

World Sanskrit Conference 2023. Canberra. Section: Veda.

Georges-Jean PINAULT

Paris, École Pratique des Hautes Études, PSL

Interpreting a Rigvedic word as a fossil from Indo-Iranian mythology

§ 1. The Saṁhitā of the Ṛgveda (henceforth RV) consists of hymns which contain few narratives. The absence of the extensive telling of any myth of the Rigvedic religion is kind of frustrating. In many cases, fundamental myths have to be reconstructed from bits and pieces which have been inserted in poems devoted mostly to the praise of the gods. Even one of the best-known myths, the killing of the serpent Vṛtra by the god Indra, is never told in a way which would ideally include all the steps of this major fighting of the warrior god against a demonic figure (*vṛtrá-* masc.) which represented the forces of chaos, while embodying the obstacle (*vṛtrá-*, nt.) to the flowing of waters, and more generally to the living of the world.¹ Actually, the whole myth is summarized in the phrase *vṛtrám han-* ‘to kill Vṛtra’, which had become a formula, with Indra as agent, at the surface syntactic level the subject of this phrase. This phrase is also the basis of the compound agent noun *vṛtra-hán-* which qualifies Indra as the ‘killer of Vṛtra’ and ‘smasher of the obstacle’.² The myth is then condensed in its crucial point, and the agent noun could be used for referring to the god himself in short. One would like to know more about the chain of events which preceded and prepared this action, about other possible actors, and about the sequels. It happens that a complete myth can be so to speak encapsulated in a single word. The previous example is of course well-known and much commented on. This approach may lead to pause on some isolated words which resisted until now any interpretation, and to search the key for their understanding in a myth or mythical motif which left some testimonies in parts of the Rigvedic text.

§ 2. A case in point is the word *uśádhak*, whose grammatical status is not even clearly ascertained, and which is totally isolated in the whole Indo-Aryan literature. It is attested only in the RV, where this form has 3 occurrences: 3.6.7c, 3.34.3c, 7.7.2d. On the tracks of the glossing given by Sāyaṇa at 3.6.7c (*kāmayamāno dahanś ca*), this word has been traditionally registered as a Karmadhāraya compound, whose two members have been connected with the roots *vaś-/uś-* ‘to desire, wish’ (MW: 929a; EWAia II: 527-528) and *dah-* ‘to burn’ (MW: 473b; EWAia I: 712-713) respectively. This would be based on a stem *uśa-dah-* ‘burning with desire or intensely’ (MW: 219c), in all

¹ Oberlies 2012: 198-200. Two hymns (RV 1.32, 1.80) tell the Indra-Vṛtra battle with some extension, but they are far from covering the whole myth, which would state the causes of this contest and the promotion of Indra as champion and hero for gods and mortals.

² Watkins 1995: 297-323 and passim.

