ungraspable.

The root is regularly used to convey an abstract meaning, and how it should be understood depends upon the context. Translators of the *Rigveda* have tended to prefer a verbal interpretation relating to the physical world; Geldner's translation of I, 148, 3, quoted above is an example. And we recall the use of \sqrt{bhr} in passage number 23. Without the evidence of the previous line nothing would have persuaded Dandekar, convinced that *grāvan* means "stone", that the verb was used there in an abstract sense. But the context compels the interpretation. In the compound *grāvagrābhā* the only context for the meaning of \sqrt{grabh} is the word *grāvan* itself, the subject of our enquiry. Once more, only the evidence of the inflected passages in which *grāvan* occurs can direct us as to its meaning. I suggest the following translation.

"and the proclaimer who welcomes the GRAVAN, the most inspired one".

In the last group of passages, 47-55, the GRAVAN is accompanied by the verb \sqrt{yuj} ("join", Whitney, "anschirren... verbinden", Mayrhofer), leading to the compound *yuktāgrāvan* and the derivative noun *yōga*. In addition to the specific physical meaning, "harness", its usage in the *Rigveda*, like \sqrt{grabh} , is regularly abstract. Monier-Williams offers a wide range of possible meanings: "to yoke or join or fasten or harness (horses or a chariot), RV &c. &c.; to make ready, prepare, arrange, fit out, set to work, use, employ, apply, ib." In the context of the GRAVANS Renou consistently translates it in its specific sense, "atteler". He understands the usage of course to be figurative; there is no evidence in the *Rigveda* that the GRAVANS are in any way physically attached to one another or to anything else (see Hillebrandt 1927: II, 410), and they are not horses or chariots. The verbal usage, in Renou's reading of the text, is a live metaphor; the GRAVANS are each time being compared to animals harnessed together to perform a task. Grassmann's understanding is the same, as his definition of the compound *yuktāgrāvan* shows, "*der die (mit Rossen verglichenen) Somasteine angeschirrt hat*".

Geldner and Griffith, on the other hand (with the exception of passage number 55, which I shall come to in due course), interpret the word differently. Geldner's translations

range across the spectrum of possible abstract meanings (“einstellen”, “in Gebrauch nehmen”, “in Tätigkeit setzen”). Monier-Williams apparently understands the verb in the context of the GRAVANS to mean something similar to—but not identical with—Geldner’s third suggestion, translating *yuktágrāvan*, “having set the GRAVANS in motion”. Griffith takes the verb consistently in the sense “put in position”, “adjust”, “make ready”. Although ways of interpreting it vary, all three agree in understanding the metaphor lying within the sense of the verb to be dead metaphor. “The difference between live and dead metaphor is that dead metaphor is just an ordinary part of our literal vocabulary and quite properly not regarded as metaphor at all.” (William Grey 2000; he gives as an example “rivers run”).

Renou’s treatment of the verb is consistent, but it is not entirely clear what is meant by “harnessing” the stones (I shall return shortly to the perceived underlying image here). The fact that the other three, although they agree in taking the metaphor as dead metaphor, interpret it in different ways, underlines the uncertainty. It has proved difficult to know how to interpret the verb in the context of “stones”.

The verb \sqrt{yuj} is however used to mean “engage for a task” with people elsewhere in the *Rigveda*. In VI, 63, 4, *prá hótā gūrtámanā urāṇó / áyukta yó nāsatiyā háviman*, Geldner translates, “Es tritt der erwählte Hotṛ auf, löblichen Denkens, der eingespannt [sic] ist, die Nāsatiya’s zu laden”. His translation of \sqrt{yuj} here is judicious; “eingespannt” contains both the concrete and the abstract sense of the verb. Griffith takes it as dead metaphor again, translating *áyukta* in this context “appointed”: “Up stands the grateful-minded priest, elected, appointed to invoke the two Nāsatiyas.” Geldner’s note to *áyukta* compares similar usage in the *Atharvaveda*: “vgl. *yujyānte (ṛtvijāḥ)* AV. 12.1.38” (in Griffith’s translation “and ministers are busied...”). The past participle, *yuktá*, is also used in the *Rigveda* in this sense at VIII, 58, 1, Geldner again translating “...wenn der gelehrte Brahmane eingespannt ward”, to which the explanatory note is supplied, “D.h. für das Opfer angestellt ist”, “that is, is employed for the sacrifice”. A more abstract translation of the verb would have done away with the need for the footnote.

