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

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In reassuring us that the traditional understanding of the role of the *grávan* in the *Rigveda* is correct, verse IX, 67, 19 has been of central importance. As Hillebrandt explains in *Vedische Mythologie*: "Der Ausdruck *grávan tunnó* (IX, 67, 19), *svánó ádribhiḥ* (IX, 107, 10) usw. zeigt, dass auch in *RV*. der Stein und nicht das Brett zum Zerreissen der Schossen gebraucht wurde" (1927-29: II, 417). The *grávan* 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.

\[
\begin{align*}
grávaná tunnó abhiśṭutaḥ \\
pavitram soma gachasi \\
dádhat stotrē svvīriyam
\end{align*}
\]

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 *abhiśṭutas*, “praised”, out of the context of the first line into the second. Geldner takes it with *pavitraṃ… gachasi*: “gehst du… besungen in die Seihe.” Renou supplies a relative clause, taking *abhiśṭutas*, although nominative, together with the vocative *soma*: “ô *soma* qui est célébré.” But the two past participles in the first line, *tunnás* (from *vṛtud* “push”) and *abhiśṭutas* (from *śtu* + preverb *abhī* “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 *esās* and the verb is in the third person:

\[
\begin{align*}
esā tunnó abhiśṭutaḥ \\
pavitram āti gāhate
\end{align*}
\]
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 abhíṣṭutas, 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
krîlîr \text{ makhó ná māṃhayūḥ} \\
pavîtraṃ \text{ soma gachasī} \\
dâdhat \text{ stôtre suvîriyam}
\end{align*}
\]

The last two lines are repeated word for word in our passage. The line that precedes them in IX, 20, 7, \( \text{krîlîr makhó ná māṃhayūḥ} \), 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 \( \text{grāvān} \).

If the traditional interpretation of \( \text{tunnás} \) is correct (and I shall return to this at the end of the paper), the text suggests that the \( \text{grāvān} \) 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 \( \text{stotṛbhīḥ} \), “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 \textit{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
A 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 brâhmaṇas 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 krátu “wisdom, insight” and kṛatu, 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 Śāyaṇa und Konsorten sind auch hier quantité négligeable; zum einen Teil sind sie falsch; wo sie zum anderen Teil richtig sind, können wir erst hinterher herauskennen, nachdem wir unsererseits des Richtigen uns bemächtigt haben, und dann werden wir sie nicht um der Autorität des Śāyaṇa 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 Āurobindo 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 √vād “speak” (“die Stimme erheben, sprechen, reden”, Mayrhofer),
numbers 2-7 and 9. As Macdonell in *Vedic Mythology* (1897: 106) notes, “grávan (generally connected with vad, to speak, and verbs of cognate meaning, and hence showing a greater tendency to personification than ádri).” 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 vá ślokam āghóṣate diví*  
*grávā yátra vádati kārūr ukthíyas* (2)

Renou takes kārūr 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 Śāyaṇa 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 kārūr ukthíyas is simply in apposition to grávan. Both Geldner and Griffith, having in mind the kind of sound a stone might make, elaborate slightly on the verb vádati, “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 (ukthyās) “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 ukthīyas.

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

I, 135, 7.  

*áti váyo1 sasató yáhi śásvato*  
*yátra grávā vádati tátra gachatam*  
*ghām indraś ca gachatam* (3)

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1 Accented 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 metonymic: “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.

\( \text{vādan gr} \bar{\text{a}} \text{vā vēdim bhriyāte} (4) \)

Geldner translates: “Der plappernde ("babbling") Stein soll auf die Vedi 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 √bhṛ with grāvan (number 23 below) will prompt reconsideration of this translation. But vādan grāvā, “the GRAVAN speaking”, is clear.

V, 37, 2.

