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THE SOUNDS OF THE WARRIOS:  
THE VEDIC DRUMS BETWEEN WAR AND POETRY

**Introduction**

The Skt. term *duṇḍubhi*, conventionally translated as “drum”, is rarely found in the Vedic *corpus*: there are only four Rigvedic quotations, which are textual variants of Atharvadic stanzas (RV 6.47.29-31 ≈ AVP 15.11.9-10; 15.12.1 ≈ AVŚ 6.126.1-3; ≈ MS 3.16.3:187.8-13; TS 4.6.6.6-7; VS 29.55-57), with the only exception of RV 1.28.5, considered by Gonda as an example of a “popular labour song” (1975: 167); some occurrences are present in the texts of the Yajurvedic schools (KS 34.5; TS 7.5.9.2-3, TB 1.3.6.2-3, etc.) and also in those of the Sāmavedic schools, especially in relation to the Mahāvratā rite (PB 5.5.18-21; JB 2.404), and even in AĀ 5.1.5. However, it is prevalently attested in the Atharvadic recensions, especially in two hymns of the Śaunaka recension, 5. 20 (≈ AVP 9.24) and 5. 21, which are completely dedicated to it. It is clear that the term *duṇḍubhī* belongs to the “mantra” layer of the Vedic *corpus*, that is to say, to both the Middle and the Late Vedic period.<sup>1</sup>

Here it is interpreted as “war-drum”, which denotes the musical instrument whose rumbling and crashing noise is able to scare and chase away enemies, and it can “soundly” represent heroic deeds on battlefields. In actual fact, it is mentioned in

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\* All the translations from the *R̥gvedasamhitā* are Brereton-Jamison’s (2014); the translations of the other texts are mine, although I have taken into account the most important scholars’ interpretations.

<sup>1</sup> See Witzel’s classification (1997).

relation to the Rājasūya, Vājapeya, Aśvamedha, Mahāvratā and Agnicayana rites: these rituals are eminently connected to the Kṣatriya sphere, and represent the development of the so-called paradigm of sovereignty in the Vedic culture.<sup>2</sup> This is how the Vedic image of the hero is outlined, so that from champion of the clan (*śūra*), he becomes chieftain (*rāj*), and even becomes supreme king of the tribal confederation (*saṃrāj*) and universal sovereign. It therefore follows that the Vedic term *dundubhī* is evidently connected to the warrior sphere.

However, it is well known that musical instruments are rarely mentioned in the complex and huge *corpus* of Vedic texts: melodies and chants are fundamental for Vedic poetry and rituals, but not specific musical instruments. The orthodox brahmanical tradition seems to privilege a “vocal” expression, based on the “sounds of the voice”-*vāc*, and has developed complex techniques of rhythmical scansion and melodic articulation of the word. This culminated in sophisticated mnemonic systems for handing down the Vedic texts and promoted an elaborate speculation about “speech”, which resulted in a sort of philosophy of language. On the contrary, musical instruments seem to pertain to a lower and more popular culture, and even nowadays, the traditional Hindu drum-beaters are mostly from the lower castes. Moreover, the high brahmanical culture founded its hegemony on a “science of words”, in terms of phonetics, grammarian and etymology, which reached the heights of its extraordinary expression in both the Vedic and the *kāvya* poetry. The Rigvedic collection, in particular, employs many refined rhetorical devices,<sup>3</sup> which range from examples of mere phonological similarity with assonance, alliteration, and formulaic refrains (epanalepsis, redditiō, anaphora, epiphora, etc.), to syntactic pattern repetitions, combined with morphological devices such as polyptota and paranomasia, even complex poetical structures, developed along the vertical axis of the hymn, through phonetical, morphological and syntactic concatenations between

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<sup>2</sup> See Proferes 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See Gonda 1959; Klein 2006; Ronzitti 2014: 15-101.

all the stanzas. However, the most important poetic feature is produced by two fundamental devices: firstly, due to the use of *figurae non etymologicae*, hypograms and anagrams, and also the so-called “subliminal” anagrams<sup>4</sup> or “semantization of sound sequence”,<sup>5</sup> the hymns show frequent and complex “metaphorization”. Secondly, a process of metricization “measures” the grammaticalized human expressions in precise strophic structures (*śc-*) exactly. Such a combination translates morphologically articulated speech into a layer of reality which is different from the human microcosmos, and this is the poetry of hieraticized speech, the Vedic *vāc-*, considered a Sacred language, *par excellence*, in which expressive iconicity and grammaticalization are combined.

Nonetheless, a more simplified kind of poetry is applied to the mantric textual layer and this is mainly hinged on the device of catalogical repetition: a *yájus* consists mainly of phonetical repetitions, such as formulaic refrains and forms of elementary isoptotic responses, which merely confer a rhythmical structure on the texts, which corresponds to the enumerative and catalogical intent of the ritual application.<sup>6</sup> This device creates a sort of denotative map of the cosmos, in which reality is conceived of as the result of “ritualization” or detailed “morphologization”. Indeed, according to a syntactic and morphemic ripartition of ritual/language, only what is grammatically expressed through ritualization can exist.<sup>7</sup> In this case, speech is also endowed with a magical power, but in accordance with an “allegorical” function: speech makes reality exist as such, by means of verbal and well articulated sounds, which are the exact expression of the “formalization” of the ritual act.

Finally, the case of the Atharvanic stanzas seems to be more complex:<sup>8</sup> the Atharvanic hymns dedicated to the above-

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<sup>4</sup> See Klein 2005 and 2012.

<sup>5</sup> See Elizarenkova 1995, 116ff., especially 130-135.

<sup>6</sup> As regards the catalogical poetical structure, see i.e. Sadovsky 2005.

<sup>7</sup> About the relationship between grammar and formulaic ritualistic expression, see Ronzitti 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See Witzel 1997: 275-283.

mentioned *dundubhí* present an elaborate poetical formulation, which seems to imitate the high Rigvedic poetry, even though they make use of expressive forms, stylistic structures and lexical material from the Yajurvedic texts. Moreover, the application of a hieraticized poetical modality to the formulaic style of the *yájus* seems hinged on non-hieratic material or on a more popular repertoire, connected to a form of “primordial” poetical expression. The latter is mainly characterized by the magic power of non-articulated sounds as such, and “names”, which are envisaged as magic devices that use sounds to “sympathetically” engage with reality. Only what is explicitly called by name can be controlled and dominated by the human sphere, otherwise, it is powerfully the “Other”, which is dangerous and belongs to the wild and demoniac sphere.<sup>9</sup>

The term *dundubhí* provides a perfect example of such Vedic poetical layers, and especially of the Atharvanic one. The latter kind of poetry privileges expressive iconicity, which seems to be congenial to the term *dundubhí* itself, inasmuch as it is an onomatopoeic noun. The name itself represents the stylistic strategy of “duplication”, producing a sort of “redundance” or, rather, the rhythmically “redoubled” iconic effect “resounds” throughout the morphological string of the speech. Such an onomatopoeic effect also “redoubles” the magic effect of sound and names. Therefore, the term *dundubhí* can convey such a kind of poetry.

### Etymological notes

As to the etymological interpretation, Kuiper (1948: 84-87) had already considered the term *dundubhí* as an onomatopoeic noun – along with other Sanskrit terms meaning “drum” (i.e. *diṇḍima*, *āḍambara*), and the Pāli *dudrabhi* –, related to the Muṇḍa root *ḍa-ba*. Likewise, other Sanskrit terms, belonging to the semantic field of music and dancing, are related to Muṇḍa languages and are traces of the cultural exchanges between the

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<sup>9</sup> As regards a magic value of the name, see Sani 1981.

so-called Aryan tribes and the local people, the non-Aryan ones. Kuiper defined this as “Aryanization” (1991), on account of the migratory waves of nomadic and semi-nomadic Aryan tribes, which progressively incorporated elements from the local culture.