II, 12, 6.

yuktágrāvṇo yó avitá [suśipráḥ] (47)

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“Who is helper of the one who has employed the GRAVANS.”

III, 4, 9 and VII, 2, 9.

yáto vīráḥ karmaníyaḥ sudákṣo
yuktágrāvā jáyate devákāmaḥ (48 & 49)

“whence will be born a man good at doing things, capable, having employed the GRAVANS, longing for the gods.”

III, 30, 2.

yuktá grāvāṇaḥ samidhāné agnau (50)

“The GRAVANS are employed by the kindled fire”.

The next four passages all describe a connection with poetry, song, or prayer.

III, 57, 4.

áchā²⁰ vivakmi ródasī suméke
grāvṇo yujānó adhvaré manīṣá (51)

Here, the instrumental *manīṣá* fits uncomfortably into the three traditional versions of the passage (the italics are mine). Renou translates: “Je m’adresse aux Deux Mondes bien érigés, en attendant pour le cursus-rituel les pierres-presseuses, *d’une pensée-inspirée*”. Geldner suggests “Ich lade... ein, während ich *unter Nachsinnen* bei der Opferhandlung die Preßsteine in Gebrauch nehme”, and Griffith, “Fixing *with thought*, at sacrifice, the press-stones...”

“I call out to well-founded Heaven and Earth, setting the GRAVANS to work with poetic inspiration...”

V, 37, 2.

sámiddhāgnir vanavat stīrṇábarhir
yuktágrāvā sutásomo jarāte (52)

Geldner takes the last two compounds as semantically related, and his resulting translation of *yuktágrāvan* here is very loose, “having the GRAVANS in his hands”: “Bei entflammtem Feuer und ausgelegtem Barhis soll (der Opfernde) den

²⁰Pada *ácha*.

Vorrang gewinnen,²¹ die GRAVANS handhabend und Soma auspressend soll er früh wach sein.”

He and Lubotsky again agree in taking *jarāte* to mean “wake” here (Geldner supplying “früh” as in number 38 above). Grassmann, Macdonell, and Griffith all take it as “sing”. Griffith understands *sutāsomas* differently, as nominal, “and, Soma-presser, [let him] sing with stones adjusted”.

“... having employed the GRAVANS he will sing.”

The lines that follow on here are passage number 5 of this paper:

“Let the adhvaryu whose GRAVANS speak fervently
Go down with the oblation to the river.”

V, 40, 8.

*grāvṇo brahmā yuyujānāḥ saparyān
kīriṇā devān nāmasopāsīkṣan* (53)

“[D]er Hohepriester, der die GRAVANS in Tätigkeit setzt und mit bloßer Verbeugung die Götter ehrt und zu gewinnen sucht.” (“and” is again supplied). Geldner translates *kīri* here “bloß”, “poor, bare”. Mayrhofer, while recording this suggested interpretation, prefers “praiser”: “wohl: Dichter, Lobsänger”.

“The brahman employing the GRAVANS, honouring,
Together with the praiser inviting the gods with reverence.”

X, 35, 9.

grāvṇām yóge mánmanaḥ sādha īmahe (54)

The meaning of *sādhe* here has been debated. Renou, Griffith and Lubotsky all take it as the locative of nominal *sādha*, which is then only attested here. This seems probable: *sādhe* is parallel to locative *yóge*. “Nous demandons... où il s’agit d’atteler les pierres, d’exécuter la prière” (Renou). Geldner understands it differently, taking *sādhe* as a locative infinitive. He translates, “Wir bitten heute... bei der Preßsteine Tätigkeit, daß unsere Andacht erfolgreich sei”. In both versions, however, the parallel between the activity of “stones” and the

²¹The meaning of *vanavat* is also debated.

accomplishment of prayer is decidedly awkward. Renou, observing the infelicity, notes: “L’activité spirituelle accompagne, comme souvent, la participation ‘manuelle’ au rite.” But the “manual participation” is not, in my view, present.