occurrences in the nominative singular, masculine (with $^{\circ}dhak < *^{\circ}dhagh-s$).³ In theory, from the phonological point of view, the second member could be based as well on the root *dagh-* ‘to fall short of, to reach’ (MW: 466b), but the connection with *dah-* ‘to burn’ is based on two facts: the word occurs twice in hymns to Agni, and in all occurrences it is followed by a form of *vána-* nt. ‘wood’, locative plural *váneṣu* (3.6.7c, 3.34.3c), accusative plural *vánāni* (7.7.2d).⁴ From this etymological account derives the gloss given by Grassmann (266): ‘mit Begierde vernichtend, verzehrend’, and by the two etymological dictionaries authored by Mayrhofer: ‘gierig verbrennend/burning intensely’ (KEWAi I: 112), ‘begierig brennend, gierig verbrennend’ (EWAia I [Lieferung 3, 1988]: 233), even though the latter states with caution that this meaning is just ‘likely’, despite some difficulties of exegesis for which it is referred to the previous translations and commentaries. Accordingly, *usá-dah-* would be a verbal governing compound, with first member being an adverb or a derivative with adverbial meaning: ‘gierig verbrennend’ (Wackernagel 1905: 221, § 91.f.γ, with question mark), however with abnormal accent, since the expected form would be $*uśa-dáh-$. One cannot deny that this gloss makes some sense in relationship with Agni, the personified fire, who is eager to burn, to crush or to eat the wood with his flames, compared to the jaws of a beast. Nonetheless, this faces some difficulties: 1) the word could be thus interpreted in isolation, while ignoring the contexts; 2) the first member is totally isolated, if it had ever the alleged meaning. Concerning the second point, there is no free form $*uśa-$ or $*uśan-$ as derived from the root *vaś-/uś-*. It has been taken for granted that *uśa-* in *usá-dah-* was related in one way or the other to the present participle *uśánt-* (RV +) of the verb in question. Alternatively, it would be based on an *-an-* stem from the same root, which would be set up entirely ad hoc. Renou, while connecting $uśá^{\circ}$ to *uśánt-*, stated that the form of the compound *uśádhak* was puzzling.⁵ It would be costly to set up an *-an-* stem $*uśan-$ from the root *vaś-* only for accounting for *usá-dhak*. In Indo-Aryan the *-an-* suffix does not serve to make primary agent nouns, nor primary action nouns, which would be neuter.⁶ I cannot follow the backwards projection, as per Scarlata (1999: 199) of *uśá-dah-* into Proto-Indo-European, as a compound of the shape $*uk-ṇ-d^{h}eg^{th}-$ ‘willig heiss werdend’, with a derivative from the root $*uek-$ as first predicative member. While the participle *uśánt-*, fem. *uśatī-* is certainly inherited (PIE $*uk-élónt-$, see Av. *usant-*, Gk. $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\acute{o}\nu\tau-$), there is no reflex of a PIE stem $*uk-e/on-$. This kind of gratuitous and extremely speculative reconstruction is not based on any inherited phraseology. In that case, one does not

³ Geldner, who based also his interpretation on Sāyaṇa (quoted 1907: 36b and 1909: 44), took the word as uninflected, however.

⁴ As underlined by Neisser (1924: 177). In any case, the alternative connection with *dagh-* (present *daghnóti*, aor. inj. *adhak*, etc., EWAia I: 691) does not allow any promising interpretation of the occurrences.

⁵ EVP XIII (1964): 143, ad RV 7.7.2.

⁶ Debrunner 1954: 175-179.

know two comparable lexemes which would be associated in that way in other Indo-European languages. One may wonder if such a phrase, supposed to mean ‘burning willingly’, could be meaningful at all outside of the RVic poetry. If one keeps the connection with the participle *uśánt-* ‘willing, wishing, desiring’ (RV 51 x), weak stem *uśat-*, fem. *uśatī-* (RV 27 x), one may conceive the existence of an adverb **uśát*, meaning ‘willingly, at will’, after the type of *dravát* ‘quickly, speedily’ (RV 7 x) vs. *drávant-* ‘running’, *stāyát* (AVŚ 4.16.1, 7.108.1) ‘stealthily, furtively’ vs. *stāyant-* ‘stealing’. Then, one would expect **uśád-dah-* meaning ‘burning at will’,⁷ according to the translation favored by the reference translations, see the next paragraph. The idea of some kind of truncation of the first member into *uśa*^o before the following stop does not have any parallel, however.⁸

§ 3. Leaving aside this issue of derivational morphology, the standard translations of the RV have adopted the gloss given by Grassmann. I give thereafter the text of the three stanzas followed by German and English translations. Except for the pādas where *uśádhak* occurs, the interpretation of these stanzas looks as reasonably safe:

RV 3.6.7 *divás cid ā te rucayanta rokā, uśó vibhātīr ānu bhāsi pūrvīḥ |*
 apó yád agna uśádhag váneṣu, hótur mandrásya panáyanta devāḥ ||

‘Bis zum Himmel sogar leuchten deine Leuchten; den vielen erglänzenden Morgenröten glänzest du nach, während deiner gierig in den Hölzern brennenden (?) Tätigkeit, des wohlredenden Hotṛ, die Götter Beifall spenden, o Agni.’ (Geldner, RV I: 343).

