
The Decipherable Rigveda: *tiróahnyam*

as an Example

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The interpretation of the *Rigveda* presents enormous problems for Vedic scholars, as Stephanie Jamison recently acknowledged in a paper on translating the *Rigveda* delivered at the Eleventh UCLA Indo-European Conference held in 1999. “It is discouragingly common to find passages in the *Rig Veda* that do not make sense without the silent supplying of additional material”. (2000: 13)

I believe there is a simple explanation for the apparent difficulty. I have chosen the word *tiróahnyam* as an example of how inherited assumptions about meaning continue to mislead scholars and distort contexts in the *Rigveda*. These inherited assumptions, furthermore, reinforce the traditional belief that the text is naive and full of fussy detail of ritual practice, helping to preserve it from scholarly attention: ‘banal’ and ‘crass’ are both words Jamison uses of the *Rigveda* in the course of her paper quoted above. I believe that the banality and crassness lie in the traditional interpretation, not in the text itself.

Wackernagel and Debrunner in the *Altindische Grammatik* explain Vedic *tiróahnya*, a compound of *tírás* ‘through, across’ and **ahnya*, from *áhan* ‘day’, ‘einen Tag hindurch gestanden’ (Wackernagel & Debrunner 1954: 814), translating ‘vorgestrig’ (1905: 308), and ‘nudiustertius’ (1954: 109). The collocation *Soma tiroahnya* occurs throughout the later Vedic texts, and in a range of grammatical forms. In this paper I focus however on the Rigvedic usage, which appears to differ from that of the later texts.

Hillebrandt, under the heading *Soma tiroahnya*, refers to the explanation of the second word given by the commentary to the *Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtra* at 24, 3, 42, endorsing it both for the later texts and for the *Rigveda*. “Der Kommentar zu Kātyāyana sagt sehr genau, was unter *Soma tiroahnya* zu verstehen ist; seine Erklärung entspricht der, die man aus dem Wort selbst entnehmen kann; es ist Tags zuvor gepresster Soma, der beim Āśvinaśastra dargebracht wird. . . Das stimmt mit dem RV überein”. (1927–29: II, 475–6) ‘The commentary to Kātyāyana states very precisely what is to be understood by *Soma tiroahnya*; its explanation corresponds with what we can understand from the word itself; it is Soma pressed the day before, which was offered during invocations devoted to the Āśvins. . . This is in accordance with the RV.’

Böhtlingk & Roth, listing *tiróahnya* as an adjective, refer to a selection of occurrences in the *Rigveda* and later Vedic texts, and describe the context in which the word is used: “adj. *übertägig* d. h. *vorgestrig*, vom Soma, der zum Zweck der Gährung stehen geblieben ist, R[ig]V[eda]. I, 45, 10. 47, 1. 8, 35, 19. 3, 28, 3, 6. Śat[apatha]. Br[āhmaṇa]. II, 5, 5, 11. Pañcav[imśa]. Br[āhmaṇa]. I, 6. Kāty[āyana]. Śr[āuta-Sūtra]. II, 6, 10. 24, 3, 42. Lāty[āyana]’s

Sūtra]. 2, 11, 11”. Translators concur: Geldner notes to the occurrence of the word at *Rigveda* VIII, 35, 19: “Den am Vortag gepreßten und deshalb gegorenen Soma, der speziell für die Aśvin bestimmt war”.

The word *tiróahnyam* occurs in eight verses of the *Rigveda*, and only in this accusative form. In the majority of these the word *sóma* is not present. I shall begin with the three passages where the two words are found together.

I, 45, 10.¹

arvāñcam *daívīyaṃ jánam*

The-hitherwards-coming divine host

ágne yáksva sáhūtibhiḥ

O-Agni, revere with-joint-invocations

ayám sómaḥ sudānavas

This *sóma* (N.), O-Sudānavas (PL.)

tám pāta tiróahnyam

It (A.) drink *tiróahnyam* (A.)