\( \text{grāvāno yāsyā isirāṃ vādanti} \)
\( \text{āyad adhvaryūr havāśāva sindhum} (5) \)

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

\(^2\)The only hitherto unquestioned occurrence of a passive subjunctive in the Rāgveda. Macdonell (1910: 334) gives in addition uhyāte (contra Pada) and uhyāthe, 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 ἄρειος has helped lexicographers to clarify the sphere of reference of ἵσιρά, here translated adverbially (“eifrig”, “loudly”). Mayrhofer stresses the relationship between ἵσιρά and ἄρειος, "Nicht zu trennen von hom. ἄρειος 'krafterfüllt, vital, heilig’ ”, and compares ἵσιρα mánasā in VIII, 48, 7 (“d’une âme fervente”, Renou), with ἄρειον μένος; Chantraine (1968-1980: 458) cross-refers, under ἄρειος, to J. Duchesne-Guillemin’s observation of cases where Vedic ἵσιρα “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 vádann ihá
somā ghōṣena yachatu (6)

Geldner, as in number 4, translates vádan, “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, brāhmaṇāsāḥ somínō vácam akṛata, “Die somafeiernden Brahmanen haben ihre Stimme erhoben”. At VIII, 17, 3 it describes “us”, vayāṁ, the speakers of the verse, and at VIII, 45, 16, friends, sākhāya[h]… somínah, glossed in Geldner’s translation “Die anwesenden Sänger”.

“May the GRAVAN speaking, having sóma
Draw you here with sound.”

X, 36, 4.
grāvā vádann āpa rákṣāṃsi sedhatu
duṣvāṇiṇyām niṛṭtim…” (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:

grāvā́nō āpa ducinā́m
āpa sedhata durmatim (8)

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

X, 94, 1.

prātē vadantu prā vayāṁ vadāma
grāvabhyo vācāṁ vadatāṁ vādadbhyāḥ (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 √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 tōnen (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 √vad, the word grāvan appears on three occasions with a passive form of √vac, “speak”, ucyāte,
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 dyumánto arcáyo]
gráveva ucyate bhrát
[utó te tanyatúr yathā
svānó arta tmānā divāḥ] (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 √vac here, as before for √vad, “speak”—and notes, “ucyte, 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
grává yátra madhusúd ucyáte bhrát
dívāsanta matibhir maniśiṇaḥ (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 madhusút. This word, translated “pressing sweetness (or honey)” (“Süßes auspressende”, “en pressant miel”), is from mádhū, “sweet, sweetness”, with suffixal –sut, traditionally derived from the root √su “press”. The word mádhū is taken in this context to belong to the ritual language, and madhusút to be synonymous with somasút. If so it could of course equally well describe a man, as somasút does; see below. The word madhusút

4The context here has led translators to render the verb in the second pāda, ávivāsanta, from √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 bhūd, (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 grāvāṅnāḥ somāśūto mayohūvas** (13)

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

“Ainsi, les GRAVANS qui pressent le *soma*, les réconfortant[e]s!” (Renou)

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

somāśū tājānena

“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.

**arvācānām sū te māno**

grāvā kṛṇotu vagnunā (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 vagnum, translated “rumeur”, “Getöse”, elsewhere describes the call of frogs uniting in the rain (VII, 103, 2), or the voice of a wife, jāyā (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 (vagnu) of Indra in battle: *indrasyeva vagnūr ā śṛṇva ājaū;* 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 ājaū 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)

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

“May the GRAVAN calling\(^5\) incline your mind hitherward.”

**VII, 104, 17.**

\[\text{gráváno} \text{ ghnantu raksiśa} \text{ upabdaíḥ} \] (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 \text{upabdá} occurs only here, but is presumably related to \text{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, \(\text{vāc}\), “with speech or voice” (compare \(\text{vācam}\) in passage number 9 above).

**X, 76, 6.**

\[\text{bhurántu no yaśásaḥ sótu ándhaso} \text{ gráváno} \text{ vācá dívitá dívítmatá} \text{náro yātra duhaté kāmiyam mádhu} \text{āghosāyanto abhíto mithástúraḥ} \] (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 \text{sótu} in the first line, again derived from the root \(\sqrt{su}\), has presented problems. Geldner translates, “um ... auszuschlagen”, but as Gotó explains: “Nicht sicher, doch Iptv. 3. Sg. in einem parentethischen Satz möglich, vgl. Oldenberg Noten z. St. [1912], der den Akk. n. des Stamms sótu-vorzuziehen scheint.” (1991: Anm. 80). Oldenberg had rejected suggestions that \text{sótu} might be an instrumental form (Böhtlingk…)

\(^5\)My 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) 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: rātryāś cid ándo áti deva paśyasi, “Du Gott blickst auch durch das Dunkel der Nacht...”