‘Your shining rays shine here even to heaven; you become radiant along with the many far-radiant dawns, / when, o Agni, the gods marvel at your busy burning at will among the wood, (the burning) by the delightful Hotar.’ (Jamison-Brereton I: 477).

RV 3.34.3 *índro vṛtrám avṛṇoc chárdhanūtiḥ, prá māyínām aminād várpaṇūtiḥ |*
 áhan vyāmsam uśádhag váneṣu, āvír dhénā akṛṇod rāmyāṇām ||

‘Indra wehrte den Vṛtra ab durch das Mittel der Stärke; er vereitelte (die Listen) der Listigen durch das Mittel der Verwandlung. Er erschlug den Vyāmsa in den Hölzern gierig brennend. Er machte die Stimmen der Nächte offenbar.’ (Geldner, RV I: 374-375).

‘Indra obstructed the obstacle [/Vṛtra] through control of his troop [= Maruts]; he beguiled (the wiles) of the wily ones through control of forms. / He smashed the one whose shoulders were spread [= cobra]. Burning at will in the woods, he brought to light the nourishing streams of the nights.’ (Jamison-Brereton I: 516).

RV 7.7.2 *ā yāhy agne pathyā ānu svā, mandró devānām sakhyām juṣānāḥ |*
 ā sānu śúṣmair nadáyan pṛthivyā, jámbhebhīr víśvam uśádhag vánāni ||

⁷ As surmised explicitly by Ludwig IV[1881]: 298, in his commentary of 3.6.7.

⁸ Pace Renou (1952: 116, § 158 note).

‘Komm, Agni, deine gewohnten Wege, willkommen, der Freundschaft der Götter dich erfreuend, den Rücken der Erde mit deinem Ungestüm erdröhnen machend, mit den Zähnen alles (verzehrend), die Bäume gierig verbrennend.’ (Geldner, RV II: 187).

‘Journey here along your own paths, o Agni, as the delighting one who takes pleasure in companionship with the gods; / (journey) here along the back of the earth, bellowing with outbursts, burning everything, burning the wood at will with your jaws.’ (Jamison-Brereton II: 892).

Renou did follow basically Geldner’s translation: see ‘brûlant à son gré dans les bois’ (3.34.3c, EVP XVII[1969]: 76), ‘brûlant à ton gré’ (7.7.2d, EVP XIII[1964]: 57), ‘ô Agni qui brûles volontiers dans les bois’ (3.6.7c, EVP XII[1964]: 55). The same doctrine is endorsed by Witzel : 3.6.7c ‘in den Hölzern begierig brennend’,⁹ 3.34.3c ‘in den Hölzern gierig brennend’,¹⁰ while conceding that *usádhak* is ‘obscure’,¹¹ referring to Oldenberg’s discussion, see further below (§ 4). These hymns are dedicated to Agni (3.6, 7.7) and Indra (3.34) and do not belong to recent parts of the RV.¹² The stanzas in question are not affected by textual or metrical problems.

§ 4. The above translations conceal several difficulties pertaining to the interpretation of *usádhak* in each passage, while not providing a unified treatment of this word. There have been in the past alternative constructions of the contexts, based on issues which have been ably surveyed by Scarlata (1999: 197-199) in the latest comprehensive discussion of this word. Scarlata himself lists *usá-dah-*, glossed ‘begierig brennend’ (following the received tradition, however with question mark), among the RVic verbal governing compounds with root noun as second member, while conceding (1999: 199) that the definitive assessment of this form has not been reached yet. In 3.6.7cd, the syntagm *apás (...) usádhak* is apparently the direct object of the injunctive *panáyanta*. Oldenberg¹³ took *apás* as equivalent of *ápas*, neuter, ‘work, activity’, which was modified by *usádhak*, also accusative nt., hence ‘die Tätigkeit, die in den Wäldern gierig brennende’. But this is not applicable to 3.34.3c, where *usádhak* follows *vyàmsam*, accusative masculine: in that passage, *usádhak* could be nominative masculine, in apposition to the subject, Indra (*áhan vyàmsam* ‘he killed V.’). In 7.7.2, instead of *usádhag váneṣu*, one finds *usádhag vánāni*, following *vísavam*, the whole phrase being apparently the direct object of an implicit verb meaning ‘to eat, devour’, or ‘to crush’, or ‘to burn’. One may admit that the latter (*dah-*) did not surface because it was understood in *usádhak*. A further problem resides in the sequence *vísavam (...) vánāni*, either with singular