Also Witzel (1999: 41-42) has included the term *dundubhí* in the list of Sanskrit terms belonging to a substrate language, common to the eastern Vedic texts. This hybrid linguistic situation is one of the arguments advanced by the “Sanskritization” theory. Thus, the new tribal union of the Kuru and Pañcāla incorporated the surrounding tribes, eastwards to the Gangetic plains, in a partly military, partly peaceful fashion until it reached northern Bihar: in linguistic terms, the Indo-Aryan dialect speakers incorporated substrate elements, spoken by the eastern tribes, which were then progressively included in the area influenced by the Kuru-Pañcāla’s political system.

Thus, the term *dundubhí* seems to convey cultural elements belonging to an “Other” sphere as such. However, since it was inserted into a new cultural system, it may have assumed a particular relevance in precisely this “revolution” in the Kuru-Pañcāla regions. In fact, as highlighted by Witzel, the establishment of the Kuru-Pañcāla union tribes in northern India, and their political expansion towards the eastern Gangetic plains, was realized thanks to a cultural reform and a new political strategy, which relied on a new socio-religious “order”.<sup>10</sup> In this context, the new paradigm of kingship, culminating with the image of the universal sovereign, started to take shape, and this development also led to changes in the warrior figure and a new conception of how a hero was portrayed. In this perspective, the term *dundubhí*, involved in the Kṣatriya sphere, can be representative of such a transformation.

Finally, Yāska’s etymological proposals of the term *dundubhí* suggest a particular cultural process applied to the meaning of the term: in the *Nirukta* 9.12, which introduces the

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<sup>10</sup> Witzel 1995: 8ff.

quotation of ṚV 6.47.29 ≈ AVŚ 6.126.1 in N 9.13, *dundubhí* is thus interpreted:

*dundubhir iti śabdānukaraṇam / drumo bhinna iti vā /  
dundubhyater vā syāc chabdakaraṇaḥ // 9.12 //*  
“*dundubhi* is so [called because] it is the shape of the articulated sound; or [because] it is a “split tree”; or it could be from *dundubhya-* [because] it is an “articulated sound maker”.

This sequence of meanings seems to indicate that *dundubhí* implies three possible values: it is a sort of “mere sound” or onomatopoeic term, which reproduces the shape of the sound as such (*śabdānukaraṇa-*: lit. “it is endowed with the similarity of the articulated sound”), or it is a material object connected to a natural element, *druma-* “tree”, or it is a “tool” to play sound, a “musical instrument”, related to the human cultural realm. In this sense, such a “meaning” sequence could also indicate different cultural layers, starting from a primordial “imitation” of the non-articulated sound that exists in nature, to a more sophisticated production of sounds, resulting from a refined technique of the expression of articulated sounds.

### ***Dundubhí* and magic power of onomatopoeia**

As is well known, onomatopoeic formations are characterized by the redoubling of sounds, inasmuch that they result from an “imitative” approach to reality, which is duplicated through mere sounding expressions. This is a powerful magic device: through the imitation and iteration of non-verbal sounds, onomatopoeia turns them into object-names, and introduces them into humanized speech. In this way, the indistinct and dangerous sphere of “Otherness” is concretely kept under the control of the humanized sphere.<sup>11</sup> In fact nouns for animals – especially birds – or natural phenomena are

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<sup>11</sup> As regards the magic power of the names, see Sani 1981.

frequently expressed by onomatopoeic words,<sup>12</sup> and by means of this form of “denomination” or “humanization”, they are transformed from a “demoniac” status into propitious beings.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in AVP 20.50.8 = KauśS 46.54 = ṚVKhil 2.2.5 [4], we also find *dundubhi-* quoted in a list of mantras used to ward off bad omens derived from the cries of *kapiñjala*-birds:<sup>14</sup>

*yauvanāni mahayasi jigyuṣām iva dundubhiḥ /  
kapiñjala pradakṣiṇaṃ śatapatrābhi no vada // 8 //*  
You elate the youth, like the drum of the victors,  
o *kapiñjala*, with a hundred feathers resound for us  
auspiciously.

*Dundubhi* is equivalent to the bird noises and it is endowed with the same power, which is probably the magic power of onomatopoeia or the duplication of Otherness. In actual fact, birds in ancient Indian culture are considered as having a twofold nature, that is to say, a heavenly one and a demoniac one, on account of their “winged and sounding” nature.<sup>15</sup> For example, in AVŚ 8.4.22 = ṚV 7.104.22 along with other wild animals, they are clearly connected to the demoniac sphere and considered as magically dangerous:

*ūlūkayātum śuśulūkayātum jahī śváyātum utá kókayātum/  
suparnáyātum utá gḍhrayātum dṛṣádeva prá mṛṇa  
rākṣa indra //*  
The owl-sorcerer, the owlet-sorcerer, smash them, and  
the dog-sorcerer and the wolf-sorcerer, the eagle-  
sorcerer and the vulture-sorcerer. As if with a mill-stone,  
pulverize the demonic power, Indra.

<sup>12</sup> About the “Intensivreduplikation” and the onomatopoeic formations, see Wackernagel-Debrunner 1957 (II): 293; in particular, also with references to the musical instruments, see Hoffman 1975.

<sup>13</sup> An example it is found in AVŚ 8.6, where wild animals, considered as demoniac beings, are mentioned through onomatopoeic constructions, especially in vv. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> See Griffiths 2004: 64-65.

<sup>15</sup> On the magic nature of the birds in Vedic culture, see i.e. AVŚ 6.27, 28.1, 29.1; ṚV 2.43; 7.104 ≈ AVŚ 8.4; ṚV 10.165; Thieme 1974 and Ronzitti 2010.

The first two nouns in particular can be interpreted as examples of onomatopoeic expressions,<sup>16</sup> which sound out “grave and deep” like the *dundubhi*. In this case, the equivalence is not explicitly expressed through a comparison but, significantly, in AVŚ 3.19.6 it is said:

*úd dharsantām maghavan vājināny úd vīrāṇām  
jáyatām etu ghóṣaḥ /  
pṛthag ghóṣā ululáyaḥ ketumánta úd trātām /  
devā indrajyeṣṭhā marúto yantu sénayā // 6 //*

Make our competitive spirits daring, o bounteous one, up  
let the shout of the conquering heroes go;  
up let the shouts, the clear howlings go, severally.  
Let the gods with Indra as chief, the Maruts, go with the  
army.

The military context is evident: the term *ghóṣa* means “noise, shout”, applied to the battlefield, but in the second verse the use of an onomatopoeic term *ululí*-“howling” is etimologically connected to the bird-noun *úlūka*-“owl”,<sup>17</sup> and the syntagma *vīrāṇām jáyatām [...] ghóṣaḥ* evokes the similar *jigyusām iva dundubhiḥ*, mentioned above in AVP 20.50.8, and in particular *jáyatām [...] dundubhiḥ*, quoted in RV 1.28.5. This is one of the four Rigvedic occurrences of the term *dundubhi*:

*yác cid dhí tvám grhé-grha úlūkhalaka yujyáse /  
ihá dyumáttamam vada jáyatām iva dundubhiḥ // 5 //*

For even though you are hitched up in house after house,  
little mortar, here speak most brilliantly, like the drum of  
victors.

According to Geldner’s interpretation (1951: 30) this hymn refers to a simplified soma-pressing rite, performed in a familiar context with the presence of the sacrificer’s wife. Furthermore, the term *úlūkhalaka*, denoting the little mortar-*ulūkhala* used to

<sup>16</sup> Etymologically speaking, *úlūka*- can also be considered as a compound from *\*uru-Hka*, “endowed with a large face”, analogous to the formation of *prátūka*-, according to Thieme 1974: 299.