The first verb here, bhurántu, is from the root √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 vádanti. Rix translates bhurántu as abstract, giving “sollen sich tummeln” (2001: 81). Geldner’s translation “ertönen” for the causative ághośāyantas is more strictly correct than it was when he used it in the context of the GRAVANS to translate √vad in numbers 2 and 3, and then √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 madhuṣūt 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 √ghus with preverb á, also appeared in my passage number 2 (repeated below). Here in its causative form “making resound” (“widerhallen lassen”,
Mayrhofer) the GRAVANS are the subject; there it was *arkás*, “song”. There seems also to be an echo in *divitā/diviḥmatā* of *divi*, “to the sky” in that passage.

\[
\text{arkó vā ślokam āghősate divi} \\
\text{grāvā yātra vádati kārūr ukthīyas}
\]

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 páda, “or the song rings out its melody to the sky”, by translating *yātra* “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 *ghōṣa* 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.**

\[
grāvṇāṁ ic chṛṇvān tiṣṭhāsi (17)
\]

“… stehst du da auf die Preßsteine horchend”.

“You stand listening just to the GRAVANS”.

The verb *√ṣru* takes the accusative of the thing, the genitive of the person (as here, *grāvṇām*), heard.

**IV, 3, 3.**

\[
devaś śastim amṛtaya saṃsa \\
grāveva sōtō madhuśud yām ilē (18)
\]

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

Renou: “au dieu immortel récite … une louange, qu’invoque le presseur du doux (*soma*) comme (l’invoque ... 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 *sōtō*, traditionally derived from *√su* like *sōtu* in
number 16 above, is again problematic. It appears here from the position of the accent to be a participle, and therefore adjectival, like *madhusūt*. Renou notes “sōtā, 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 *madhusūt* at the fourth occurrence of the word, III, 58, 9 (see below): “*madhusūt* est actif, ép. de grāvan ‘qui presse le doux (breuvage)’”. If this is so then the text would suggest that both sōtā and *madhusūt* 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 sōtā and *madhusūt* to make a single noun, “Honigpresser”, “presseur du doux (soma)”, “presser of the sweet juice”. If their interpretation of *madhusūt* as given in number 11 above was right, there is textual redundancy here. Together sōtā (which translators read as agent noun sotā) *madhusūt* 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 (*madhusūt* is an epithet of the grāvan elsewhere but not here), and that it is flawed (repetitious).

The adjective *madhusūt* 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, *madhusūtātama*, it agrees with the noun *sōma* 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 “Avins, 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 ॐ, “anrufen, durch Lieder preisen, verehren” (Mayrhofer), and in the first two (identical) passages ॐ, “speak”, this then would relate it to compounds like *mādhu-vacas*, “sweet of speech”, or “sweetly speaking” at IV,
The difficulties posed by the two derivatives of √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 mãdhú. 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 √duh, in addition to the concrete physical sense “milk”, often has an abstract meaning, “give, give forth” (Mayrhofer “DOGΗ melken… spenden”). At VI, 48, 12, for example, it is used of śrāvas (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 mãdhú, 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 vṛṣṇano arhām ārāṇ
īndra grāvāṇo ādītiḥ sajōṣāḥ
anāśvāsō yē pavāyo arathā
īndreśātā abhy āvartanta dāṣyān (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 vṛṣṇanās as nominal. But it is much more natural to take vṛṣṇan as adjectival (“strong, manly”), and in agreement with the GRAVANS, as indeed it is (vṛṣṇī 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 ādītiḥ sajōṣāḥ. The word sajōṣa is used in the context of worship in an earlier poem, I, 153, 1: “Wir verehren euch Große einmütig [sajōsās] mit Opfergaben 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 [sajōsās] 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...”

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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 rāksāsā upabdaīḥ. But in number 7, grāvā vādann āpa rāksāmsi 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 vāsān atomas 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 [pavāyas] without horse, without chariot,
Urged on by Indra overcome the Dasyus.”

The word pavāyas 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, nā, 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 pavāyas 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
$\sqrt{is}$, \textit{isítá} 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, \textit{vānāya codayā pavím}, “impel the wheel rim of music”. The meaning of \textit{paví} should perhaps be subjected to review.