⁹ Witzel-Gotō II: 25.

¹⁰ Witzel-Gotō II: 66.

¹¹ Witzel-Gotō II: 361.

¹² According to the classification done by Arnold (1905: 275, 279), 3.6 and 3.34 belong to the “normal” (N) period and 7.7 to the “strophic” (S) period.

¹³ Noten I : 228. Following basically Ludwig I[1876]: 333, who translated as follows: ‘dasz des heitern hotars in den hölzern girig brennende tätigkeit loben die götter’. Compare Ludwig (2019: 361): ‘that, o Agni, the gods may praise (admire) the work of the glad *hotar* [that consists in his] eagerly burning in the woods’.

collective ('all, everything') followed by plural ('the woods'), or instead of *vīśvā(ni) vānāni*, due to metrical constraint.¹⁴ In any case, the construction is not the same as in 3.6.7cd and 3.34.3cd, so that one cannot explain this as kind of formulaic variation, *vānāni* replacing *vāneṣu*. All these expedients fail to convince. I will rather follow Scarlata (1999: 199) by taking *uśádhak* as a neuter substantive, which refers to something which is 'among the woods' or 'in the forests' (*vāneṣu*, 3.6.7c, 3.34.3c), and which is combustible, because it can be on the same level as *vānāni* (7.7.2d): direct object in 3.6.7 and 7.7.2, and possibly also in 3.34.3. For the latter passage, Jamison (in her commentary, put online in 2020) argues for seeing a shift to Agni phraseology, so that *uśádhag vāneṣu* should be constructed with the next pāda, against all previous translations, while taking *uśádhak* as nominative, in apposition to the subject, Indra. This complies with the tradition that holds *uśádhak* as a nominative elsewhere. One may consider that Indra is described as producing himself light, through killing a demon who had locked up the dawns, the sun, the waters, the cows, and other goods, as it is told in the next stanza:

RV 3.34.4 *índraḥ svarṣā janáyann áhāni, jigāyośígbiḥ pṛtanā abhiṣṭh /*
 prārocayan mánave ketúm áhnām, ávindaj jyótir bṛhaté ráṇāya //

'Indra, der Sonnengewinner, der die Tage schuf, der Überlegene gewann mit den Uśij die Schlachten. Er ließ für Manu das Wahrzeichen der Tage aufleuchten; er fand das Licht zu großer Freude.' (Geldner, RV II: 375).

'Indra winning the sun, begetting the days, conquered in the battles along with the fire-priests, as superiority (itself). / He made shine for Manu the beacon of the days [= sun], he found the light for lofty joy.' (Jamison-Brereton I: 516).

Alternatively, *uśádhak* (3.34.3c) can be understood as direct object of *āvír (...)* *akṛṇot* (d), on the same level as *dhénāḥ*. This would not affect the sequence of the mythical imagery. Jamison (*op.cit.*) insists on the thematic connection with the preceding stanza, which is reinforced by the phonetic echo linking *uśíg-bhiḥ* (4b), instrumental plural, with *uśá-dhak* (3c). I propose to go a step further, by assuming that this surface effect is based on a deeper relationship between **uśán-*, basis of the first member of *uśá-dhak*, and *uśíj-*, masc. which refers to priests (Uśij) helping Indra in his conquest of light, on the model of the support which the Aṅgiras (*áṅgiras-*), mythical priests, gave by their chanting to Indra in the myth of Vala, the demonized cave which contained the vital goods. As far as Indra liberates all the lights in this primordial exploit, his action corresponds to the one of Agni, acting on the ritual ground in the morning, at sunrise. Effectively, some traits of Agni as god of fire, light, sun, etc. are superimposed here on Indra, which accounts for the fact that *uśádhak* is otherwise found in hymns to Agni, which describe burning of woods and plants (7.7.2cd) or his work as priest (Hotar, 3.6.7d), precisely shining along the dawns (3.6.7b). One may even assume