<sup>17</sup> See Mayrhofer 1992-1996: I, 231.

pound the soma stalks, is also generally interpreted as a substrate loanword,<sup>18</sup> and can therefore attest the interference of the non-hieratic culture on the later layers of the *Rgvedasamhitā*.<sup>19</sup> The mortar-*ulūkhala* is compared to *jāyatām dundubhiḥ*, the “drum of victors”, and mortar and drum are not only matched for the same magic function, related to “beating” and “splitting”, but also for their acoustic equivalence. The object – mortar/drum – is magically powerful because it sounds, inasmuch as it is a mortar/drum which is in action during the soma ritual/battle, and because it is a “sounding-noun” or humanized articulated sound, which is able to clearly denote an object that comes from the “Otherness” sphere. Moreover, both terms are characterized by the same rhythmical beat-effect and the same grave-sound effect, thanks to the repetition of the vowel / u /, and through a sort of phonetically and rhythmically bipartite structure (*gr-gr / ú-ū / a-a / am-am / va-va*). The same term *ulūkhala* phonetically “sounds” like the term *ulūli- / ululī-* “howling” – mentioned above in AVŚ 3.19.6 –, and is a sort of paranomasia in relation to the term *ulūka-* “owl”, which is one of the birds considered as being connected to the demoniac sphere and magically dangerous. It seems that the terms *dundubhi- ulūkhala-ulūka-ulūli* constitute a magic phonetical chain, which only resound reciprocally and “duplicate” one another. However, these potentially dangerous onomatopoeias are introduced into a fully humanized sphere: the root *vad-* “to speak” pertains to human speech, and makes the “Other” reality conform to the human cosmos, and even to the ritual itself.<sup>20</sup> It is worth noticing that according to ApŚŚ 16.26.1; 3 and MŚŚ 6.1.7.23 the same Rigvedic stanza refers to pestle and mortar used for pounding all kinds of plants in a phase of the

<sup>18</sup> See i.e. Burrow 1973: 381; 387; and particularly Kuiper 1991, 14; 41. ŚBM 7.5.1.22 also proposes a form of “Sanskritization” of the term: *urukara uru me karad iti tad urukaram, urukaram ha vai tad ulūkhalam ity ācakṣate parokṣam*; the same interpretation is again quoted in N. 9.21, where also the Rigvedic stanza is also mentioned.

<sup>19</sup> As regards the interpretations, see Schmidt 2009.

<sup>20</sup> As to the use of the term *ulūkhala* in the non-sollemn rite, see also AVŚ 9.6.15, where the *dvandva ulūkhala-mūsala-* “mortar and pestle” is quoted in the list of the utensils for the guest ceremony.

Agnicayana. Moreover, the same Rigvedic stanza is quoted in AB 7.17 in relation to Śunaḥśepa legend, considered a distinctive trait of the Rājasūya rite, which confirms a relation with the emerging Kṣatriya ideology. In BŚS 16.21: 267.13-268.2, soma-pressing by means of a mortar-*ulūkhala* is performed together with the chariot-race, the beating of drums, and the stirring up of the mixing-milk in the Mahāvratā: mortar, runners, and drums resound synchronically, “calling” one another, in a mutual process of duplication and iconicization. This rite in particular is connected to the establishment of the Kuru state, which marks the definitive passage from a semi-nomadic society to a form of settled state, starting from the dynasty of King Parikṣit.<sup>21</sup> There could therefore also be a connection between a kind of poetry, based on the onomatopoeic effect conveyed by *dundubhi*, and a particular figure of warrior, related to this epochal transformation. Moreover, not only does this rite<sup>22</sup> foresee the use of drums, and other musical instruments, especially the *vīṇā*- “lute”, but also a special Earth-drum is built, in order to magically secure prosperity and fertility. According to the ancillary literature,<sup>23</sup> the *bhūmi-dundubhi* consists of a hole dug in the fire-kindler priest’s hearth, half within and half outside the sacrificial area; the hole is covered with a bull’s hide, hairy side up, and then it is beaten with the bull’s tail.

Likewise, the occurrence of the term *dundubhī* in AVŚ 5. 31 provides another example of magic poetry that relied on an onomatopoeic effect and already precluded hieraticized poetry. In this case, we have an apotropaic hymn with a list of evil spells to be warded off, and verse 7 also mentions the drum:

*yām te cakrūḥ sēnāyām yām cakrūr iṣvāyudhé /*  
*dundubhaú kṛtyām yām cakrūḥ pūnaḥ prāti harāmi tām*  
 // 7 //

<sup>21</sup> See Witzel 1995: 7-13.

<sup>22</sup> As regards the Mahāvratā rite, see Rolland 1972; Parpola 1999; Witzel 2005.

<sup>23</sup> ĀpŚS 20-23; LŚS 3.10-4.3; ŚŚS 17-18; BŚS 16. 22-23.

The charm which they have made against you, in army,  
 which they have made in the arrows and weapons, which  
 they have made in the drum, I take it back again.

The term *dundubhí* here, which evidently refers to a product of the material culture connected to the military sphere, along with the arrows and weapons, “resounds” throughout the stanza through the assonance of the vowel sound / *u* /, and bipartite redoublings of sounds (/ *dundu* / ; / *yām* / *yām* / ; / *úh* / *pú* /), which grant the text a rhythmical structure and catalogical effect. In fact, the rhythmical effect of the beating seems to be reproduced. Thus, the onomatopoeic duplication of the syllable / *du* /, which characterizes the term *dundubhí* and reproduces phonetically both the grave-sound sonority and the rhythmical beating of the musical instrument, is reflected and echoed throughout the verses. The poetical device of phonetical duplication reproduces the sounding and rhythmical effect of the *dundubhí* as a musical instrument and turns the grammaticalized sequence into an acoustically powerful magic “weapon”. In fact, it is an acoustic “icon”. This seems to anticipate a form of “semantization of the sound sequence”, which characterizes the poetry of the hieratic language of the Rigvedic strophes, in a more refined modality way. Indeed, although the magic device of onomatopoeia has yet to be perfectly inserted into a hieraticized system, it has already become a poetical device even at this stage of poetical expression.

Finally, in the Atharvanic hymns devoted to *dundubhí*, it is addressed as *vedhás*, literally meaning “the one of the sacred seat”<sup>24</sup> (AVŚ 5.20.4), and can be applied to both gods and humans. When it is used for gods, it means “worthy of worship”; whereas in the case of humans, it means “worshipper”, either as a priest or patron. Moreover, this term is particularly connected to the figure of *kaví*, the Vedic poet, or “word-master”, who was linked to the royal power. In this case, not only is *dundubhí* inserted into a completely hieraticized role of the Aryan matrix, someone who was received as a guest

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<sup>24</sup> See Pinault 2012:123.

offering his wealth/booty-“*védas*”, but it also represents the most important role of the ritual, that is, the connection between the human sphere and the divine sphere, or the “mediator” between heaven and earth. As *kaví*, its “mediating” device is poetry, and it is noteworthy that this term is a derivative of the I.E. root \**keu-*“to notice, to observe”, which implies a twofold perception that is both “visual” one and “auditive”. In this case, the term *kaví* seems to be particularly connected to the image of a “bird”, the flying being *par excellence*, and more especially to the “voice of birds”.<sup>25</sup> His “mediating” poetry is eminently characterized by sound.

AVŚ 5.20.4 = AVP 9.24.3

*saṃjāyan p̄tanā ūrdhvámāyur ḡrhyā gr̄hñānó bahudhā*  
*vī cakṣva /*

*daívīm vācam dundubha ā gurasva vedhāḥ śátrūṇām*  
*úpa bharasva védah // 4 //*

Winning completely struggles, seizing all what is to be seized, appear you distinctly, endowed with loud shout, manifoldly,

O drum, worshipper, welcome the divine Speech, submit the wealth of the enemies.

