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

Introduction

The Skt. term dundubhi, conventionally translated as “drum”, is rarely found in the Vedic corpus: there are only four Rigvedic quotations, which are textual variants of Atharvanic 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 Mahāvrata rite (PB 5.5.18-21; JB 2.404), and even in AĀ 5.1.5. However, it is prevalently attested in the Atharvanic recensions, especially in two hymns of the Šaunaka recension, 5. 20 (≈ AVP 9.24) and 5. 21, which are completely dedicated to it. It is clear that the term dundubhi belongs to the “mantra” layer of the Vedic corpus, that is to say, to both the Middle and the Late Vedic period.1

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

1 See Witzel’s classification (1997).
relation to the Rājasūya, Vājapeya, Aśvamedha, Mahāvrata 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.² 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 dundubhi 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 kāvyā poetry. The Rigvedic collection, in particular, employs many refined rhetorical devices,³ which range from examples of mere phonological similarity with assonance, alliteration, and formulaic refrains (epanalepsis, reddito, 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

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” anagrams⁴ or “semantization of sound sequence”,⁵ the hymns show frequent and complex “metaphorization”. Secondly, a process of metricization “measures” the grammaticalized human expressions in precise strophic structures (ięć-) 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 Ṛvac-, 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 *yājus* consists mainly of phonetical repetitions, such as formulaic refrains and forms of elementary isoptotic responsions, which merely confer a rhythmical structure on the texts, which corresponds to the enumerative and catalogical intent of the ritual application.⁶ 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.⁷ 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:⁸ the Atharvanic hymns dedicated to the above-

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⁴ See Klein 2005 and 2012.
⁶ As regards the catalogical poetical structure, see i.e. Sadovsky 2005.
⁷ About the relationship between grammar and formulaic ritualistic expression, see Ronzitti 2014.
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.9

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. dindima, ādambara), and the Pāli dudrabhī –, related to the Munḍa root da-ba. Likewise, other Sanskrit terms, belonging to the semantic field of music and dancing, are related to Munḍa languages and are traces of the cultural exchanges between the

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9 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 *dundubhi* 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 *dundubhi* 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”.10 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 *dundubhi*, involved in the Kṣatriya sphere, can be representative of such a transformation.

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

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

\[
\begin{align*}
dundubhir iti śabdānukaraṇam / drumo bhīna iti vā / 
dundubhyate r vā syāc chabdakaraṇaḥ \\
\text{“dundubhi is so [called because] it is the shape of the} 
\text{articulated sound; or [because] it is a “split tree”; or it} 
\text{could be from dundubhya- [because] it is an “articulated} 
\text{sound maker”.
\end{align*}
\]

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. In fact nouns for animals – especially birds – or natural phenomena are

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11 As regards the magic power of the names, see Sani 1981.
frequently expressed by onomatopoeic words, and by means of this form of “denomination” or “humanization”, they are transformed from a “demoniac” status into propitious beings.

Thus, in AVP 20.50.8 = Kauśī 46.54 = RV Khil 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:

\[
yauvanāni mahayasi jīgyuṣām iva dundubhiḥ / kapiñjala pradaksinam satapatrabhi no vada // 8 //
\]

\[\text{You elate the youth, like the drum of the victors,} \]
\[\text{o kapiñjala, with a hundred feathers resound for us auspiciously.} \]

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.

For example, in AVŚ 8.4.22 = RV 7.104.22 along with other wild animals, they are clearly connected to the demoniac sphere and considered as magically dangerous:

\[
ūlūkayātum śuśulūkayātum jahī śvāyātum utā kōkayātum/ suparnāyātum utā gṛdhrayātum dṛśādeva prá mṛṇa rākṣa indra //
\]

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.

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12 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.

13 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.