“We approach, in employing the GRAVANS, in the accomplishment of prayer...”

X, 175, 1.

*prá vo grāvāṇaḥ savitá
deváh svatu dhármaṇā
dhūrṣú yujyadhvam sunutá (55)*

“Euch, GRAVANS, soll Gott Savitṛ nach der Bestimmung in Bewegung setzen. Schirret euch an die Joche, presset aus!” (The final imperative *sunutá*, from the troublesome root \sqrt{su} again, occurs twice elsewhere in the text, both also in Book X, where it is again understood to apply to men or priests.)²² The first two lines of X, 175, 1 are repeated in verse 4 with slight variation, the verb here being without the preverb, but the repetition suggests that there is no variation of meaning:

*grāvāṇaḥ savitá nú vo
deváh svatu dhármaṇā (56)*

Geldner, in translating the main verb in both verses, *svatu*, in a concrete, physical sense here, “soll in Bewegung setzen”, is once more thinking of stones; elsewhere (I, 124, 1) Savitṛ rouses men and beasts to work: “Gott Savitṛ hat unsere Zwei- und Vierfüßler nunmehr angetrieben (*prāsāvit*), an ihr Geschäft zu gehen.”

Is X, 175, 1, evidence that Renou is right to take the use of \sqrt{yuj} with the GRAVANS as “live” metaphor? I suggest that there is another way of reading it. “There is an intermediate category which can be called ‘dormant metaphor’, which consists of expressions which we use without being conscious of their metaphorical character, but if we attend to them we can see at once that they are unmistakable metaphors. These are metaphors in the process of expiring. Dormant metaphors can be found lurking in almost every interesting sentence.” (William Grey 2000)

²²X, 14, 13 and X, 30, 15.

“Waking” a dormant metaphor (itself an example of the device) is the stuff of poetry. When something is done “under cover of darkness” we do not usually think about the nature of the “cover”. When John Buchan used “The Blanket of the Dark” as the title of a novel, he was not thinking, literally, of a “blanket”. But the image can be revived in poetic use:

“Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry ‘Hold, hold’.” (*Macbeth* Act I, Scene 5)

The poet in Rigveda X, 175, 1, is bringing the metaphor to life by juxtaposing the verb with the locative *dhūrṣú*, literally, “in the shafts”. The use of this word, *dhúr*, is also regularly figurative in the text. See, for example, “das Joch der Ordnung”²³ at I, 84, 16, “die Deichsel des Kampfliedes” at I 131, 2, and *yajñásya dhūrṣú*, “in des Opfers Joch”, at X, 105, 9; the translations are as usual by Geldner. Renou notes to *dhúr* at VII, 34, 4: “*dhúr* ‘brancard’ et non ‘joug’... Mais la valeur figurée est seule présente à l’esprit du poète.”

In the first verse of V, 46, the poet uses exactly the same image with reference to himself. He describes his undertaking in a sustained and sophisticated simile.

*háyo ná vidvāṁ ayuḥ svayám dhurí
tām vahāmi pratāraṇīm avasyúvam
násyā vāsmi vimúcam nāvṛtam púnar
vidvān pathāḥ puraetá rjú²⁴ neṣati*

Renou translates: “Comme un coursier, moi qui sais, je me suis attelé de moi-même au brancard. Je tire ce (brancard) qui promeut, qui donne assistance. Je ne veux pas le dételer, ni tourner en arrière. Celui qui sait le chemin, qui va en tête, qu’il (me) conduise droit!”

“Well knowing have I bound me, horse-like, to the pole: I carry that which bears us on and gives us help. I seek for no release, no turning back therefrom. May he who knows the way, the leader, guide me straight.” (Griffith) Griffith notes: “The pole: a metaphorical expression for sacrificial duties”. Geldner

²³*ñásya*. Geldner supplies in brackets “(Opfer)”, “(Opfer)ordnung”.