These verses clearly show a Rigvedic poetic style, in which assonances and alliterations are used, and responsions, based on the imperative verbal form, scan the syntactic structure. Furthermore, the *figura non etymologica vedhāḥ-védah* is also relevant. However, the phonetical repetitions follow one another in a rhythmical “redundant” sequence (/ á / an / na / ŋ / ur / udh / ma / gr̄ / vi / ca / va / vi / va / ca / am / gur / va / ve / ru / u / va / ve / etc.): the redoubling effect highlights the chain *bahudhā-daívīm vācam-dundubha*, in which *bahudhā-dundubha* is a pseudo-anagram. In this way *kaví-dundubhí* poetry is endowed with Sacred Speech. In fact, the poet as a *dundubhí* belongs to the warrior sphere: his poetry results from a “warrior” strategy of approaching reality as Otherness, that is to say, from a mimetic strategy, whose modality of expression “imitates” the

<sup>25</sup> See Pelissero 1997.

hieratic one, and assumes its nature. This somehow results in Sacred speech which can attain the heavenly realm and rise up to heaven from the earth.

### **Dundubhí – From the sound of the wilderness to the sound of battlefields**

If one considers the textual repertoire of the ritualistic ancillary literature – especially as far as the Mahāvratā ritual is concerned (LŚS 3.11.1-2) – it is evident that the term *dundubhí* has a concrete meaning. It denotes a kind of musical instrument, a specified object of the material culture, and made of wood, as suggested by the second etymological interpretation of the *Nirukta*: *drumo bhinna iti vā*: “*dundubhi* is so [called because] it is a “split tree”. As musical instrument, it is used by the *dundubhy-āghātā*, literally “drum-beater” (TB 3.4.13.1; BĀU 2.4.7), or the “one who strikes *dundubhí*”: *ā-ghāta-* derives from the root *han-* “to strike, to smite”. According to KauŚS 16.1-2, the recitation of AVŚ 5.20.1 [≈ AVP 9.24.1] (mentioned below) – together with AVŚ 6.126.1 – must be combined with a peculiar ritual, involving “all musical instruments” – *sarvavāditra*: after having washed them, and sprinkled them with fragrant powders of root-plants, the *purohita* must “beat” – *han-* them thrice, and finally, he places them in front of the warriors, who are about to fight and conquer. *Dundubhí* is a powerful magic “weapon” for ensuring victory, which protects the warriors like an amulet, infusing them with bravery, and helping them “to strike” the enemies.

According to Sani,<sup>26</sup> the root *han* is used in the Rigvedic and Atharvanic repertoire as a sort of technical magic term. Not only does it denote a military value, but it also implies a specific use: the subject of the action expressed through the root *han* is conceived of as the positive “hero”, who must defeat his enemies, whereas the object of the root *han*, namely, the one who is “struck”, is generally pictured as a demoniac being, who

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<sup>26</sup> Sani 1990.

must be defeated as such. In this sense, expressions like *dundubhīm han-* (ŚŚS 12.18.16; 17.5.10) and *dundubhy-āghātá* connote the object *dundubhí* as the prototype of the enemy, who must be destroyed, particularly as a demoniac being.<sup>27</sup> Such expressions can be interpreted as a sort of magic formula, by means of which the victory is “induced”: thus, the term *dundubhí*, meaning the “defeated enemy”, is also “magically” the winning weapon, by means of which the victory is auspiciously realized. This weapon represents that “Otherness” which is conceived of as the non-humanized sphere, like the wild forest, full of terrifying monsters and demoniac beings, which must be controlled magically. The warrior is he who is able to brave this “Other” being, and *dundubhí* is his apotropaic “weapon”, made of the same “terrifying” substance as the “Otherness”.

Therefore, in relation to the Mahāvratā, we find a reference in PB 6.5.10-13 (≈ TS 6.1.4.1; MS 3.6.8: 70.16) to a myth about *vāc*, which is claimed by the gods:

*vāg vai devebhyo 'pakrāmat sāpaḥ prāviśat [...] sā  
punartātyakrāmat sā vanaspatīn prāviśat tān devāḥ  
punar ayācaṃs tāṃ na punar adadus tān aśapan svena  
vaḥ kiṣkuṇā vajreṇa vṛścān iti tasmād vanaspatīn svena  
kiṣkuṇā vajreṇa vṛścanti devaśaptā hi / 12 / tāṃv*

<sup>27</sup> About the same I.E. phrase \*g<sup>w</sup>hen-“slay, split” + monster, especially as \*og<sup>w</sup>his-“serpent, snake”, applied to the Vedic repertoire, connected to the famous myth of the killing of the monster-Obstacle-*vṛtrā*, see Watkins 1995: 304ff. As is well known, the Epic tradition also counts a demon-*asura* buffalo, called Dundubhi, among the demoniac figures, which is mentioned in the fourth book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (R 4.9-11): he is one of the demoniac beings who terrorized Kiṣkindhā, the monkey city, roaring at the city gate: “Dundubhi roared out, causing the earth to tremble, like a drum” (4.11.26cb *nanarda kampayan bhūmiṃ dundubhir dundubhir yathā*). He was killed by Vālin - compared to Indra against Namuci (R. 4.11.22) -, who was then challenged by Dundubhi’s younger brother Māyāvin who wanted to avenge his brother’s death. Māyāvin was also killed by Vālin in a cavern and his voice is said to be similar to the deep underground sound (R. 4.10.16: he is “thundering-roaring”-*stanat-*). As regards this myth and its interpretation, see Hildebeitel 1980. It is worth noticing that, according to Hildebeitel and Parpola (1999), the mythical figure of the demon-buffalo, especially the water-buffalo, can be correlated with the Akkadian civilization and the Indus civilization. This is reminiscent of the early Indo-Aryan contact with these civilizations and therefore represents a sort of prototype of “Otherness” for the Aryans of the early migration waves.

*vanaspatayaś caturdhā vācaṃv vinyadadhur dundubhau  
vīñāyām akṣe tūṇave tasmād eṣā vadiṣṭhaiṣā valgutamā  
vāg vā vanaspatīnām devānām hy eṣā vāg āsīt / 13 /*

The Speech passed away from the gods, it enters the waters; [...] She, being restored, passed beyond and entered the trees. The gods claimed her back, but they did not restore her. They cursed them: “By means of your own handle [as] a cudgel, they will hew you”. Therefore they hew the trees by means of their own handle [as] a cudgel. For they had been cursed by the gods. The tree distributed the Speech in four different ways: in the drum, in the lute, in the axle, in the reed-pipe. Therefore this Speech of the trees is the loudest and most lovely; for it was the voice of the gods.

Here the forest-tree is pictured as a rival of the gods, equivalent to the obstacle – *vṛtrá*: it is hewed (from the root *vraśc-*) through a weapon-*vájra* made of the same substance of the tree, that is to say made of wood. Thus, in *ṚV* 1.32, the serpent killed by Indra lies “like logs hewn apart by an axe” (*skándhāmsīva kúliśenā vívṛkṇā*, *ṚV* 1.32.5c), and in *AVŚ* 2.12.3cd the enemy is equivalent to a tree (*vṛścāmi tám kúliśeneva vṛkṣám yó asmákam mána idám hinásti*–“I hew him as a tree [hewed] by an axe, [he] who beats this mind of ours”). Likewise, in *ṚV* 6.6 Agni, in his terrible aspect, is the “wood-hewing” - *vṛścádvana-* (st.1) through ever-roaring (*nānadat-*) flames- (st. 2): “they conquer the woods” - *vánā vananti* (st. 3).<sup>28</sup> However, *vánaspáti* is addressed in *AVŚ* 10.3 as the deity who protects men from charms (*kṛtyā*); the image of the forest tree is evoked in *AVŚ* 12.3.15 as a powerful ally of the gods against demons:

*vánaspátīḥ sahá deváir na āgan rákṣaḥ piśācām  
apabādhmanāḥ /  
sá úc chrayātai prá vadāti vācaṃ téna lokān abhí sárvān  
jayema //15//*

<sup>28</sup> As regards the tree-enemy motif and wood-cutter-winner, see Ronzitti 2001: 32-35; Durante 1976: 121.