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

\textbf{V, 36, 4.}

eśā grāveva jaritá ta indra
\textit{yārī} vācām bhād āśuṣānāh (22)

“This Sänger hier erhebt wie der GRAVAN seine Stimme laut, sich ereifernd” (Geldner) The singer, \textit{jaritý}, 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 \textit{āśuṣānás “sich ereifernd “}, “getting excited”, he is apparently deriving the word from the root \textit{ṝuṣu}, “dry” with preverb \textit{á} in a specialised sense which seems remote from the root (he explains his derivation in \textit{Der Rigveda in Auswahl} (1907-9: I, 181). Böhtlingk and Roth, Grassmann, Lubotsky and Mayrhofer all agree in deriving it from \textit{ṝuṣu “breathe”}. Grassmann had translated the verb with preverb “schnaufen bei angestrengter 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.

\textbf{VII, 33, 14.}

grāvāṇam bijhrat prá vadāti ágre (23)

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

(Geldner)

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

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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:

ukthaḥbhītam sāmabhītam bibharti
grāvānum bibhrat pra vaddāti āgye

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 √bhṛ, one finite and one participial; the word grāvan is parallel to ukthaḥbhīta and sāmabhīta. 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 Hotr) 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; [yāḥ] grāvānum bibhrat [varītate 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 √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 √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.
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 grāvānas and vīpās 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 vīṣan, would be to take vīpra 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 vīpra at this point: “On est tenté d’abord de garder le sens étymologique de vīpra, donc ‘rendues vibrantes par’, mais on s’écarterait ainsi de girbhīr vīpraḥ 5.”

In the next group the GRAVAN displays further human characteristics.

VI, 51, 14.
Desiring fellowship.

“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 vāvaśitr to govern nas, is more likely, and “(nach dir)” does not have to be supplied (although he does not translate hi, “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.

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“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 áśvapṛṣṭha is an unusual bahuvrīhi formation: “der von Bopp für die ganze Kategorie empfohlene Name ‘Possessivkomposita’ ist zu eng, vgl. z.B. v. áśva-ṃṛṣṭha- ‘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 mamhánā; others take the word differently. The rest, “der du auf dem Rücken die Rosse trägst wie der Preßstein das (Soma) Roß,” relates solely to grāvānāṃ nā áśvapṛṣṭham, 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.

sām grāvabhīr nasatē...

“Mit den GRAVANS kommt er in Berührung…” (Geldner). Mayrhofer explains the root ṯnas “sich glücklich (zu Hause) vereinen… gr. vēouɑt kehre Heim”. With preverb sām 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 ārdhābhi caṣṭur adhvarām (28)
“les GRAVANS haut dressé[e]s ont regardé vers le sacrifice”
(Renou)
For ārdhvā, “upright”, see below, numbers 34-37.

**X, 94, 10.**
Taking pleasure in.
yāśya grāvāṇo ājūṣadhvam adhvarām (29)

“…wann ihr GRAVANS an dem Opfer jemandes Gefallen fondet” (Geldner)

**X, 94, 2.**
They are parallel here to the sons of Sudhanvan:
viṣṭā grāvāṇaḥ sukṛtaḥ sukṛtyāyā (30)

“Da die Steine tätig wären, Gutes wirkend mit gutem Werke” (Geldner)
This same formula, viṣṭa... 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 Rṣis:
sōma grāvāṇa īṣaya ca viprāḥ (31)

“Soma, die GRAVANS und die redegewaltigen Rṣi’s”. (Geldner) The word vipra, which Geldner takes here as adjectival, could also apply to the GRAVANS: “The GRAVANS and the Rṣis, the inspired ones”. This is the second time vipra 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, grāvāṇa tūṇno abhiṣṭutāḥ, was echoed in the verse that followed it:

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esā tūṇno abhiṣṭutāḥ
    āvītram ātī gāhate
```

These lines bear a striking similarity to two lines in IX, 3, 6 (the subject is the same).
esā víprair abhiṣṭuto
apō devō vi gāhate
dādhad rátnáini dāśuṣe

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

dādhat stotrē suvīryam

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 sutām (32)

“… mit den Steinen ausgrepreßt” (Geldner)

The past participle sutā, which in the later language also functions as the past participle of both √sū “impel” and √sū “give birth to”, is traditionally understood to belong only to the root √sū, “press” (unattested outside Indo-Iranian), in the Rigveda. Elsewhere in the text this past participle, sutā, 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.
nṛbhīḥ soma prācyuto grāvabhiḥ sut[āḥ] (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; nṛbhīḥ prācyutah/ grāvabhiḥ sutāḥ.

The past participle prācyuta (from √cyu with preverb prā) 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 āpracyuta also occurs at II, 28, 8, describing vratā, “vielleicht…

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men, nībhis. Geldner notes: "prācyuta = fraśūta 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 fraśūta in the Avesta is right, a traditional reading of the text would expect the past participles to be reversed: nībhīḥ sutāḥ / grāvabhiḥ prācyutāḥ—we saw above the occurrence of the former in the Rigveda. Comparison with the interpretation of the Avesta might compel the conclusion that here nībhis and grāvabhīṣ 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 prācyutas. 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, prācyutas, 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.

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is described as \( \text{úrdhvá} \), “upright” (“aufrecht”, Mayrhofer).

I, 28, 1.

\[
yátra grávā 
prthībudhna
\]

\( \text{úrdhvó bhávati sótave} \) (34)

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

In his entry for \( \text{úrdhvá} \) Mayrhofer draws attention to cognate Greek \( \text{óρθ} \), “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 \( \sqrt{bhú} \) occurs elsewhere in the text with \( \text{úrdhvá} \). At the beginning of IV, 4, 5 \( \text{úrdhvó bhava} \) is addressed to Agni. This imperative is employed as a variant of a different imperative at the beginning of the previous verse, \( \text{úd agne tisṭha} \), “stand up”. Renou’s translation brings out the parallel: “O Agni, dresse toi (\( \text{úd agne tisṭha} \))… Soit haut (dressé) (\( \text{úrdhvó bhava} \)).” In our passage grávā […] \( \text{úrdhvó bhávati} \) 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 sót. The word sót 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 sót, 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.

\( \text{úrdhvó grávā ṛḥád agnih sámiddhaḥ} \) (35)

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

X, 100, 9.

\( \text{úrdhvá vásavā astu sótāri} \) (36)

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

“Que se dresse haut le GRAVAN, ô Vasu’s, à presser!”
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 *sot*. 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 grâvā. - *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: “*sotári* m. Pressender (RV), *sotári* beim (Soma-)Pressen”. Once more, words traditionally understood to be derivatives of √su are highly problematical.

The formula *ūrdhvó grāvā* also occurs at X, 92, 15, a passage we have already looked at (number 28 above), *grāvāna ārdhvā abhī caksür adhvarām*, where Renou had translated, “les GRAVANS haut dressé[e]s ont regardé vers le sacrifice”.

Compounded forms usually arise from existing uncompounded forms in the Rigveda, and this collocation leads to the compound *ūrdhvāgrāvānah*.

**III, 54, 12.**

*ūrdhvāgrāvāno adhvarām 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 *adhvarām ataṣṭa* and the compound, but the meaning remains opaque, and the finite verbs that accompany the uncompounded forms of *ūrdhvā* with the GRAVANS are verbs to be, bhāvati and astu, not verbs to “put”.

For singers being *ūrdhvā* see X, 115, 9.
"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 ārdhvāsas in this passage: “aktionsbereit oder erwartungswoll”.

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

II, 39, 1.
grāvāneva tād īd ārthaṃ jarethe
grīdhreva vyāksaṃ 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 √gr “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 yāntā zu ergänzen.”

At no point does Geldner consider “sing, praise”, to be a possibility (although in an earlier passage, I, 92, 17, the A śvins, the subject of the verb jarethe in our passage, ślokam... cakrāthuk; for śloka 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

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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. 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 \( \sqrt{j}r \) (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 grāvānezva tād id ārtham (with a supplied \( yāntā, “going” \)) together; and he also supplies an unstated object to agree with \( nidhimántam \), rather than taking it with \( vykšām \), 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 \( ácha \), needs a verb. This should be a verb either of moving or of speaking: “Die Bedeutung [of \( ácha \)] 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 \( ácha \).