²⁴Represented in the metrical text *puraetá rjú*.

however offers the alternative, and it is surely more likely. “Der Deichsel oder das Joch (*dhúr*) ist die Opferhandlung oder das Gebet, das zu den Göttern geht.” The text gives no evidence of “sacrificial duties”. The task that the poet is performing is immediately before us: he is petitioning the gods.

Opferhandlung oder Gebet?

Renou’s image, of “yoking” the GRAVANS for sacrificial duties, fits well, however, within the traditional interpretation of the *Rigveda*. In a study devoted to the word *dhúr* Ferdinand Sommer explains a dual form at X, 101,11: “Der Soma als ‘Zugtier’ bewegt sich zwischen den beiden als *dhúrau* maskierten Preßsteinen...” (1949: 150). Later in the paper (153) Sommer compares our passage number 55, X, 175, 1, although he points out that the image is slightly different here; the GRAVANS are not themselves the “two shafts” of the earlier passage. Renou makes a glancing reference to Sommer’s explanation of X, 101, 11 (16, 158): “*dhúr* [shaft] au duel, Sommer Sprache I p. 150 (image des pierres à presser, d’où le duel).” Geldner understands this dual slightly differently; he takes it to refer to the hands holding the stones: “Es ist... der zwischen den Händen ausgepreßte Soma gemeint”. In number 38 above, however, he conjured up a similar image of stones at work when he understood *tád íd ártham* to refer to the GRAVANS rather than to the Ásvins, “wie zwei Preßsteine an dasselbe Geschäft (gehend)”. Explanations of this kind pervade the traditional interpretation of the *Rigveda*. Max Müller, for example, endorses Sāyaṇa’s commentary on the word *vṛṣan* at III, 43, 7: “Here Sāyaṇa, too, sees rightly that ‘the male bruised by the males’ is the Soma-plant, which, in order to yield the intoxicating juice, has to be bruised by stones, which stones are again likened to two males...” (1897: 146; both Geldner and Renou follow this interpretation). Soma, we are told, is pressed between stones by the Soma-presser, and the image of two animals being put to work lies at the heart of Renou’s “harnessing” metaphor. Monier-Williams tells us in his definition of *grāvan* that “originally 2 were used, RV. ii, 39. 1; later on 4...” Böhrtlingk and Roth had explained: “Nach den Erklär. zu den Brāhmaṇa sollen deren *fünf* im Gebrauch gewesen sein; dass dieses aber für die älteste Zeit nicht immer gilt, zeigt der Gebrauch des du[al]., z. B. RV. 2, 39, 1.” Klaus Mylius, in his *Wörterbuch des Altindischen Rituals*, 1995 agrees: “*grāvan* m, Preßstein für die Somastengel; zur des Zeit des RV

und AV waren es nür zwei; später vier oder fünf...”

But scholars have made an assumption here. This paper has looked at all occurrences of the word *grāvan*. The word appears only once in the dual, in the verse cited by both Böhtlingk and Roth and by Monier-Williams, which is number 38, above. In every other instance the word has either a singular or a plural form. The unique occurrence of the dual in II, 39, 1 is at the beginning of a poem addressed to the Aśvins, the “Two Horsemen”. It is full of similes, and the things to which the horsemen are compared appear, inevitably, in the dual: the Aśvins are like two GRAVANS, two birds of prey, two priests, two ships, and so on. I drew the comparison with a similar passage, X, 106, 1, quoting Geldner’s translation: “Ihr beide habt gewiß nur dieses eine Ziel: Ihr spannet die Gedanken an wie die Meister die Gewänder”. Here, of course, the word translated “die Meister”, *apāsā*, is also in the dual, as the “masters” are being compared to the dual Aśvins. It does not mean that the word *apās* has inherent duality, any more than the birds of prey, priests, or ships of II, 39. As both Geldner and Renou note, the dual form in II, 39, 1, depends upon the two horsemen themselves: “Der Dual der Vergleiche ist nicht immer in deren Natur begründet, sondern durch die Zweiheit der Aśvin bedingt”; “... le duel étant souvent de pure adaptation”. It is, as Hillebrandt observes (1927-29: II, 408), “unwesentlich”, “not significant”. In fact, the *Rigveda* never describes *two* GRAVANS.