The forest tree came to us together with the gods, causing the demon *piśācas* to bind and chase [him] away, he (the forest tree) shall raise, shall speak forth [with the] voice; thanks to him may we win all the worlds.

The forest tree is the means to control the Otherness: it can *ud-śri*-“raise” sound and the “sounding” tree is the weapon to overcome enemies, but the presence of the gods turns it into the endowed with Sacred Speech-*vāc*: it “speaks forth” (*pra-vad*) speech.

Likewise, verses 4-6 in AVŚ 5.21, the second Atharvanic hymn dedicated to *dundubhī*, correlate the term *dundubhī* and the terrifying wilderness, with the wild beasts in particular:

*yáthā mrgāḥ saṃvijánta āraṇyāḥ púruṣād ádhi / evá tvám dundubhe 'mítrān abhíkṛanda prá trāsayátho cittāni mohaya //4//*

*yáthā vṛkāḍ ajāváyō dhāvanti bahú bibhyaṭīḥ / evá tvám dundubhe 'mítrān abhíkṛanda prá trāsayátho cittāni mohaya //5//*

*yáthā śyenāt patatrīṇaḥ saṃvijánte áhardivi siṃhásya stanáthor yáthā / evá tvám dundubhe 'mítrān abhíkṛanda prá trāsayátho cittāni mohaya //6//*

As the animals of the forest run away from the man in fear, so you, o drum, shout at the enemies, frighten [them], and then confound [their] minds.

As goats and sheep run away from the wolf, greatly fearing [the wolf], so you, o drum, shout at the enemies, frighten [them], and then confound [their] minds.

As the winged ones fly away from the falcon in fear, as day by day [they run away] from the thundering of the lion, so you, o drum, shout at the enemies, frighten [them], and then confound [their] minds.

As is well known, the similarities are a magic device for acting “sympathetically” on the objects, conferring the qualities of the *terminus comparationis* on them, according to the military mimetic technique: the *dundubhī* is clearly a

“terrifying” weapon, equivalent to wild beasts, and it is capable of scaring the enemies by its wild nature. Furthermore, the formulaic structure of the stanzas - with anaphoras, refrains, redditios, resposion with iteration of the ablatival syntagma - suggests that the magic efficacy of the explicit comparison is enhanced by a catalogical repetition of sounds. The effect of the rhythmical redoubling, typical of percussion instruments, seems to be duplicated through the repetitive structure of the verses, especially through a bipartite structure (*yáthā...evá tvám dundubhe*). Finally, the qualities eminently implied in the magic comparisons are related to “sonority”: *dundubhí* is compared to *stanáthu*, a *hapax* form,<sup>29</sup> variant of the masculine noun *stanátha*, from the root *stan-* “to thunder, to roar”,<sup>30</sup> the root *krand-* in *abhí-krand-*, which expresses the noises made by animals – horses, bull, wild beasts –, thunderbolts and flowing waters, provides *dundubhí* with the most effective means for defeating enemies, as it represents non-humanized and non-verbal noises. In fact, in the Vedic texts, the derivative neuter *krándas*, from the same root *krand*, is used with the specific military meaning of “Kampfgeschrei”,<sup>31</sup> the terrifying wild noises which are the shouts of battle. In this way the dangerous wilderness is controlled thanks to an “inclusivistic” strategy, by which Otherness is encompassed, imitated and duplicated, included and assumed “sympathetically” in the humanized sphere as a “weapon” itself; only this is able to overcome the Otherness as such. The wild sound, turned into an acoustic weapon, is used by men-warriors to dominate wilderness itself.

A similar image of *dundubhí* is depicted in AVŚ 5.20.1-2 ≈ AVP 9.24.1-2:

*uccaírghoṣo dundubhiḥ satvanāyán vānaspatyáḥ*  
*sāmbhṛta usrīyābhiḥ*

<sup>29</sup> The similar formulaic phrases *siṃhásyeva stanáthor saṃ vijánte* is found in AVŚ 8.7.15a.

<sup>30</sup> See Mayrhofer 1992-1996: II, 752-753.

<sup>31</sup> See Thieme 1978: 34-35. According to Goto 1987: 116 the root *krand-* can denote both the neighing and the striding of horses: a sense which is easily applicable to the battlefield.

*vācam* kṣṇuvānó *damáyant* *sapátnānt* *siṃhá* *iva* *jeṣyánn*  
*abhí tamstanīhi*

The one endowed with the high shout, the drum, being warrior, belonging to the forest-tree, brought together with the reddish ones (the cows); sharpening the voice, dominating rivals, thunder constantly against (them), like a lion, about to conquer.

*siṃhá ivāstānīd* *druvāyo* *vībaddho* *'bhikrándann* *ṛṣabhó*  
*vāśitām* *iva* /

*vṛṣā tvám vādhrayas* *te* *sapátnā* *aindrás* *te* *śúsma*  
*abhimātiṣāhāh* // 2 //

Like a lion, the wooden one thundered, the fastened one, like a bull roaring at the desiring cow; You [are] bull, your rivals [are] impotent, your impulse is similar to Indra's one, able to defeat the enemies.

In these Atharvanic verses *dundubhí* is denoted as *druvāya*-“the wooden one” and *vānaspatyá*“one who belongs to the forest-tree”; but also a hypogram is applied, that increases the expressive iconicity. Actually, the rhythmical effect is relied on a sort of redundant bipartite structure, characterized by the redoubling of the same syllable (/ o / o /; / du / du /; etc.), or by their alternate iteration (/ at / va / na /; / an / va /; / va / na /; / at /), especially in the first verse. Moreover, the repetition of the syllable / va / in the sequence / va / vā / vān / vāna / makes the term *vana* resound, magically evoking the very essence of *dundubhí*, as a forest tree. But the root *van*- “to conquer” is also evoked, alluding to the conquering power of *dundubhí*. Morphological rhetorical devices are also used, like the homoioteleuta of the participles in *-at*, but this seems to amplify the onomatopoeic effect as such: on the one hand the same “sounding” root *krand*, in the participle form *abhikrándan*, constitutes a syntactic respiration, on the other hand the same syllable *-at*, implied in the participle stem, echoes in the verses through the root *stan*, and the intensive verbal form *tamstanīhi* increases the iconicity-effect. Therefore, *dundubhí*-tree is mainly a “sounding” tree, “beaten” and torn apart by

thunderbolt, and “resounding” thunder in itself.<sup>32</sup> Rhythmical duplication of the sounds “pictures” the object, which is the “mediator” voice, resounding between heaven and earth. In this case, the iconicity is powerful: the primordial magic device of onomatopoeia is combined with the more refined poetic modality which is also applied to the rigvedic strophes. By redoubling both the Rigvedic style and the cosmic thunderbolt, it can also “conquer” the heaven. Thus, *dundubhí* rises up to heaven from the wilderness and battlefield on earth: also the same term *krándas* “shout of battle” in the dual form *krándasī* assumes a cosmic meaning in the Rigvedic collection, that is to say, the “two battle lines” of the battlefield turn into the cosmic couple of Heaven and Earth, equivalent to the term *ródasī*.<sup>33</sup> The cosmic sphere proceeds along a vertical axis from the horizontally outlined frontlines: the warrior role is granted a new status, that is to say, a heavenly one.

Finally, in the above-mentioned Atharvanic verses, the same animal sphere is mentioned and the comparison *siṃhá iva* is quoted, along with identification with the bull-*vṛṣan*. This anticipates verses AVŚ 5.20.3 = AVP 9.24.4, in which the comparison is fully developed, also through the use of another “sounding” root *ru* “to bellow”.