Geldner, thinking of pressing-stones, understands tād id ārtham to refer specifically to the activity of the GRAVANS, not the two Ažvins. 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 Ažvins:

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

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ubhá u núnám tád íd arthayethe
ví tanváthe dhiyo vástrāpáseva

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
Aśvins, twins with the same aim.

Both Geldner and Renou point to the parallel (tád íd ártham/ tadidarthāś) with VIII, 2, 16, where the verb, jarante,
accompanied by ukthébhis, “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.

váya ukthébhir jarante
tuvám áchá14 jātiáraḥ

“Vāyu! Mit Lobgedichten singen dir die Sänger”
(Geldner). Not only is the subject “singers”, and the verb again
explained by ukthébhis, “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 JAR1 = GAR1... ‘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 grávan 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 brahmins offering praises...”

V, 48, 3.
á grávabhir ahanśebhir aktúbhir
vāriśṭham vájram á jigharti máyini (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 soma does not appear in this poem. But if the “weapon” of the GRAVANS is, as I have argued, song, could this perhaps be the vārīṣṭham vījram, 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 √han, but from √ghṛ, “sprinkle”. But my suggestion is a tentative one. Much of this poem is obscure.

Geldner comments “schwieriges Lied, vielleicht Fragment”.

VIII, 27, 1.

agniḥ ukthē puṇḥito
grāvaṇo barhīr adhvarē
tyā 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 grāvaṇas here would be to take it, not as nominative, but as vocative:

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15The other passage, IV, 17, 14, where the verb √ghṛ with preverb ṛ 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”.

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

IX, 113, 6.

yátra brahmá pavamána
chandasiyāṁ vācaṁ vādan
grávāṁ sōme mahiyáte (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 erhäben fühlt”.

The first two lines are relatively straightforward. “Where the brahman, o Pavamāna, speaking the melodious word… ” 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 mahiyáte to fit all the contexts in which the verb appears. It is generally taken to be denominative from máhi, 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 sōme. Both Geldner and Renou, in order to make sense of the instrumental grávānā, supply in brackets “in the hand”. But the text merely gives grávānā … mahiyáte, “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 grávan with any form of any word meaning “hand”. The most obvious way to take the instrumental grávānā 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.

grávāna úpareśu á
mahiyánte sajóśasah
vṛṣṇe dádhato vṛṣṇiyan (42)

16I follow Mayrhofer and At. Gr. 1954: 222 in the interpretation of chándas.
“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 mahiyánte. In the previous passage the singular verb mahiyáte had the brahman as subject. This confirms the likelihood that in that passage grávamá 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 mahiyánte, the meaning of the locative plural úparsu is unclear. The comparative of úpa, úpara, 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 prathamá and párva. 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 úpara 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 úpara 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 mahiy occurs. The GRAVANS in X, 175, 3 mahiyánte sajóasasaḥ. 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 mahiy passage the priest who governs the verb is also described as singing, chandasiyām vācaḥ vādātan. The parallel between X, 175, 3 and passage number 19 is reinforced in the third line here, vṛṣṇe dādhato vṛṣṇiyam, which seems to echo vṛṣṇe yat te vṛṣṇo arkāṁ arvāṁ in that earlier passage. Could the verb mahiy have the sense of being or growing in vocal harmony in these two passages, either sajóasasas, “in concert with”, or grávamá, “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 grāṇā in IX, 113, 6.

X, 78, 6.

grāṇāno nā sūráyah sindhumātara[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 sindhumātara 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 sindhumātara 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: “sūráyah 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 sūr 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 úpara 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 ślokah[...] sūrēh, 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 gṛṇāntah, 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:
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.

śāṁ 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.

dravinodā drāvinaśo
grāvahastāso adhvarē
yajñēṣu devām īlāte (45)

17See also II, 2, 12, II, 4, 9, III, 31, IV, 37, 7, V, 10, 3, VI, 23, 10, and X, 167, 4.
18The identity of a number of these is uncertain.

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“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, grāvagrābhā, differ from
the one already encountered, ūrdhvāgrāvan, 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 flate” (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 ..