¹⁴ Oldenberg, Noten II: 9. On this problem, see also Renou (EVP XIII: 143): 'tout, (y compris) les bois'.

that the phrase *uśádhag váneṣu* has been imported from 3.6.7c by a poet of the same family (Atri), in order to be adapted to a different context in 3.34.3c, while being set at the same place in the pāda.

§ 5. Going back to the formal analysis of *uśádhak*, I take on Scarlata's analysis as the substantivization (*uśá-dah-*), through accent retraction, of an adjective, which was a verbal governing compound, **uśa-dáh-*, but with a different syntactic analysis: the second member was an agent noun with passive value, so that the compound meant 'burnt by Uśan'. This compound was a kind of kenning (periphrasis) referring to some stuff which was found in the woods, or among the woods, and which could be burnt by the fire, precisely the ritual fire. This may have been some implement used for the kindling of fire. The underlying term with neuter gender would be *tṛṇa-* 'grass' (Grassmann: 547), 'grass, herb, straw' (MW: 453a), or *parṇá-* 'leaf' (MW: 606b). The former noun (RV 6 x) is found once as direct object of *dah-* in 3.29.6d: *tṛṇā dáhan* 'burning the grasses', again in the Atri's maṇḍala. The presence of *apás* in 3.6.7c is quite decisive, because this adjective refers usually to someone 'active, busy, industrious' for the ritual.¹⁵ The plant burnt by the priest and by Agni, the personified fire, the divine equivalent of the fire-priest, becomes ritually 'active' and efficient once the fire has been kindled. Taking stock of the previous assumptions, I propose the following translation of the three passages: 3.6.7cd 'when the gods marvel at the active one burnt by Uśan among the woods, belonging to the delightful Hotar, o Agni'; 7.7.2cd 'along the back of the earth, bellowing with outbursts, (devouring) with your jaws the woods, every (grass) burnt by Uśan'; 3.34.3cd '(Indra) killed Vyāmsa (the cobra). He brought to light the burnt one by Uśan (for the morning fire), the nourishing streams of the nights'. In the latter passage, 'the burnt one', evoked through metonymy the flame rising up on the ritual altar at dawn,¹⁶ since the kindling element – grass or plant of sorts – has been so to speak absorbed by the fire itself. In all passages, *uśádhak* features as direct object. From the derivational point of view, the interpretation of the stem *uśá-dah-* (originally **uśa-dáh-*) as a verbal governing compound with passive second element is perfectly acceptable,¹⁷ see the following examples from the RV: *madhu-pṛc-* 'mixed with honey', *yuvā-yúj-* 'harnessed by you (two)', *hiraṇya-vṛ-* 'wrapped in gold', *annā-vṛdh-* 'strengthened by food', *payo-vṛdh-* 'strengthened by milk', *girā-vṛdh-* 'grown strong through song', *ṛtā-vṛdh-* 'strengthened by the truth', etc. There are well-recorded instances of the first member standing for an instrumental with value of agent or means.¹⁸

¹⁵ See for instance RV 1.31.8c, 3.1.3d, 11d, 3.2.5d, 7b, 3.8.5c, 3.60.3b, 8.4.14b, 9.72.6b, 9.107.13c. Agni himself is called the best workman (*apástamaḥ*, 10.115.2a).

¹⁶ Actually, Scarlata (1999: 199) suggested that *uśádhak* was based on some circumlocution for *śocís-*, neuter, 'flame' (RV +). But this would not work for the passages where *uśádhak* refers to some material which is burnt by fire, as in 3.6.7cd, 7.7.2cd, not to the fire itself.