This is addressed to Agni, not to the two Aśvins, who are not mentioned in the poem. Geldner translates: “Bitte, Agni, das göttliche Volk her durch gemeinsame Einladung: Hier ist Soma, ihr Gabenschönen; trinket ihn, der einen Tag über gestanden hat!” He refers to the authority of two later texts in his note, the second of which is the one quoted by Hillebrandt: “*tiróahnya* der gestrige (‘yesterday’s’) Soma, der über Nacht gegoren hat. Vgl. Śat[apatha Brāhmaṇa]. 11, 5, 5, 11 und Kāty[āyana]. Śr[auta-Sūtra]. 24, 3, 42 mit Komm”.

The slight grammatical dislocation of the collocation ‘this *sóma* (N.) . . . it (A.) drink, the-day-old (A.)’ is found again at the second occurrence of *tiróahnyam*, in a poem addressed this time to the Aśvins. Renou, referring to Hillebrandt, notes to this passage, “*tiróahnya*, dit du soma . . . L’expression est typique des Aśvin”. (Vol.16: 6)

I, 47, 1.

ayám vām *mádhumattamaḥ*

This for-you-two most-sweet

sutáḥ sóma ṛtāvṛdhā

Expressed *sóma* (N.), O-Ṛtāvṛdhā (Du.)

tám aśvinā pibatam tiróahnyam

It (A.) O-Aśvins, drink *tiróahnyam* (A.)

dhattám rátanāni dāsúṣe

Bring gifts for-the-worshipper

¹ The text is taken from the metrical edition (Van Nooten & Holland 1994). My interlinear glosses contain other traditional translations that I regard as questionable, but they do not affect the present argument. I am grateful to Mike Falchikov of the University of Edinburgh for help with translation from the Russian, and to Martin Kümmel of the University of Freiburg for information and useful discussion on the later Vedic texts.

III, 58, 7 is the only instance in the *Rigveda* where the two words of the suggested collocation *Soma tiroahnya* appear in the same case. As in the two examples already given, however, they are not in the same pāda.

III, 58, 7.

ásvinā vāyúnā yuváṃ sudakṣā

O–Aśvins, with–Vāyu, you-two, O–Sudakṣā

niyúdbhiṣ ca sajóṣasā yuvānā

And with–the–Niyuts, in–harmony, O–young–ones

násatyā tiróahniyaṃ juṣāṇá

O–Nāsatyā, *tiróahnyam* enjoying/delighting²

sómam píbatam asrídhā sudānū

sóma drink, unfailing, O–Sudānū

The traditional interpretation of *tiróahnyam* is a possible, although slightly awkward, one in these three passages. In the remaining five occurrences of the word in the *Rigveda* however it is highly problematic. The word concludes verses 3 and 6 of III, 28, a poem addressed, again, to Agni, not to the Aśvins, and three verses of VIII, 35, 19–21. In none of these does the word *sóma* appear.

III, 28.

ágne vīhí puroḷásam

O–Agni, seek–out the *puroḷás*

áhutaṃ tiróahniyaṃ

Offered *tiróahnyam* (3)

Geldner translates: “Agni! Hab nach dem geopfertem Reiskuchen Gelüst, der einen Tag alt ist”.

ágne vṛdhāná áhutim

O–Fire, growing, the offering

puroḷásam jātavedaḥ

The *puroḷás*, O–Jātavedas

juṣásva tiróahniyaṃ

Enjoy *tiróahnyam* (6)

“Agni, dich stärkend, laß dir das Opfer, den Reiskuchen schmecken, der einen Tag alt ist, o Jātavedas!” (Geldner)

Both Geldner and Renou, as we have seen, follow the commentators in understanding that there is an adjective *tiróahnya* in the *Rigveda* that describes a special preparation, a kind of vintage *sóma*. However, Geldner makes no comment on his translation here, which takes the word to refer to a cake. Nor does Renou, who translates, similarly, in both verses, “le gâteau de riz qui a passé la journée”. Both scholars, understanding *tiróahnyam* to be an accusative

² The root aorist middle participle *juṣāṇá* is used both transitively and intransitively.

adjective, not unreasonably take it to agree with the accusative noun in the two verses, *puroḷásam*.