drāviṇodo 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,
drāviṇasas, to depend upon it (but again the verb is missing); he
notes: “Ellipse oder starke Anakoluthie”. Renou does the
same: “draviṇodā drāviṇasah, extension du type de base gāvām
gopāth… 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 drāviṇasas to depend upon īflate as
partitive genitive of the thing sought, as in VII, 24, 5, where the
verb is also from īdā: indra tvāyām arkā ītte vāsūnām, “Indra, it is
you the song calls upon for wealth”.

The bahuvrihi compound, grāvahastāsas, “GRAVAN-
haended”, 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, lagudahasta 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 (rōman, “hair”), “pfauenhaarig” (Ai. Gr. 1905: 277), “having hair like a peacock’s”, not “with peacocks in their hair”; or, indeed, āsva-ṛṣṭha (ṛṣṭhā, “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 sōta madhusūd yām Ḭū, “den der Honigpresser ruft wie der GRAVAN”. The verb ᬍū is again, as in the passage we are now considering, from the root ṭū. I suggest that the same comparison is being drawn here. Elsewhere in the Rigveda gods are appealed to with outstretched hands, uttānāhasta: 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...”

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I, 162, 5.

hótaḥdvaryūr āvayā agnimindhó
grāvagrābhá utá śāṃstā sūvipráṣ (46)

“Der Hotr, Adhvaryu, der Āvayāj, der Agnimindha [Feueranzünder], Grāvagrābhá [Preßsteinhalter] und der redegewandte Śamstr.” (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 śāṃstā sūvipras [sind] durch zwischenstehendes utá zu einem Gliede verbunden” (248). So grāvagrābhás is either adjectival, and like sūvipras in agreement with nominal śāṃstṛ, or it is a noun in apposition to it; either way, it is closely connected with śāṃstṛ, “proclaimer”.

The verb √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 √grabh has a wide range of senses, many of which are abstract. With preverbs ánu and práti 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, práti me stómam āditir jagṛḥhyāt (there is also at least one passage, IX, 113, 3, where verb with preverb práti 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 _medhá_, “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.)

It is clearly used metaphorically when the instrument of the “taking” is _jihvá_, the tongue, at VIII, 72, 3 and VIII, 17, 5, or _svadhá_, “etwa Eigenheit, Eigenkraft” (Mayrhofer), at I, 164, 38. It means “grasp mentally, understand” at I, 145, 2, _svéneva dháro mánasá yád ágrabhit_, “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: _námo jagrbhváñ ahhi yáj jújoat_, “die Huldigung annehmend, an der er seine Freude haben wird”; “Having received the hommage 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:

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\text{nitye cin nú yám sádane jagbhré}
\text{prásastibhir dadhiré yajñyásah}
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“... him in his constant seat men skilled in worship have taken (and) with praises have established” (Griffith). Geldner, preferring a concrete interpretation of _√grabh_, moves _nitye... sádane_, “in his constant seat”, out of the context of the first verb, _jagbhré_, 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 _–grábhá_, both of which, like this, occur once only, _hastagrábhá_ 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 _udagrábhá_ at IX, 97, 15, with _udán_ “water” as its first part. Geldner devotes a long footnote to the possible ways of understanding “Wasserfasser”; but the

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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 √bhṛ 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 √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 √yuj (“join”, Whitney, “anschirren… verbinden”, Mayrhofer), leading to the compound yuktāgrāvan and the derivative noun yóga. In addition to the specific physical meaning, “harness”, its usage in the Rigveda, like √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 yuktāgrāvan, “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 √yuj is however used to mean “engage for a task” with people elsewhere in the Rigveda. In VI, 63, 4, ṭrā hōtā gūrtāmanā uṇānō / āyukta yō nāsatiyā hávīman, Geldner translates, “Es tritt der erwählte Hotṛ auf, lōblichen Denkens, der eingespant [sic] ist, die Nāsatiya’s zu laden”. His translation of √yuj here is judicious; “eingespannt” contains both the concrete and the abstract sense of the verb. Griffith takes it as dead metaphor again, translating āyukta in this context “appointed”: “Up stands the grateful-minded priest, elected, appointed to invoke the two Nāsatiyas.” Geldner’s note to āyukta compares similar usage in the Atharvaveda: “vgl. yujyānte (ṛtvijāh) AV. 12.1.38” (in Griffith’s translation “and ministers are busied…”). The past participle, yuktā, 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.

yuktāgrāvno yō avitā [suśprāh] (47)
“Who is helper of the one who has employed the GRAVANS.”

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

\[ yāto\ virāh\ karmaniyah\ sudākso\ yuktāgrāvā\ jdyate\ devākāmaḥ \]

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

**III, 30, 2.**

\[ yuktā\ grāvâṇaḥ\ samidhānē\ agnaû \]

“The GRAVANS are employed by the kindled fire”.

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

**III, 57, 4.**

\[ ácha\²⁰\ vivakmi\ rōdāsi\ sumēke\ grāvmo\ yujñō\ adhvarē\ manisā \]