*vṛṣeva yūthé sáhasā vidānó gavyánn abhíruva*  
*saṃdhanājit /*  
*śucā vidhya hṛdayam páreṣām hitvā grāmān prácyutā*  
*yantu śátravaḥ // 3 //*  
 Like a bull in the herd, found endowed with strength  
 [and] desiring kine, bellow, o conquering of booty;  
 Pierce the heart of the adversaries with pain, let the  
 enemies go away, dispelled, having left [their]  
 settlements.

<sup>32</sup> Already Hillebrandt (1890: 323) interpreted the *dundubhi* in the Mahāvratā rite as a magic device to evoke the rain’s fecund powers through the beating-drum, which “sympathetically” corresponds to the thunderbolts.

<sup>33</sup> See Thieme 1978: 35-36.

Here the term *dundubhí* is inserted in an erotic context, connected to the theme of fertility.<sup>34</sup> Indeed the term *vṛṣan* does itself denote the fecundating power of the rainy-waters and bull, which is itself generally considered as a vigorous animal. The image of rainy-waters, etimologically hinted at by the term *vṛṣan*, seems to introduce the cosmic perspective, along the vertical axis, which links earth to heaven.

### Dundubhí – Sound of the Earth

The root *ru-* “to bellow, to roar”, denoting the noises made by cattle,<sup>35</sup> is used both for soma in the Rigvedic hymnes and for *dundubhí* in the above quoted Atharvanic verses: in RV 9.71.9a it is said: “Like a bull going around the herds, he (soma) has bellowed” (*ukṣéva yūthá pariyánn arāvīd*); in RV 9.70.7a *ruvāti* is also referred to soma-*vṛṣabhá*, depicted as “fearsome” (*ruvāti bhīmó vṛṣabhás taviṣyáyā*—“the fearsome bull bellows forcefully”). Finally, in RV 1.173.3cd *ruvát* refers to cows: *krándad áśvo náyamāno ruvád gaur antár dūtó ná ródasī carad vák* -“The horse neighs while being led; the cow bellows. Speech wanders between the two worlds like a messenger”: here, the term *ródasī* – etimologically linked to *rudra*<sup>36</sup> – introduces the microcosmos (cattle and horses) into the macrocosmos. This “metaphorical” process “passes through” the *vác* itself, which is articulated and humanized sound as “words”, which “brings” the primordial sound “beyond” the earthy layer, and reaches the heavenly dimension, like a messenger. This process of cosmicization is action here: the pivot is the ritual space of the soma sacrifice to which *dundubhí* has access thanks to the Kṣatriya rituals. Thus, soma, *vṛṣan* and *dundubhí* constitute a chain of equivalence, based on the redoubling mimetic strategy of the sound: they are iconic

<sup>34</sup> Auspicious rites with obscene elements are included in the Mahāvratā ceremony.

<sup>35</sup> See Goto 1987: 265-267.

<sup>36</sup> See Mayrhofer 1959.

representations of the “bellow”, but in particular *dundubhī* is the onomatopoeic “mediator”.

In actual fact, the term *rāva*, a derivative of the root *ru*, which is generally used in the formulaic expression *vṛṣabhāsya rāva*, “the bellowing of the bull” (RV 7.79.4c; 1.94.10b), is generally interpreted in the compound *uparava* as “sounding hole” or “hole for resonance”.<sup>37</sup> These are four holes dug during the soma rituals, under the shaft of the southern cart which carries the soma-plants, to mark the four corners of a rectangular area, just to “encompass *rākṣasas*” and “to cut off (*āpi-kṛt*) the necks of the *rākṣasas*”, according to TS 6.2.10; KS 25.9, MS 3.8.8, and especially ŚBM 3.5.4.3-5. In this sense, *rāva* refers to demoniac sounding beings connected to the underground sphere, who are magically controlled during the hieraticized rite. It seems reminiscent of the Epic demon buffalo Dundubhi, and also hints at the Earth-drum in the Mahāvratā. Furthermore, *rāva* is the key-word of the famous Vala myth:<sup>38</sup> the cows, closed inside Vala’s cave, are released by Indra-Bṛhaspati together with the “flock” of Aṅgirasas, thanks to the effect of *rāva*, which is able to break the rock (i.e. RV 3.31.6d; 4.50.4c). In relation to another version of the same mythologema, the motif of the forest tree is also evoked in RV 1.54.1c. Indra, who tears the *vṛtra*-“Obstacle” down and releases waters, is represented as “bellowing” through the woods: *ākrandayo nadīyo rōruvad vānā*-“You made the rivers roar, yourself constantly bellowing through the woods”. In this case another chain of equivalences is hinted at: *nadī-soma-vṛṣan-vāna-dundubhī*, which relies on the onomatopoeic effect of *dundubhī* and *nadī*.<sup>39</sup>

The same mythologema is once again hinted at: the military “strategy” of mimetism and redoubling is the warrior weapon, which “splits” the enemies, after having duplicated and assumed within itself the dangerous nature of the Otherness, as the forest tree, wild animals and waters. Since it is analogous with

<sup>37</sup> Sahoo 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Ronzitti 2001: 23.

<sup>39</sup> As regards the root *nad*-“to roar” and the relationship between rivers, bull and sounds, see Ronzitti 2001: 40-47.

*dundubhi*, the sphere of Otherness is acoustically controlled: *ráva*, the indistinct underground sound, is translated into the bellowing cattle; the earthy rock is broken by the bellowing warrior; the roaring waters are released, and the high shout of battle reaches heaven, in a play of acoustic repercussion. These roaring and shouting sounds can also be the jubilant shouts of warriors, on occasion of the warrior festivals for propitiating booty. Thus, in AVŚ 12.1, stanza 41 in the famous hymn dedicated to the Earth-*bhūmi* contains references to jubilant shouts that are part of a warrior festival, and perhaps alludes to the Mahāvratā rite, in which the earth-drum is used.

*yásyām gāyanti nṛtyanti bhūmyām mártiā vyālabāḥ /  
yudhyānte yásyām ākrandó yásyām vādati dundubhiḥ /  
sā no bhūmiḥ prá nudatām sapátnān asapátnām mā  
prthivī kṛṇotu //41//*

The Earth, on which the mortals sing and dance, making various noises, on which they fight, on which war-cry, the drum, resounds, let that Earth chase the rivals forth for us, let the Earth set me free from rivals.

Once again the poetry of rhythmical repetition is applied, with responsions based on the locative case, isoptotic homoioteuta (-*nti*) and polyptota (*sapátna-*), but the phonetical play is focused on the term *mártiā*, in which the alliterations *má* and *ya* are combined in a sort of “subliminal” anagram for *yama*, the name of the god of death,<sup>40</sup> and on the assonance of / *u* /. However, the most significant term is *vy-áilaba*, which translates as “making various noises”. It is also mentioned in AVŚ 12.5.47;48;49, and in AVŚ 6.16.3, and generally interpreted as “howl” or “din”,<sup>41</sup> referred to demons. The compound *ailabá-kārá-* in AVŚ 11.2.30a refers to the Maruts, Rudra’s companions, who are also defined as *ghoṣín* (AVŚ 11.2.31). It seems to be a sort of onomatopoeic reproduction of

<sup>40</sup> It is worth noticing that musical instruments, songs and dance are connected to Yama (KU 1. 25-26), as well as to Mṛtyu (JB 2.69-70); in Hinduism, the water-buffalo is Yama’s vehicle.