15 On the magic nature of the birds in Vedic culture, see i.e. AVŚ 6.27, 28.1, 29.1; RV 2.43; 7.104 = AVŚ 8.4; RV 10.165; Thieme 1974 and Ronzitti 2010.
The first two nouns in particular can be interpreted as examples of onomatopoeic expressions,\(^\text{16}\) which sound out “grave and deep” like the *dundubhī*. In this case, the equivalence is not explicitly expressed through a comparison but, significantly, in AVŚ 3.19.6 it is said:

\[
\text{úd ďhārśantām maq̥havan vājīnāny úd virāṇām} \\
\text{jáyatām etu ghōsah} \\
\text{pṛ̥thag ghōsā ululāyāḥ ketumānta úd āratām} \\
\text{devā āndhrayēṣṭhā marūto yantu sēnayā} \\
\]

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 *ghōsa* means “noise, shout”, applied to the battlefield, but in the second verse the use of an onomatopoeic term *ululī* “howling” is etimologically connected to the bird-noun *ulūka* “owl”,\(^\text{17}\) and the syntagma *vīrāṇām jáyatām [...] ghōsah* evokes the similar *jigyusām iva dundubhīḥ*, mentioned above in AVP 20.50.8, and in particular *jáyatām [...] dundubhīḥ*, quoted in RV 1.28.5. This is one of the four Rigvedic occurrences of the term *dundubhī*:

\[
yác cid dhī tvām gṛh-ṛghra ālūkhalaka yujvāse \\
ihā dyuṁāttamam vada jáyatām iva dundubhīḥ \\
\]

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 *ālūkhalaka*, denoting the little mortar-ālūkhalaka used to

\(^{16}\) Etymologically speaking, *ālūka* can also be considered as a compound from *uru-Hka*, “endowed with a large face”, analogous to the formation of *prātīka*, according to Thieme 1974: 299.

pound the soma stalks, is also generally interpreted as a substrate loanword, and can therefore attest the interference of the non-hieratic culture on the later layers of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*. 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 (*gr̥-gr̥ / ú-ū / a-a / am-am / va-wa*). The same term *ulūkhala* phonetically “sounds” like the term *ulūlī* / *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-ultūkhala-ulūka-ulūlī* 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. It is worth noticing that according to ApSS 16.26.1; 3 and MŚS 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

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18 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 tat urukaram, urukaram ha vai tat ulūkhalam ity ācaksate paroṣam;* the same interpretation is again quoted in N. 9.21, where also the Rigvedic stanza is also mentioned.

19 As regards the interpretations, see Schmidt 2009.

20 As to the use of the term *ulūkhala* in the non-sollemn rite, see also AVŚ 9.6.15, where the *dvandva ulūkhala-māsala*—“mortar and pestle” is quoted in the list of the utensils for the guest cerimony.
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 Mahāvrata: 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 seminomadic society to a form of settled state, starting from the dynasty of King Parīkṣit.21 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 trasformation. Moreover, not only does this rite22 foresee the use of drums, and other musical instruments, especially the viṇā- “lute”, but also a special Earth-drum is built, in order to magically secure prosperity and fertility. According to the ancillary literature,23 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 dundubhi in AVŚ 5. 31 provides another example of magic poetry that relied on an onomatopoeic effect and already preluded 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:

\[
yāṁ te cakrūḥ sēṇāyāṁ yāṁ cakrūḥ iṣvāyudhē /
dundubhāṅ kṛtyām yāṁ cakrūḥ pūnah prāti harāmi tāṁ
\]

22 As regards the Mahāvrata rite, see Rolland 1972; Parpola 1999; Witzel 2005.
23 ÅpŚŚ 20-23; LŚŚ 3.10-4.3; ŚŚŚ 17-18; BŚŚ 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 *dundubhi* 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 (/du/; /yām/ yām/; /ūḥ/ pū/), 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 *dundubhi* 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 *dundubhi* 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 *dundubhi*, it is addressed as *vedhás*, literally meaning “the one of the sacred seat” (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 *dundubhi* inserted into a completely hieraticized role of the Aryan matrix, someone who was received as a guest

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24 See Pinault 2012:123.
offering his wealth/booty-“vēdas”, 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 kavī, 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 kavī seems to be particularly connected to the image of a “bird”, the flying being par excellence, and more especially to the “voice of birds”.25 His “mediating” poetry is eminently characterized by sound.