The lack of duality of the GRAVAN is also a consideration when translating the compounds *grāvagrābhā* and *grāvahasta*. If these describe priests carrying stones, how many are they carrying? In the passages where priests appear with GRAVANS, sometimes only one GRAVAN is mentioned (numbers 23 and 41 for instance), but often a singular priest is found with a number of GRAVANS, as in numbers 5 (*adhvaryús*, *grāvāṇas*), 39 (“he”, *grāvabhis*), 51 (“I”, *grāvṇas*), 53 (*brahmā*, *grāvṇas*). Geldner explains that the verb \sqrt{vad} , “speak”, is used figuratively with the GRAVANS to describe the ringing sound made by stones being operated by priests (see passage number 3 at the beginning of the paper). When he translates *grāvahastāsas* in number 45, above, “mit den Preßsteinen in der Hand”, and then *yuktāgrāvā* in number 52 above, loosely, as “die Preßsteine handhabend”, is the priest holding three stones, or more than three? Are these used sequentially? In short, if the GRAVANS are stones, held in the hands of priests, by means of which, or indeed between

which, something is crushed, one would expect them to appear in the dual; hence Renou's passing note, the glosses of obscure passages by Sāyaṇa, Max Müller, Sommer and Geldner, and the explanations of lexicographers, from Rudolph Roth in the middle of the nineteenth century to Professor Mylius at the end of the twentieth.

Two hapax legomena

This study has looked at all 56 contexts in which the word *grāvan* appears in the *Rigveda*. Of these, it is possible to translate *grāvahasta* in number 45 and *grāvagrābhā* in number 46, both of which are *hapax legomena*, in a way that makes "stone" a possible interpretation of the word. But they are compounds, and can also be translated differently. Our analysis of compounds often depends upon the meaning of their component parts. The traditional way of understanding a compound in the *Rigveda* may be based on a misapprehension, and cannot be used as the basis for a semantic argument which is contradicted by the clear evidence of inflected passages.

Compounds are very common in the later language, but much less so in the *Rigveda*, where they occur with roughly the same frequency as in Homer. Both passages 45 and 46 are grammatically irregular: subject and verb are not in agreement. If we should ever entertain the possibility that any Rigvedic passage might be of doubtful authenticity, it would be such a passage. Unlike later Sanskrit, the language of the *Rigveda* is highly inflected, with, in particular, a wealth of verbal forms. Classical Sanskrit is characterised, in contrast, by the "use of passive constructions and of participles instead of verbs, and the substitution of compounds for sentences." (Whitney 1941: xv) It is possible to understand these two compounds in a way that is consistent with the evidence of the inflected passages, but if this were not so, we would have to regard them as of questionable authority.

The meaning of these two passages remains disputed. Grassmann's note on the use of *utā* challenges the traditional way of understanding *grāvagrābhā* in I, 162, 5, although O'Flaherty follows tradition (1981: 90). Scholars have disagreed about how to interpret I, 15, 7, the verse in which the compound *grāvahasta* occurs. This verse, however, as it is the first appearance of the word *grāvan* in the text, has been highly influential. Horace Hayman Wilson, the first translator of the

Rigveda into English, was working at his translation, which is based on Sāyaṇa's commentary, as and when the text and commentary were published, over a period of twenty-five years. He was therefore not able to compare passages, as we have done, to put the traditional explanation of *grāvahasta* to the test.