<sup>41</sup> Bloomfield 1897: 30, 466; Whitney 1905: 705-706.

cries and shouts or, according to Falk, a “stammering voice”, (1993, 209-210) and is reminiscent of the “howling” Maruts in the above quoted AVŚ 3.19.6. Moreover, in ChU 3.19.3, in relation to the secret equivalence *brahman-āditya*-“sun”, the term *ulūlu*-“howling”, combined with the term *ghoṣa*, is mentioned in a cosmogonic sequence: *taṃ [ādityaṃ] jāyamānaṃ ghoṣā ulūlavo ’nūdatisṭhan-*“As it was born, shouts and howlings rose up”. This could refer to the Mahāvratā rite, the ceremony of the winter solstice as such, in which the new rising sun is celebrated by cries of joy and jubilant shouts.<sup>42</sup> Taking into account that the Paippalāda reading is *ailavá, aílaba / ailavá* hints at the term *ráva*,<sup>43</sup> and at the famous expression *he ’lavo he ’lava(h)*, quoted in the ŚBM 3. 2. 1. 23, which is an example of non-Brahmanical speech attributed to the Asuras, in the narration of mythological contests between gods-*deva* and demons-*asura*, mentioned in the brahmanical texts. Therefore, it can be considered as an example of not perfectly hieraticized eastern Vedic dialect,<sup>44</sup> or “stammering voice” of non-Aryan speakers. It is worth recalling that in the Mahāvratā rite a man from the eastern region of Magadha is also involved in a sort of “dramatic” performance.<sup>45</sup>

The term *mártya* “mortal”, morphologically linked to *vy-aílaba*, highlights that this kind of imperfectly articulated expression belongs to the sphere of death and human beings, and not to the heavenly and divine sphere, to which only the supreme sacred speech-*vāc* can be applied. In a more hieraticized expression, such as the elaborated Rigvedic one, the semi-articulated sound becomes *ghoṣá*, if the verse *āghoṣáyantaḥ pṛthivīm upabdībhiḥ-*“making the earth heed with (their) trampling” (RV 10.94.4d),<sup>46</sup> alludes to the same popular

<sup>42</sup> About this interpretation, see Kuiper 1960: 235.

<sup>43</sup> According to Witzel (1989: 212) *r > l* is an Eastern particularity.

<sup>44</sup> See Witzel 1989: 185-191; 212.

<sup>45</sup> See Rolland 1972.

<sup>46</sup> RV 10.94.4: *byhád vadanti madiréna mandinā indraṃ krósanto avidann anā mádhu / samrābhyā dhīrāḥ svásṛbhir anartīsur āghoṣáyantaḥ pṛthivīm upabdībhiḥ ||* “They speak loftily by reason of the delighting delightful (soma). Shrieking to Indra, in this way they found the honey. (Fit) to be clasped by the sisters [=fingers], the clever ones have danced, making the earth heed with their trampling” The term *upa-bdī*, deriving from the noun *pád-*

practice of celebrating the winner warriors as heroes, by making the earth resound, by shouting and dancing on it, and beating it as if it were a drum. This is the warrior dance, performed after enemies have been conquered, and the instrumental case *upabdíbhīḥ* seems to phonetically “duplicate” *dundubhí* as a sort of anagram. The sound of the earth-drum-*dundubhí* with its trembling reproduces that of Indra’s feet during his victory-dance, according to Kuiper (1960, 252).

Thus, the Otherness, represented by the *rakṣas-asura*-eastern people, and the humanized sphere, represented by cattle-bull-soma pressing, are connected through the sounds *aílaba-ākrandá-dundubhí-ru*. Indeed, they can only rise up to heaven if they are inserted in a ritualized sphere, since this is where they become Sacred Speech. By means of the institution of the Kṣatriya rituals, the warrior figure is to be related to heaven and to the sun: the new status of king must guarantee cosmic fertility. In this sense the Mahāvratā rite, the annual festival, marking the winter solstice, could represent one of the most important turning points in the role of the warrior. On the one hand, it is connected with the military raids, which traditionally started around January-February, and entailed ceremonies for securing the conquering of booty; on the other hand, it implies explicit sexual references, with obscene dialogues and dancing young maidens, which suggest that it could be an ancient ritual of fertility, originally belonging to the non-hieratic sphere. With the process of hieraticization, implied by the Kuru “revolution”, the warrior sounds also became *vāc*.

### ***Dundubhí-* From the earthy sound to the heavenly sound**

According to the Atharvanic hymns, the main device for attaining heaven is *dundubhí*: it is *uccáirghoṣa* “one who is

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“foot”, seems to recall the compound *pad-ghoṣá-*, quoted in AVŚ 5.21.8b. In RV 7.104.17d the stemming variant *upabdí-* is also quoted, with reference to the beating of the soma-pressing stones: *grāvāno ghnantu rakṣása upabdaiḥ* “Let the pressing stones smash the demons with their trappings”.

endowed with high shout”.<sup>47</sup> This compound occurs only in the mantric Vedic layer (AVŚ 9.1.8; TS. 4.5.2m; AB 4.9),<sup>48</sup> even though the root *ghuṣ*, meaning “to sound, to make noise”, and its derivatives are mentioned also in the ancient layer. According to Goto,<sup>49</sup> the most ancient meaning of the root, related to the I.E. \*g<sup>(w)h</sup>*ews-*, is “to make s.th. audible” through non-verbal sounds and not through speech-like articulated sounds. It therefore implies the meaning “to hear noise”, but not “to listen to words”, belonging to the root *śru*. In this sense, the root conveys the non-articulated sound or the mere shout, which belongs to both the wild sphere and the warrior context, as is the case of AVŚ 3.19.6 mentioned above, where *ghóṣa* is equivalent to *ululí*.

In the Rigvedic occurrences this primordial meaning of the root *ghuṣ* is rarely preserved, unless it refers to warrior-chariots; however, even in these cases it does not merely express wild noise: the same Atharvanic phrasing is quoted in RV 10.103.10, but with no traces of “howling”.<sup>50</sup> In RV 5.37.3c, the verse *áśya śravasyād rátha á ca ghoṣāt* “his chariot will seek fame here and will sound loudly” refers to the noise made by chariots, which “cyclically resound”, according to the rotatory and redoubling movement of the wheels, as is evoked by the phonetical duplication *áśya...asyā*. However, in this case, the root *ghuṣ* is also related to the root *śru*, so that the noise of chariots is metaphorically equivalent to a powerful “voiced” and “articulated” sound, which makes the warrior “understandable” as a winner, that is to say, “famous”. The so-called I.E. “ideology of the \*kléwos-glory/fame”<sup>51</sup> (Skt. *śrávas*) is already

<sup>47</sup> The same compound is mentioned in AVŚ 9.1.8 ≈ RV 1.164.28, combined with *ūrdhvámāyu-* “one who is endowed with loud bellow”, quoted also in AVŚ 5.20.4a.

<sup>48</sup> In AVP 15.19.11b the phrase *uccair ghoṣān kṛ-* is referred to the Apsarases in a Rudraic context.

<sup>49</sup> Goto 1987: 130-132; also Mayrhofer 1992-1996: I, 518-519.

<sup>50</sup> RV 10.103.10: *úd dharṣaya maghavann áyudhāni út sátvanām māmakānām mánāmsi/ úd vṛtrahan vājinām vājināni úd ráthānām jáyatām yantu ghóṣāh // 10 //* “Make our weapons bristle up, o bounteous one, up the minds of my own little warriors, up, o Vṛtra-smasher, the competitive spirits of the competitors. Up let the battle-cries of the conquering chariots go”.