AVŚ 5.20.4 = AVP 9.24.3
śanujāyana pṛjñānā ūrdhvaṁāyur gṛhyā gṛhānā bhudeḥ
vī caṅṣa / 

daivīṁ vācaṁ dundubha ā gurasva vēdāḥ śātrūnām
ūpa bharasva vēdāḥ // 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 etymologia vedhā-vēdaḥ is also relevant. However, the phonetical repetitions follow one another in a rhytmical “redundant” sequence ( ā / an / na / ř / ur / udh / ma / gr / vi / ca / va / vi / va / ca / am / gur / va / ve / ru / u / va / ve / etc.): the redoubling effect highlights the chain bahudhā-
daivīṁ vācaṁ-dundubha, in which bahudhā-dundubha is a pseudo-anagram. In this way kavī-dundubhi poetry is endowed with Sacred Speech. In fact, the poet as a dundubhi 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

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 Mahāvrata 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 bhīna iti vā: “dundubhi is so [called because] it is a “split tree”. As musical instrument, it is used by the *dundubhya-aṅgātā*, literally “drum-beater” (TB 3.4.13.1; BĀU 2.4.7), or the “one who strikes *dundubhí*”: *ā-ṅgāta- 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” – *sarvāṅgātrā*: after having washed them, and sprinkled them with fragrant powders of root-plants, the *purohīta* 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,²⁶ 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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²⁶ Sani 1990.
must be defeated as such. In this sense, expressions like *dundubhīṃ han* (ŚŚŚ 12.18.16; 17.5.10) and *dundubhy-āghātā* connote the object *dundubhī* as the prototype of the enemy, who must be destroyed, particularly as a demoniac being. Such expressions can be interpreted as a sort of magic formula, by means of which the victory is “induced”: thus, the term *dundubhī*, 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 *dundubhī* is his apotropaic “weapon”, made of the same “terrifying” substance as the “Otherness”.

Therefore, in relation to the Mahāvrata, 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:

\[
\text{vāg vai devebhyo 'pakrāmat sāpāḥ prāviśat [...] sā punaritītyakrāmat sā vanaspaṃ prāviśat tān devāḥ punar ayācaṃs tām na punar adadus tān āsapan svena vaḥ kiṣkuṃā vajreṇa vrścān iti tasmād vanaspaṃ svena kiṣkuṃā vajreṇa vrścānti devaṃpatā hi / 12 / tāv}
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27 About the same I.E. phrase *gwen~”slay, split” + monster, especially as *ogw~”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 Rāmaṇa (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 navaradvam kampayan bhūṃnam dundubhir dundubhir yathā). He was killed by Vālin - compared to Indra against Namucē (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 Hiltebeitel 1980. It is worth noticing that, according to Hiltebeitel 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 vācānv vinyadadhur dundubhau
vīṇāyām akṣe tūṇave tasamād ēśā vadiṣṭhaiśā valgutamā
vāg vā vanaspatīnāṃ devānāṃ hy ēśā vāg āsīt / I3 /
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 – vytrā: it is hewed (from the root
vraśc-) through a weapon-vājra made of the same substance of
the tree, that is to say made of wood. Thus, in RV 1.32, the
serpent killed by Indra lies “like logs hewn apart by an axe”
(skāṇḍhāṃśiva kūlišenā vívr̥kna, RV 1.32.5c), and in AVŚ
2.12.3cd the enemy is equivalent to a tree (vṛścāmi tāṁ
kūlišeneva vṛksaṁ yō asmākaṁ māna idāṁ hināsti-“I hew him
as a tree [hewed] by an axe, [he] who beats this mind of ours”).
Likewise, in RV 6.6 Agni, in his terrible aspect, is the “wood-
hewing” - vṛścādvana- (st.1) through ever-roaring (nānadat-)
flames- (st. 2): “they conquer the woods” - vānā vananti (st. 3).28
However, vānaspatāt 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:

vānaspatāt sahā devāir na āgan rākṣaṁ piśācāṁ
apabādhamānaḥ /
sā ṛc churnātai prá vādāti vācaṁ tēna lokān abhi sārvān
jayema ll15ll

28 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-śrí-“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-vā́c: it “speaks forth” (pra-vad) speech.