¹⁷ Scarlata 1999: 738-739.

¹⁸ Scarlata 1999: 747.

§ 6. The next issue is about accounting for the lexical status of **uśán-* found in the first member of *uśá-dah-*. It was a proper name, matching Avestan *Usan-*. This mythological figure is far from being unknown in the Indo-Iranian area, under the complex form Av. *Kauui Usan* (in later sources, continued by Middle Persian *Kay Us*, Persian *Kay Kā'us*), Ved. *Uśánā Kāvya* (known in secondary literature as *Kāvya Uśanas*).¹⁹ In Younger Avestan the nom. sg. is *Usa*, besides a by-stem *Usaðan-* underlying acc. sg. *Usaðanəm*, gen. sg. *Usaðanō* (var. *Usaðānō*), whose precise origin remains unclear.²⁰ Leaving this latter stem aside,²¹ the basic name points to an animate (masculine) *-an-* stem, whose expected nom.sg. would be Ved. **uśá*, together with an acc.sg. **uśánam*, following the type of *ukṣán-* ‘young bull’ (*ukṣá*, *ukṣánaṃ*), *vṛṣan-* ‘bull’ (*vṛṣā*, *vṛṣanaṃ*), and of names such as *aryamán-* (*aryamá*, *aryamáṇam*), *pūśán-* (*pūśá*, *pūśánaṃ*).²² In Indo-Aryan, the stem is registered as *uśanas-*,²³ but this form appears relatively late, in middle Vedic period, and becomes standard by the Epic stage. In the RV, the name occurs in 17 passages, under a restructured form, which points to the older *-an-* stem. According to the lexica and grammars,²⁴ this noun had in the RV an abnormal paradigm, stemming from a single form *uśánā*, used potentially for different cases, with forms of accusative, dative and locative which have been so to speak improvised on demand: nom.sg. *uśánā* (14 x), acc.sg. *uśánām* (10.40.7b), dat.sg. *uśáne* (6.20.11b), loc. sg. *uśáne* (1.51.11a). This has been cogently explained²⁵ by the collocation of the name with the title of this character, which was originally *kaví-* (matching Av. *kauui-*) and currently *kāvya-* (alternatively *kāvya-*), the latter being evidently based on the former, see the phrases *kavír uśánā* (4.26.1d), *uśánā kāvyaḥ* (1.83.5c, 8.23.17a), *kāvya uśánā* (1.121.12c), *kāvyaṃ uśáneva* (9.97.7a), *uśánā kāvyaena* (9.87.3b), *uśáne kāvya* (1.51.11a), *uśáne kāvyaḥ* (6.20.11b). Then, *uśánā* owes its peculiar shape to the addition of °*ā* to the stem *uśán-*, after the older nom.sg. **kavá* (< **kauṁá*), matching Old Avestan *kauuā* (also in *kauua-cā*, with pre-clitic shortening), according to an inflectional pattern of *-i-* stems which has been abandoned in Vedic for the “normal” inflection of the type sg. nom. *kavíḥ*, acc. *kavím*, etc.²⁶ This awkward nom.sg. *uśánā* for a masculine name has been eventually reanalyzed as belonging to an °*as-* stem, nom.sg. *uśánās*, with loss of the final *-s* before voiced sounds, hence a new acc.sg. *uśanas-am*, etc.²⁷ This stem *uśán-* is also presupposed by the vṛddhi derivative *auśana-* ‘belonging to Uśan, coming from Uśan’, which gives the name of several melodies (*sáman-*).²⁸

¹⁹ Lommel 1939 (= 1978: 162-167), Macdonell-Keith 1912, I: 103; Jamison 2007a: 124-137.

²⁰ Mayrhofer 1979: 84-85 (Nos. 322 and 323), with previous literature; de Vaan 2003: 128-129.

²¹ Whichever was the model of this form, Av. *Usaðan-* kept the inflection of an *-an-* stem.