Conclusion

Stephen Ullmann, quoted at the beginning of this paper, recommended the collection of “an adequate sample of contexts”. We have looked at *all* the contexts in which the word *grāvan* appears. Some of these have so far not been satisfactorily deciphered, as we have seen. A substantial number, however, are clear. The GRAVAN is regularly depicted as speaking, singing or as having an invocatory role: see numbers 2 to 7, 9 to 12, 16, 18 and 22; and I would add, as argued in the paper, numbers 19 and 38. In numbers 3, 6, 7, 14 and 15 he draws benign deities and repels malign ones with sound which is described as vocal. He is portrayed as having a range of other human characteristics—see, for example, numbers 25 to 30. This is the clear evidence of the contexts that are not in question. These can only be explained, if we insist that the word means “stone”, as the elaborate personification of a ritual object. But it is only tradition that leads us to a translation that is “ohne deutliche verbale oder nominale Grundlage” (*Ai. Gr.* 1954: 902-903).²⁵ The GRAVAN has none of the characteristics of a stone in the text. The element fire, *agní*, in the *Rigveda* is often represented in personified form, as the god Agni. But it also regularly appears as fire itself; it is kindled and it burns. The same is not the case with *grāvan*. The GRAVAN is not heavy or light, large or small, rough or smooth, hard, round, picked up or dropped, given or taken, found, cleaned, or polished. Nowhere is there any passage that suggests that the word *grāvan* in the *Rigveda* means “stone”.

The text, moreover, has to be manipulated to make sense of the traditional interpretation, as translators have done in a variety of ways in, for example, numbers 1 and 2, 16, 18, 19, 22 to 27, 33, 37, 38, 39, and 41 to 43. We are sacrificing information clearly given by the text for a theory; exactly the kind of “short cut to meaning” that Stephen Ullmann, in the

²⁵If the word on the other hand represents a kind of singer, derivation from \sqrt{gr} , “sing, praise” would seem a possibility.

passage quoted at the beginning of this paper, warns scholars against.

Wendy O’Flaherty expresses the state of affairs precisely. “[O]ne feels that the hymns themselves are mischievous translations into a ‘foreign’ language.” (1981: 16). This “foreign language” is the interpretation of Hindu tradition, under the influence of which Sanskrit scholars, whose interest lies chiefly in that tradition itself, continue to labour. But if we are able to listen instead to Ullmann’s “salutary warning, which both semanticists and lexicographers would do well to heed” (67), and approach the contexts in which our test case occurs in the *Rigveda* with an open mind, the conclusion to be drawn is clear. In this earliest of Vedic texts, whatever the meaning later attributed to the word, *grāvan* describes a man: a man who is repeatedly depicted as singing and praising.

But a problem remains: that of the first passage we looked at, IX, 67, 19.

grāṃṃā tunnó abhīṣṭutaḥ
pavītraṃ soma gachasi
dādhat stotrē suvīriyam

Traditionally the two participles in the first line have been translated “struck” and “praised”. As observed at the beginning of the paper, to be “struck” and “praised” at the same time seems unlikely. So is the traditional interpretation of *tunnās*, literally “pushed”, here correct? The verb \sqrt{tud} occurs eight times in the *Rigveda*, and this is the only appearance of the past participle. The root carries a broad range of meanings, many of which are, once again, abstract. Monier-Williams gives, for the *Rigveda*, “to push, strike, goad, bruise, sting, vex”. Horace Hayman Wilson, in the first Sanskrit-English dictionary (1819) collating the native dictionaries, gave a similar range of meanings for \sqrt{tud} , only omitting the concrete “push” and “strike”: “To pain, to wound, to vex, or har[r]ass, to tease, to torture, or torment”.

At Rigveda X, 94, 14, the verb (here with preverb *ā*), is again juxtaposed with vocal activity, as in IX, 67, 19:

suté adhvaré ādhi vācam akrata
ā kriḷāyo ná mātāraṃ tudāntaḥ

This is translated by Geldner: “Bei dem ausgepreßten Opfer haben sie ihre Stimme erhoben, wie spielende (Kinder) die

Mutter stoßend”.

This passage, incidentally, contains my last example of the problems posed by derivatives of \sqrt{su} . Geldner’s version of *suté adhvaré* is a literal rendering of what is traditionally understood by the two locatives, but “at the pressed out sacrifice” doesn’t make sense. The apparent collocation appears elsewhere in reverse order at III, 53, 10, *mádanto gīrbhír adhvaré suté sácā*, where it is again translated by Geldner “bei dem ausgepreßten (Soma)opfer”. But here Renou, who has elsewhere found *suté sácā* a “formule stable” (15, 86), takes them separately, translating “au sacrifice” and “en même temps que (le soma est) pressé.” Something is seriously amiss here.