Here, the instrumental *manisā* 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 attelant 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.**

\[ sāmiddhāgniir\ vanavat\ śirṇābarhīr\ yuktāgrāvā\ sutāsomo\ jarāte \]

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

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²⁰Pada ácha.
Vorrang gewinnen, 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.

grāṃa brahmd yuyujānāh saparyān
kīrṇā devān nānasopāśiṣyan (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 kīrṇā 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.

grāṃāṃ yōge mānmanah sādha imahe (54)

The meaning of sādha 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: sādha is parallel to locative yōge. “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

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21 The 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 grávánaḥ savitá
deváḥ suvatu dhármanā
dhūrṣu yujadhvaṃ sunutā (55)

“Euch, GRAVANS, soll Gott Savitṛ nach der Bestimmung in Bewegung setzen. Schirret euch an die Joche, presset aus!”
(The final imperative sunutā, from the troublesome root √ṣu 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:

grávānaḥ savitā nū vo
deváḥ suvatu dhármanā (56)

Geldner, in translating the main verb in both verses, suvatu, 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 Vierfüßer nunmehr angetrieben (prāsāvīḍ), an ihr Geschäft zu gehen.”

Is X, 175, 1, evidence that Renou is right to take the use of √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)

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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 dunniest 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 dhúrú, literally, “in the shafts”. The use of this word, dhúr, is also regularly figurative in the text. See, for example, “das Joch der Ordnung” at I, 84, 16, “die Deichsel des Kampfliedes” at I 131, 2, and yajñásya dhúrú, “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.

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háyo ná vidvám ayují svayám dhurí
tám vahámi prátáraṇi m avyávam
náṣyá vaśmi vimúcam náviṭam þínar
vidvám pathyá þuraetá 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

²³ṛásya. Geldner supplies in brackets “(Opfer)”, “(Opfer)ordnung”.
²⁴Represented in the metrical text þuraetá 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 ‘Zugtiers’ 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 tād īd ārtham to refer to the GRAVANS rather than to the Aśvins, “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...” Böhtlingk 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 Althindischen Rituals*, 1995 agrees: “grāvan m, Preßstein für die Somastengel; zur des Zeit des RV
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 Horsemens”. 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 Gelder 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 Rāgveda 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 (adhvaryūs, grāvānas), 39 (“he”, grāvabhis), 51 (“I”, grāvanas), 53 (brahmā, grāvanas). Geldner explains that the verb √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

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which, something is crushed, one would expect them to appear in the dual; hence Renou’s passing note, the glosses of obscure passages by Sāyana, 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 1, 162, 5, although O’Flaherty follows tradition (1981: 90). Scholars have disagreed about how to interpret 1, 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). The GRAVAN has none of the characteristics of a stone in the text. The element fire, agni, 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

25 If the word on the other hand represents a kind of singer, derivation from √gr. “sing, praise” would seem a possibility.
The Meaning and Language of the Rigveda

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, grávan 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.

grávam tunnō abhiṣutaḥ
pavitraṃ soma gachasi
dādhat stotṛē suvārīyam

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 √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 √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:
sutē adhvarē ādhi vācām akṛata
ā kṛiṣīyo nā mātāraṁ 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 √su. Geldner’s version of suté adhvare 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 girbhír adhvare suté sácá, where it is again translated by Geldner “bei dem ausgepreßten (Soma)opfer”. But here Renou, who has elsewhere found suté sácá 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)

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 √tud helps to make sense of the derivative adjective nitodin, which occurs at X, 34, 7, to describe the gambler’s dice. Geldner translates aksāsa id ankṣiño nitodin[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.

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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), 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 thatoverlay the text like later archaeological strata, we shall uncover a very different *Rigveda* from the one that we have come to accept.

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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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