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

\[
\text{yāthā mṛgāḥ saṃvijānte āraṇyāḥ pūruṣād ādhi / evā tvām dundubhe 'mītrān abhiprakaṃ prá trāsayaśtha citāni mohaya} //4//
\]
\[
\text{yāthā vṛkād ajāvaya dhāvanti bahū bibhyatiḥ / evā tvām dundubhe 'mītrān abhiprakaṃ prá trāsayaśtha citāni mohaya} //5//
\]
\[
\text{yāthā śyenāḥ patatāniḥ saṃvijānte āhārdive simhāsya standātho yāthā / evā tvām dundubhe 'mītrān abhiprakaṃ prá trāsayaśtha citāni mohaya} //6//
\]

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 dundubhi 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, reditios, responson 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 (yāthā…evā tvām dundubhe). Finally, the qualities eminently implied in the magic comparisons are related to “sonority”: dundubhī is compared to stanāthu, a hapax form,29 variant of the masculine noun stanātha, from the root stan- “to thunder, to roar”;30 the root krand- in abhī-krand-, which expresses the noises made by animals – horses, bull, wild beasts –, thunderbolts and flowing waters, provides dundubhī 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”,31 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 dundubhī is depicted in AVŚ 5.20.1-2 ≈ AVP 9.24.1-2:

uccairghosō dundubhīḥ savanāyān vānaspatvāh sāmbhṛta usriyābhīḥ

29 The similar formulaic phrases simhāsyeva stanāthor saṃ vijānte is found in AVŚ 8.7.15a.
31 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.
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.

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 dundubhi is denoted as druvāya—“the wooden one” and vānaspatyā’one who belongs to the forest-tree”; but also a hypogram is applied, that increases the expressive iconicity. Actually, the rhythmic effect is relied on a sort of redundant bipartite structure, characterized by the redoubling of the same syllable (/ o / o l; / du / du l; etc.), or by their alternate iteration (/ at / va / na l; / an / va l; / va / na l; / at l), 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 dundubhi, as a forest tree. But the root van- “to conquer” is also evoked, alluding to the conquering power of dundubhi. Morphological rhetorical devices are also used, like the homoioteleuta of the participles in -at, but this seems to amplify the onomatopetic effect as such: on the one hand the same “sounding” root krand, in the participle form abhikrāndan, constitutes a syntactic responsion, 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 taṃstanāh increases the iconicity-effect. Therefore, dundubhi-tree is mainly a “sounding” tree, “beaten” and torn apart by
thunderbolt, and “resounding” thunder in itself.\textsuperscript{32} 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, \textit{dundubhi} rises up to heaven from the wilderness and battlefield on earth: also the same term \textit{krándas} “shout of battle” in the dual form \textit{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 \textit{ródasī}.\textsuperscript{33}

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 \textit{siḿhá iva} is quoted, along with identification with the bull-\textit{vṛ̥ṣan}. 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 \textit{ru} “to bellow”.

\begin{quote}
\textit{vṛ̥ṣeva yāthē sāhasā vidānō gavyā̄n abhīruva samdhānājit /}
\textit{śucā vidhyā hādayam pāreśām hitvā grāmān prácyutā yantu śātravah //3 //}
\end{quote}

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.

\textsuperscript{32} Already Hillebrandt (1890: 323) interpreted the \textit{dundubhi} in the Mahāvrata rite as a magic device to evoke the rain’s fecund powers through the beating-drum, which “sympathetically” corresponds to the thunderbolts.