If *tudántas* in X, 94, 14, means physically “pushing”, as Geldner understands it, what is conveyed by the comparison? “They have raised their voices like children pushing a mother” is not very meaningful. The parallel between this passage and IX, 67, 19, with “raised voices” on the one hand, and “praising” on the other, suggests that in both these passages “push” has a more abstract, vocal sense, like German “(jemanden) antreiben”, French “pousser (quelqu’un à faire quelque chose)”, or English “press (someone to do something)”:

“They have raised their voices
Like playful ones pestering a mother.” (X, 94, 14)

“Urged, praised by the GRAVAN,
You go...
Bringing vigour to the praiser.” (IX, 67, 19)²⁶

There is a direct parallel in the use of cognate Latin *tundo*. *OLD* gives as an abstract sense of the verb “to assail, din (the ears) with constant repetition”, and Ernout-Meillet’s definition, “rebattre les oreilles”, again shows a similar image in French. Lewis and Short give “to din, stun, keep on at, importune”. At *Aeneid* 4, 448, for example, when Dido and her sister are pleading with Aeneas, the verb is used in this way: “*adsiduis hinc atque hinc vocibus heros tunditur*”, “the hero was importuned on this side and that by their persistent voices”.

²⁶An abstract interpretation of \sqrt{tud} helps to make sense of the derivative adjective *nitodín*, which occurs at X, 34, 7, to describe the gambler’s dice. Geldner translates *akṣása íd añikuśínō nitodín[ah]*, “Die Würfel haben Widerhaken, Stacheln (barbs, thorns).” I suggest that “The dice are addictive (have hooks, get you hooked), importunate” is a more convincing translation.

Tradition Stands in our Way

We have inherited an assumption that the *Rigveda* is primarily a ritual text, and that much of the vocabulary, whose meaning was forgotten at a very early date, belongs to the language of ritual. This belief has been confirmed, established and rendered fixed and immutable throughout the history of the transmission of the text by an immense literature deriving from and dependent upon the assumed meaning. The belief that the text is largely devoted to the description of a complex ritual procedure, detailing “physical activity and the manipulation of objects” (Jamison 1991: 1),²⁷ has led interpreters to understand its use of language to be regularly more concrete than abstract. In particular, the verbal usage is consistently taken by translators to belong to the external, physical world, rather than to the internal world of sensation and intellect. This, while upholding the traditional ritual interpretation of parts of the text, has rendered much of it incomprehensible, and continues to frustrate the attempts of linguists to make progress in deciphering the *Rigveda*.

The “incoherence and poverty of sense” observed by Aurobindo is explained by scholars as it was in ancient times. “As the Brāhmaṇas tell us so often, ‘the gods love the obscure’... and in investigating Vedic matters, we must learn to cultivate at least that divine taste.” (Jamison 1991: 41) But a “taste for obscurity” surely limits the scope of philological endeavour. For all its antiquity, I believe the *Rigveda* to be a text of great sophistication, employing all the nuances of linguistic usage that characterize other poetry known to us; and that its apparent poverty of sense is the legacy of tradition. Its beauty and craft lie deeply buried, but they have been carefully preserved. If we can dig beneath the assumptions about meaning that overlay the text like later archaeological strata, we shall uncover a very different *Rigveda* from the one that we have come to accept.

²⁷Jamison presents the case for her different approach to the text. “A question we must briefly raise here is to what extent this entire elaborate system was in place from the earliest period and how much was manufactured in the Brāhmaṇa or even the Sūtra period... [What is] clear is that many of the technical terms of later practice appear already in the RV [...]. We are therefore entitled to assume that much of the ritual structure, in some form, was in place, at least in the late RV period... [W]hen Rigvedic verses can easily be interpreted in the light of later ritual procedure, I think we should not hesitate to do so.” (1991: 25)

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