Others disagree. Elizarenkova, in the most recent complete translation of the *Rigveda*, believes that *tiróahnyam* must refer to *sóma* here, as she understands it to do elsewhere, and that words are missing from the text. The *puroḷás* is described as *áhutam* ‘offered’ *tiróahnyam* in verse 3. This she translates loosely, and slightly awkwardly, “polituyu (somo) brodyeshchim vtorye sutki”, ‘poured over (with soma) which has been fermenting for forty-eight hours’. In verse 6 she again pads out the translation, interpreting the single word *tiróahnyam* as “soprovozhdaemyi pozavcherashnim (somo)”, ‘accompanied by the day before yesterday’s (soma).’ This degree of supplementation presupposes a seriously defective text.

If *tiróahnyam* is adjectival in the *Rigveda*, we expect there to be a noun in agreement with it. In the light of the regular collocation of the two words in the later Vedic texts, it is understood to describe *sóma*, and this, as we have seen, is possible in I, 45, I, 47 and III, 58. In both verses of III, 28, however, the only noun present is *puroḷás*, traditionally ‘rice cake’³. Either the text here is defective, as Elizarenkova believes, or the *puroḷás*, in the *Rigveda* (but not in the later texts) can be subjected to the same ageing process as the *sóma*, as the translations of Geldner and Renou suggest. Both explanations seem doubtful.

Even more perplexingly, in the last appearance of the word *tiróahnyam*, where the line in which it occurs is repeated in three consecutive verses, there is no noun for it to agree with at all.

VIII, 35, 19–21.

átrer iva śṛṇutam pūrviyástutiṃ
As-of-Atri, hear the earliest-praise

śyāvāśuvasya sunvató madacyutā
Of-Śyāvāśva pressing, O-Madacyutā,

sajóśasā uśásā súriyeṇa ca
In-harmony with-Uśas and with-Sūrya

ásvinā tiróahnyam
O-Aśvins, *tiróahnyam* (19)

sárgāñ iva sṛjatamṣi suṣtutír úpa
Like-outpourings shed the eulogies (to/forth)

śyāvāśuvasya sunvató madacyutā
Of-Śyāvāśva pressing, O-Madacyutā,

sajóśasā uśásā súriyeṇa ca
In-harmony with-Uśas and with-Sūrya

ásvinā tiróahnyam
O-Aśvins, *tiróahnyam* (20)

³ But see my study of the word *puroḷás* (Thomson, 2004).

raśmīṁr iva yachatam adhvarāṁś ūpa
 Like reins, lay-hold the holy-offices (to)
śyāvāśuvasya sunvató madacyutā
 Of-Śyāvāśva pressing, O-Madacyutā,
sajóśasā uśásā sūriyeṇa ca
 In-harmony with-Uśas and with-Sūrya
ásvinā tiróahnyam
 O-Aśvins, *tiróahnyam* (21)

Geldner translates the last two pādas in each of the three verses: “Einträchtig mit Uśas und Sūrya (trinket) den gestrigen (Soma), o Ásvin!” Not only the noun, “(Soma)” is supplied, but also the verb. Elizarenkova, similarly, translates “(Peite somu,) (brodiashchego) vtorye sutki, o Ashviny!”, and Renou agrees that the verb is “éllipsé” here (Vol. 16: 6). Because translators follow the traditional interpretation of the word *tiróahnyam*, they have to assume that the text is highly defective in these three verses. Only by supplying words does it have any meaning. This is an example of the difficulty Stephanie Jamison describes, as quoted at the beginning of this paper: “It is discouragingly common to find passages in the *RigVeda* that do not make sense without the silent supplying of additional material”.

A simpler explanation, I suggest, is that the traditional explanation of the word cannot be correct here. The second element of the compound *tiró-ahnyam* ‘through/across – day’ dictates that *tírás* ‘through, across’ must in this instance have a temporal sense. Hillebrandt concludes that the explanation given by the *Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtra*, that it is an adjective describing *sóma* that has stood ‘through a day’, “stimmt mit dem R.V. überein”. But on the contrary, it presents considerable problems in five of the eight verses in which the word occurs in the *Rigveda*.