\textsuperscript{33} See Thieme 1978: 35-36.
Here the term *dundubhí* is inserted in an erotic context, connected to the theme of fertility. 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, 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” (*ukséva yāthā pariyánn arāvīḍ*); in RV 9.70.7a *ruvāti* is also referred to soma-*vṛṣabhá*, depicted as “fearsome” (*ruvāti bhīmó vṛṣabháṁ taviṣyāyā-“the fearsome bull bellows forcefully”). Finally, in RV 1.173.3cd *ruvát* refers to cows: *krándad áśvo náyamáno ruvád gaur antár dūtó ná ródasi carad vāk* -“The horse neighs while being led; the cow bellows. Speech wanders between the two worlds like a messenger”: here, the term *ródasi* – etimologically linked to *rudra* – introduces the microcosmos (cattle and horses) into the macrocosmos. This “metaphorical” process “passes through” the vāc itself, which is articulated and humanized sound as “words”, which “brings” the primordial sound “beyond” the earthly layer, and reaches the heavenly dimension, like a messanger. This process of cosmization 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

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34 Auspicious rites with obscene elements are included in the Mahāvrata ceremony.
36 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 *vyṣabhāsya 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”. 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 Mahāvrata. Furthermore, *rāva* is the key-word of the famous Vala myth: the cows, closed inside Vala’s cave, are released by Indra-Bṛhaspati together with the “flock” of Aṅgirases, 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 *vṛ̥tra*—“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: *nādi-*soma-*vyṣan-vāna*-dundubhī*, which relies on the onomatopoeic effect of *dundubhī* and *nādi*. 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

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37 Sahoo 2002.
38 Ronzitti 2001: 23.
39 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 Mahāvrata rite, in which the earth-drum is used.

\[\text{yáryām gāyanti nṛtyanti bhūmyāṁ máṛtyā vyālabāḥ / yudhyante yāsvāṁ ākrandō yāśvāṁ viḍati dundubhiḥ / sā no bhūmīḥ prā ṇudataṁ sapātāṁ asapātāṁ mā prthivī krṣṇou //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 máṛtya, in which the alliterations má and ya are combined in a sort of “subliminal” anagram for yama, the name of the god of death,\(^{40}\) and on the assonance of /u/. However, the most significant term is vy-aślabha, 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”,\(^ {41}\) referred to demons. The compound aślabā-kārā- in AVŚ 11.2.30a refers to the Maruts, Rudra’s companions, who are also defined as ghośīn (AVŚ 11.2.31). It seems to be a sort of onomatopoeic reproduction of

\(^{40}\) It is worth noticing that musical instruments, songs and dance are connected to Yama (KU 1. 25-26), as well as to Mrṣu (JB 2.69-70); in Hinduism, the water-buffalo is Yama’s vehicle.

\(^{41}\) 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 ghosa, is mentioned in a cosmogonic sequence: tam [ādityam] jāyamāṇam ghoṣā ulūlavo ’mūdatiṣṭhan-“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. Taking into account that the Paippalāda reading is ailavā, ailabā /ailavā hints at the term rāva, 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, 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.

The term mārtya “mortal”, morphologically linked to vy-ailaba, 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 ghosā, if the verse āghoṣāyantah prthivīṁ upabdibhiḥ-“making the earth heed with (their) trampling” (RV 10.94.4d), alludes to the same popular

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42 About this interpretation, see Kuiper 1960: 235.
41 According to Witzel (1989: 212) r > l is an Eastern particularity.
40 See Rolland 1972.
46 RV 10.94.4: bhūḥ vādant’ madirēṇa mandinā īndraṁ krōṣanto avidann anā mádhu / samrābhīya dhīṛāḥ svātēḥār anarīṣur āghoṣāyantah prthivīṁ upabdibhiḥ // “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-bdi, deriving from the noun pād-
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 *upabdibhiḥ* seems to phonetically “duplicate” *dundubhiḥ* as a sort of anagram. The sound of the earth-drum-*dundubhiḥ* 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 *aṭilaba-ākrandā-dundubhiḥ-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 Mahāvrata 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 *vā́c*.

*Dundubhi*- From the earthy sound to the heavenly sound

According to the Atharvanic hymns, the main device for attaining heaven is *dundubhiḥ*: it is *uccā́igrhoṣa* “one who is...