<sup>51</sup> See Watkins 1995: 114f.

applied to this cultural stage; whosoever is “heard and renowned” through the “resounding” of his own warrior deeds, especially in gaining cattle and booty, is recognized as a “hero” by the members of the clan. According to the Indo-European *Weltanschauung*, the warrior role in a nomadic or a semi-nomadic society can be embodied by every young male member of the clan (*nṛ́; vīrá*), inasmuch as he is able to defend the clan from the dangers of the Otherness. In particular, he is the “protector of men and livestock”,<sup>52</sup> as a herdsman and hunter, or conquerer of booty, who provides the clan with a means of survival, and becomes its champion. In the early Vedic tribal society, the distribution of gained wealth was the so-called *vidátha*:<sup>53</sup> on this occasion the “winner” was “proclaimed” and praised as such. Traces of this practice are Rigvedic formulaic expressions, such as like “*vīrīyā pra vac-*” “to proclaim the “warrior/heroic” deeds” (i.e. 2.21.3d, 2.13.11ab, 4.32.10a), or the refrain *brhád vadema vidáthe suvīrāḥ*—“May we speak loftily at the ritual distribution, in possession of good warriors/heroes”, repeated at the end of almost all the hymns in the second Rigvedic book. The recognition of “heroic status” was founded on the public “voiced” and “heard” proclamation, which translates the phonetical duplication into an articulated sound and an understandable “noun” (*v...vi...uvī > vīra*), according to the magic onomatopoeic effect, and also the alliteration / *ad / da / > vi-da-tha*.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, heroic status is recognized eminently through sounds, both non-humanized ones, such as wild noises, and humanized ones, which are morphologically articulated as “speech” and expressed through the roots *vad*, *vac* and *śru*. The warrior sphere, to which *dundubhí* belongs, is located in a liminal space, similar to the position of the Earth-drum in the Mahāvratā rite. The warrior shouts can be “understandable” only if they are introduced into the ritualized sphere, so that *ghóṣa* is turned into *śruta-*. In actual fact, the Sacred Speech-*vāc-* is overloaded with

<sup>52</sup> See Watkins 1995: 15; 42-43.

<sup>53</sup> See Thieme 1949: 35-49; Kuiper 1974: 129-132.

<sup>54</sup> As to the subliminal anagram *vade-deva-*, and other word plays, according to Toporov’s interpretation, see Watkins 1995: 114

metaphorical effects as such, so that it is “sharpened” like a weapon (*vācam kṣṇuvāna-* in AVŚ 5.20.1) and onomatopoeically “sounds” as / *vana* / -“wood” and / *kiṣku* / -“handle of a cudgel”, so that non-articulated sounds become “understandable” or metaphorically significant. On the contrary, the noises of chariots, horses, and cattle become “the *śrutá*-one” in the military raids, that is to say, they are “translated” into chants and praise-songs. In this way, warriors become “heroes”, that is, “the heard and renowned ones” for the other members of the clan, or, inversely, the “heard” resounding of the warrior-sounds sets the Otherness directly under men’s control, translating it into “audible and understandable” speech. It therefore resounds between heaven and earth: in ṚV 1.83.6b, *arkó vā · ślókam āghóṣate diví-*“or the chant sounds its signal-call towards heaven”, the term *ślókā*-“signal-call”, from the same root *śru*,<sup>55</sup> makes what is “audible”-*ghóṣa* “understandable”, and “shining” chants (*arká*) are formed.<sup>56</sup>

Such a relationship between *ghoṣa* and *ślókā* is evident in the following passage in ŚBM 5.3.5.9, related to the section of the Rājasūya rite, the ceremony of the “consecration” of the “royal” power (*rājya*), which turns the champion and chieftain into a “king”:

[...] *indrāya svāheti vīrya vā indro vīryeṇaivainam etad abhiṣiñcati ghoṣāya svāheti vīryam vai ghoṣo vīryeṇaivainam etad abhiṣiñcati ślokāya svāheti vīryam vai śloko vīryeṇaivainam etad abhiṣiñcati* [...] /  
 (He says): “To Indra hail!”; Indra is the heroic power; with heroic power he thus sprinkles him; “To the shout hail!”; shout is heroic power; with heroic power he thus sprinkles him; “To the signal-call hail!”; the signal-call is heroic power; with heroic power he thus sprinkles him [...].

<sup>55</sup> About the term *ślókā*- see Horsch 1966: 223-229

<sup>56</sup> The same image also in ṚV 1.190.4a: *asyá ślókó divíyate pṛthivyám átyo ná* “When his signal-call speeds in heaven and on earth like a steed”.

In the name of the sole king – in this case Indra - every shout becomes “understandable”, and the ideology of *śravas*- “fame” is still implied: it is the foundation of the new heroic power-*vīrya*.

In AVŚ 5.20.7 *dundubhī* is defined *ślokakṛt*-“one who makes signal-calls”, and opens the path to heaven and sovereignty.<sup>57</sup>

*aṅtarémé nábhasī ghóṣo astu pṛthak te dhvanáyo yantu  
śībham /  
abhī kṛanda stanáyotpípānaḥ ślokakṛn mitratūryāya  
svardhī // 7 //*

Let there be shout between heaven and earth, let your resonances go quickly, severally;  
Resound you, thunder you, swelling up, you who make *śloka* for victory of friends, you who have a good part.

Radical compounds in *-kṛ-t* are very productive in the Vedic texts. Indeed, many examples are already found in the Rigvedic repertoire,<sup>58</sup> but *ślokakṛt*- only occurs in the later Vedic corpus (TU 3.10.6), even though we do find the phrase *ślokaṃ kṛ-* in RV 4.53.3b: *āprā rájāṃsi diviyāni pāṛthivā ślókaṃ devāḥ kṛṇute svāya dhármaṇe*-“He (Savitar) has filled the heavenly and earthly realms. The god makes his signal-call to support his own” and this has been inserted into a hymn that refers to the rising sun. In actual fact, in the Atharvanic recensions, radical compounds in *-kṛ-t* are particularly frequent: the root *kṛ* expresses magic power as such, as is indicated by the magic technical term *kṛtyā*-“charm”. In this sense, the onomatopoeic forms are frequently combined with the root *kr*-<sup>59</sup> that represents the magic “duplication” of sounds, which acts in an empathetic way on reality, producing name-objects. The same magic strategy is applied to *ślokakṛt*, but in a redundant way: the onomatopoeic term *par excellence* or object-name – *dundubhī* – redoubles itself magically, producing the signal-call or the

<sup>57</sup> The term *dundubhī* is mentioned in the Rājasūya sections of KS 36.15 and TB 2.7.7.1-2 ≈ AVŚ 6.38 and AVP 2.18.

<sup>58</sup> See Scarlata: 1999, 73-81.

<sup>59</sup> See Hoffman 1975.

“understandable” and articulated sound. It can rise up to heaven, together with the renowned warrior-hero.

Thus, the warrior figure assumes a new image in the hieraticized context. From the liminal sphere of the battlefield he is introduced into the humanized sphere as a winner, who is worthy of celebrations, received with jubilant shouts, addressed through a well-heard speech, and worthy of praise; he is recognized as a “hero”, as *rāj*. And the ceremony of booty-distribution, *vidátha*, becomes a ritual as such, with soma-pressing and the sacrificial fire. In fact, the Mahāvratā rites constitute the pivot point in this process of hieraticization of the figure of the warrior.<sup>60</sup> Thus the non-articulated primordial sound is translated into an understandable one: it is heard even in heaven, and the warrior attains fame as a “hero”: “Speaking manfully, measure out prizes to us; in heaven you have established your fame, your name as a “hero” (*ṅvād vādann úpa no māhi vājān diví śrávo dadhiṣe nāma vīrāh*) (RV 10.28.12cd). Phonetical repetitions seem to interweave in rhythmical succession, culminating in the last two terms: *nāman* and *vīrā*. The alliterations *ān/nā* and *mā/ma* in the former are intermingled to shape a new “noun”, which is etymologically able “to measure” the booty, whereas, in the latter, the alliterations *vi/vī* and *rā* are combined to form the term which is “heavenly resounding”. And *rāva* is “mimetically” resounded into *śrávas*: the magic onomatopoeic power of converting non-articulated and meaningless sound into a morphologically “understandable” object-name is perfectly realized here, through the duplication of the sounds. The whole cosmos is “morphemized” and “grammaticalized” thanks to *nāma-vīrā*, the name-“hero” or, magically, the “hero”-name, which “resounds” throughout heaven.

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<sup>60</sup> See Witzel 1995; 2005.

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