²² Wackernagel-Debrunner 1930: 267; Macdonell 1910: 204-206; Gotō 2013: 38.

²³ MW: 219c; EWAia I: 234.

²⁴ Wackernagel-Debrunner 1930: 285; Renou 1952: 195 (§ 243, note 4).

²⁵ See Jamison 2007b.

²⁶ Gotō 2013: 29.

²⁷ As assumed by Macdonell 1910: 226 note 5.

²⁸ MW: 240a; Jamison 2007b: 163-164 and note 26.

Accordingly, the first member of the compound *usá-dah-* shows the expected form of the weak stem allomorph of *-an-*stems, compare RV *vṛṣa-parvan-*, *vṛṣa-nābhi-*, *vṛṣa-pāṇi-*, *pūṣa-rāti-*, etc. § 7. The correspondence between Old Iranian and Vedic points to a figure of Indo-Iranian mythology, even though their roles are manifestly different: Av. *Kauii Usan* is a king and warrior while Ved. *Uśanā Kāvya* is a wise priest and a sage. The issue of the ultimate meaning and function of Indo-Iranian **kauuá-/kaví-* ‘sage, expert’ (Av. *kauui-* and Iranian cognates, Ved. *kaví-*)²⁹ lies beyond the scope of the present paper. Which is immediately relevant for our purpose is the role of *Uśanā* in the RV. It occurs mainly in allusions to two narratives, which are sometimes intertwined: the saga of the fight against the demon Śuṣṇa, and the Vala myth.³⁰ The first tale has to be reconstructed from bits and pieces, but its basic content is as follows: Śuṣṇa is a kind of serpent, a Vṛtra-like creature, which Kutsa defeated with the help of Indra, both driving the same chariot; Indra, together with his companion, is welcomed by the sage Uśanā Kāvya, who supports him in this contest with an offering of *soma* drink, and an efficient weapon.³¹ The Vala myth tells the opening of the primeval mountain or cave (*valá-*), enclosing cows and other goods, by Indra (or Bṛhaspati, alternatively Indra supported by Bṛhaspati), with the decisive support of priests and singers, the *Āngiras* (*āngiras-*).³² In addition, Uśanā Kāvya is mentioned as founder of the first sacrifice, together with Atharvan, and as instrumental for establishing Agni as the primeval priest (*hótar-*) of the sacrifice, see especially

RV 1.83.5 *yajñair átharvā prathamāḥ pathás tate, tátah sūryo vratapá vená ájani /*
 á gá ājad usánā kāvyāḥ sácā, yamásya jātám amṛtaṃ yajāmahe //

‘With sacrifices Atharvan first stretched the paths. Thereupon was the sun, the protector of rules, the tracker, born. / Uśanā Kāvya drove the cows together. We sacrifice to the immortal birth of Yama’. (after Jamison-Brereton 2014: 211, slightly modified for the translation of *vratá-*).

RV 8.23.17 *usánā kāvyás tvā, ní hótāram asādayat /*
 āyajīm tvā mánave jātávedasam //

‘Uśanā Kāvya set you [Agni] down as Hotar – you to win (goods) by sacrifice for Manu as Jātavedas.’ (Jamison-Brereton 2014: 1077).

These actions are in accordance with the presence (§ 4) of *Uśan*, alluded to by *usá-dhak*, in passages pertaining to Agni as the kindled fire (7.7.2), pleasant to the gods, at dawn (3.6.7), and to Indra, as victorious over Vṛtra, as killer of the serpent (cobra) Vyāmsa, in a passage which alludes simultaneously to the personified dawns emerging from the night and to the cows liberated from

²⁹ Thoroughly discussed by Brereton (2004: 333-337), Jamison (2007a: 120-148), Köhler (2011).

³⁰ Bergaigne II: 328-341; Jamison 2007a: 131-135.

³¹ Macdonell 1897: 147; Oberlies 2012: 213. See RV 1.51.10-11, 1.121 (stanzas 9-12), 4.16 (stanzas 9-14), 5.29.9, 5.31.8, 5.34.2, 10.22.6.