“foot”, seems to recall the compound *pad-ghoṣa*-, quoted in AVŚ 5.21.8b. In RV 7.104.17d the stemming variant *upabdā-* is also quoted, with reference to the beating of the soma-pressing stones: *grā́vāṇo ghnantu rakṣāśa upabdāḥ* “Let the pressing stones smash the demons with their tramplings”.
endowed with high shout". This compound occurs only in the mantric Vedic layer (AVŚ 9.1.8; TS. 4.5.2m; AB 4.9), even though the root *ghuṣ, meaning “to sound, to make noise”, and its derivatives are mentioned also in the ancient layer. According to Goto, the most ancient meaning of the root, related to the I.E. *g(e)hwes-, 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 śruti. 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 ghọṣa is equivalent to ululī.

In the Rigvedic occurrences this primordial meaning of the root ghuş 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”. In RV 5.37.3c, the verse ā́ sya śravasyā́d rā́thā ā́ 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 ā́ sya…asyā. However, in this case, the root ghuş is also related to the root śrū, 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 *klēwos-glory/fame” (Skt. śrávas) is already...
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 (ṇṛ, vīrā), 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”,\(^\text{52}\) 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 *vidātha*:\(^\text{53}\) 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/heroeic” deeds” (i.e. 2.21.3d, 2.13.11ab, 4.32.10a), or the refrain *brāhād vadema vidāthe 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.\(^\text{54}\)

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 *dundūbhī* belongs, is located in a liminal space, similar to the position of the Earth-drum in the Mahāvrata rite. The warrior shouts can be “understandable” only if they are introduced into the ritualized sphere, so that ghōṣa is turned into śruta-. In actual fact, the Sacred Speech-vāc- is overloaded with

\(^{52}\) See Watkins 1995: 15; 42-43.


\(^{54}\) 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 / kisku / -“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 śrutā-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 RV 1.83.6b, arkó vā · ślókam āghóṣate diví-“or the chant sounds its signal-call towards heaven”, the term ślóka-“signal-call”, from the same root śru, makes what is “audible”-ghoṣa “understandable”, and “shining” chants (arkā) are formed.55

Such a relationship between ghoṣa and śloka 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 vīryenaivainam etad abhiṣiṅcati ghoṣāya svāheti vīryam vai ghoṣo vīryenaivainam etad abhiṣiṅcati ślokaśa svāheti vīryam vai śloko vīryenaivainam etad abhiṣiṅcaty [...]

(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 [...].

55 About the term ślóka- see Horsch 1966: 223-229

56 The same image also in RV 1.190.4a: ayyā śloko divyaye pythiṣyām ātysā nā “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 dundubhí is defined ślokakṛ-“one who makes signal-calls”, and opens the path to heaven and sovereignty:57

\[
\text{antaréme nábhasí ghóso astu pýtak te dhvanáyo yantu}
\]
\[
\text{śibham /}
\]
\[
\text{abhi kranda stanáyotpínař šlokakṛn mitratúryāya}
\]
\[
\text{svardhī // 7 //}
\]
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- are very productive in the Vedic texts. Indeed, many examples are already found in the Rigvedic repertoire,58 but ślokakṛ- only occurs in the later Vedic corpus (TU 3.10.6), even though we do find the phrase ślokam kṛ- in RV 4.53.3b: āpṛā rājāṃsi diviyāni pārthivā ślokam devāh kr̥te svāyā dhármaṇe-“He (Savitār) 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- are particularly frequent: the root kr 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-59 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 ślokakṛ, but in a redundant way: the onomatopoeic term par excellence or object-name – dundubhī – redoubles itself magically, producing the signal-call or the

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57 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.
“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, vidātha, becomes a ritual as such, with soma-prescribing and the sacrificial fire. In fact, the Mahāvrata rites constitute the pivot point in this process of hieraticization of the figure of the warrior.60 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” (ṛṇvād vādann úpa no māhi vājān divī śrāvo dadhiśe 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 vī/vī/ and rā are combined to form the term which is “heavenly resounding”. And rāva is “mimetically” resounded into śrāyavas: 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.

60 See Witzel 1995; 2005.
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