Both Geldner and Renou have already had reason to question the authority of this commentary in explaining the word. The commentator describes *Soma tiroahnya* as a preparation offered in compositions devoted to the Ásvins. The passage is quoted by Hillebrandt: *ásvinaśastrakayāgasambandhinaḥ camasasthāḥ somāḥ pūrvadinaniṣpannatvāt tiro’hnyā iti ucyante* ‘Somas in the camasa-vessels connected with invocations to the Ásvins are said to be tiro’hnya because they were prepared on the previous day’. But the word *tiróahnyam*, in the *Rigveda*, appears in three verses in the context of praising Agni, not the Ásvins. We are also told that the word is an adjective specifically describing a special way of preparing *sóma*. But in III, 28 it is understood by Geldner and Renou to describe the rice cake instead. The translations of these two scholars suggest that they believe the explanations of the *Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtra* are only partially correct.

The traditional interpretation, although ancient, appears not to be authoritative when it comes to the *Rigveda*. In verses VIII, 35, 19–21 it is grammatically impossible, unless we assume that the text of the *Rigveda* is so defective that without our intervention it is incoherent and meaningless. I suggest that *tiróahnyam*, which occurs only in this form in the *Rigveda*, is not in fact adjectival, but a fixed temporal accusative, like *náktam* ‘by night’, and that there is no need to supplement the text with either noun, or indeed verb, in these three verses. The repeated line *sajóśasā uśásā sūriyeṇa ca* ‘in harmony with Uśas and with

Sūrya' runs through all the previous verses in the poem, with a range of imperatives: *pibatam* 'drink' in the first three, *volham* 'carry' in verses 4–6, *γātam* 'go' in verses 7–9 and 13–15, and *dhattam* 'put, bring', in verses 10–12. The verb in verse 19, the imperative *śṛṇutam* 'hear', occurs with *sajōṣa* in a parallel passage at III, 62, 2:

sajōṣāv indrāvaruṇā marúdbhir
In-harmony, O-Indra-and-Varuṇa, with-the-Maruts
divá pṛthivyā śṛṇutam hávam me
With-Heaven, with-Earth hear my call

The translation of VIII, 35, 19 is straightforward. 'As of Atri, hear the earliest praise Of Śyāvāśva . . . in harmony with Uṣas and with Sūrya, O Aśvins, through the day'. Verses 20 and 21 offer metaphorical variations on this theme: 'Like outpourings, shed forth the eulogies of Śyāvāśva . . . in harmony with Uṣas and with Sūrya, O Aśvins, through the day' (20); 'Like reins, lay hold of the holy offices of Śyāvāśva . . . in harmony with Uṣas and with Sūrya, O Aśvins, through the day' (21). In these three verses we no longer have an elliptical, meaningless text, but a sophisticated and poetic one.

For this revised interpretation to be correct it must fit all occurrences of the word. I, 45 and I, 47 both belong to what Geldner identifies as the sixth group of poems, I, 44–50. These seven poems all describe early morning, the coming of dawn and of the gods that are *uṣarbúdhas* 'dawn-waking' (I, 44, verses 1 & 9). I, 48 and 49 are addressed throughout to Uṣas, and I, 50 to Sūrya, the sun, *udyánn adyá* 'rising today' (verse 11).

In I, 45 the penultimate verse, verse 9, belongs in sense with the last.

prātaryávanah sahaskṛta
Those-that-come-in-the-morning (A.PL.), O-Sahaskṛta
somapéyāya santiya
For-sóma-drinking, O-Santiya
ihádyá dáviyaṃ jánam
Here today the divine host
barhír á sādāyā vaso
On *barhís* seat, O-Vasu (9)
arvāñcaṃ dáviyaṃ jánam
The-hitherwards-coming divine host
agne yáksva sáhūtibhiḥ
O-Agni, revere with-joint-invocations
ayáṃ sómah sudānavas
This *sóma*, O-Sudānavas
tám pāta tiróahnyam
It drink *tiróahnyam* (10)

The heavenly host is *prātaryávan*, 'coming in the morning' in verse 9, and is invited at the end of the poem to 'drink *sóma*' *tiróahnyam*, the final word in the poem. The temporal context supports the case for 'through the day' as a more likely translation than '(that is) a day old'.

The word order, in addition, is significant, in this verse and elsewhere. Adjectives usually precede the noun they describe in the *Rigveda*, as with *daívyaṃ jánam* in these two verses. But the word *tiróahnyam* in most of its occurrences, as here, concludes the verse.

The context of I, 47, 1 is parallel. The Ásvins are described as coming with the morning rays in verse 7 of this poem, *sākāṃ súryasya rásmibhiḥ*. We know from elsewhere in the *Rigveda* that the twin horsemen visit mankind at other times as well as at dawn, *divā náktam* ‘by day, by night’, and *madhyāṃdine* ‘at noon’, for example, in V, 76, 3. The Ásvins are the gods that are *gámiṣṭha* ‘most willing to come’ in the *Rigveda*. Like the ‘divine host’ in the previous passage, they are invited not to leave:

ayám vām mádhumattamaḥ
This for-you-two most-sweet
sutáḥ sóma ṛtāvṛdhā
Expressed *sóma*, O-Ṛtāvṛdhā
tám ásvinā pibatam tiróahniyaṃ
It O-Ásvins, drink throughout-the-day
dhattám rátnāni dāśúṣe
Bring gifts to-the-worshipper

The same is the case in III, 58, 7. The poet hopes that the Ásvins, wakened by the praise of dawn in the first verse, *uśása stómo ásvināv ajīgaḥ*, will stay for longer.

násatyā tiróahniyam juṣāṇá
O-Násatyā, through-the-day delighting
sómam pibatam asrídḥā sudānū
sóma drink, unfailling, O-Sudānū

This interpretation is confirmed by the two occurrences of the word in III, 28. In the six verses of this poem Agni is invited, through the course of the poem, to enjoy the *puroḷás* at different times of the day: in verse 1 in the morning, *prātaḥsāvé* “bei der Morgenspende” (Geldner), in verse 4 *mádhyaṃdine sávane* ‘at the midday *sávana*’, and in verse 5 at the third or evening ceremony, *ṛtīye sávane*. The hitherto perplexing occurrences of *tiróahnyam*, in the middle of the poem and at the end of the final verse, now make sense.

O Agni, enjoy our oblation
The *puroḷás*, Jātavedas
At the morning offertory, O Dhiyāvasu (1)

O Agni, seek out the *puroḷás*
Offered through the day (3ab)

At the midday *sávana*, O Jātavedas
Enjoy the *puroḷás*, wise one (4ab)

Agni, pray take delight, at the third *sávana*,
In the offered *puroḷás*, O son of strength (5ab)

O Fire, growing, the offering
 The *puroḷāś*, O Jātavedas,
 Enjoy throughout the day. (6)

Conclusion

Rigvedic contexts suggest that the word *tiróahnyam*, in this earliest text, is a temporal adverb. Later Vedic clearly has an adjective *tiróahnya*, which does not occur in the *Rigveda*. The later texts refer frequently to *Soma tiroahnya*, but without giving details to indicate what they understood the collocation, which usually occurs in the plural, to mean. The second word appears in a range of grammatical forms, for example *tiróahnyasya* (*PvB* 1, 6, 4), *tiróahniyās* (*TS* 7, 3, 13, 1), *tiróahnyās* (*KSA* 3, 3), *tiróhnyās* (*KB* 18, 5; 30, 11), *tiró'hnyān* and *tiró'hnyais* (*ŚB* 11, 5, 5, 11), *tiróahnyānām* (*RVKhila* 5, 4, 7), *tiróhnyeṣu* *KS* 25, 7.⁴

The reason for the change in grammatical category, and perhaps meaning, is uncertain. The analysis of the *Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtra* could also be misleading for the later texts, the adjective meaning ‘(offered) through the day’, not ‘(having stood) through a day’. The existence of adjectival *tiróahnya* may derive from an early misunderstanding of the word *tiróahnyam* in the *Rigveda*. Whatever the reason, the example of *tiróahnyam* indicates that reviewing our understanding of the meaning of the *Rigveda* without reference to later Vedic texts can help resolve traditional difficulties in its interpretation, and may uncover a more sophisticated and poetic text.

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⁴ The form *tiróahnyam* in fact occurs once only, at *RVKhila* 1, 5, 1, where it seems to reflect the Rigvedic usage (the word *soma* does not appear): *áśvinā pātām asmayí nśatyā tiróahniyam*.