³² Macdonell 1897: 146; Oberlies 2012: 200-207. See RV 1.83.5, 4.16.2, 8.7.26, 9.87.3.

the darkness of the cave, at dawn (3.34.3). As we have noted above, the hymn 3.34, to Indra, mentions the *uśíj*-priests after *uśá-dhak*, in the immediately following stanza (3.34.4). This can be explained by the occasional substitution³³ of *uśíj*-priests for the *Ángiras* in the telling or recalling of the Vala myth: the symbolic connection is ensured by the notion of the first appearance of light in early morning. Those mythical priests (and possibly poets) are considered as responsible for the original kindling and tending of the fire: they attend on Agni, they install him as priest (*hótar*-) of ritual fire (5.3.4d, 7.10.5a, etc.), and Agni himself is called an *uśíj*- (1.60.4a, 3.2.4c, 3.3.7d, 8b, 3.11.2b, 3.27.10c, 10.45.7a), following the rule, the duty (*vratá*-) of the *uśíj*- (1.128.1b), the sage-poet (*kaví*-) of the fire-priests (10.92.12a). The *uśíjah* belong to the ancient race of the *Bhṛgu*s (*bhṛgu*-, nom. pl. *bhṛgavaḥ*), primeval priests which are connected with the communication of fire to men, and with the first production of fire for the sacrifice.³⁴

§ 8. The noun *uśíj*- itself does not have any internal analysis in Old Indo-Aryan. The translation by ‘fire-priest’ (thus consistently by Jamison-Brereton 2014) does not entail that it contained a lexeme related to ‘fire’. It may have been a title or an epithet of priests, going back to Indo-Iranian, and matching Avestan *usij*- (nom.sg. *usixš* Y. 44.20), which refers to enemies of the religion of *Zarathuštra*. Now, the RVic contexts point to an intriguing relationship between *uśíj*-, *uśánā*- (in the complex name *Uśánā Kāvya*) and finally, as implied by *uśádhak*, **uśán*-, while the latter is matched by Avestan *usan*-, and has been reshaped in Vedic as *uśánā*-.³⁵ One cannot escape the hypothesis that Indo-Iranian **uś-* was a lexeme corresponding to some mythical or ritual notion. It would be rash to suppose that it meant simply ‘fire’ or ‘rite’. In any case, this noun may have had an origin foreign to Indo-Iranian, and featuring two alternative forms. The form **uśan*- is worthy of notice, because it recalls strikingly the form of another *°an*-stem of Indo-Iranian descent, which has been also variously reshaped in Ancient Vedic: the priestly title **karpan*-, known in Old Avestan under the form *karapan*-, designating religious adversaries of *Zarathuštra*, mentioned together with *kauui*- (Y. 46.11) and *usij*- (Y. 44.20). On the RVic side, it occurs under secondary adaptations, as dative sg. *kṛpān-e* (10.99.9b), *kārpān-é* (10.22.10b),³⁶ accusative sg. *kṛpam* (8.3.12c), locative sg. *kṛpe* (8.4.2a), presupposing a nominative sg. **kṛpaḥ*, reshaped from **kṛpā*, on a stem **kṛpan*-.³⁷ This RVic *kṛpan*-/*kārpān*- appears among protégés of Indra, and again in the tale of *Śuśna* where Indra

³³ Noted by Schmidt (1968: 59).

³⁴ Bergaigne II: 307, 322-323; Macdonell 1897: 140; Oberlies 2012: 123.

³⁵ The relation between *uśíj*- and *Uśánā (Kāvya)* has already been hinted at by Bergaigne (II: 341), who stated correctly that the analysis of the two nouns remained obscure. This careful approach was better founded than the routine etymological connection of all these terms to the zero grade *uś-* of the root *vaś-* ‘to wish’, which has been entertained without any semantic control for a long time, see references in KEWAi I: 112, 113, III: 170; EWAia I: 233, 234-235, II: 527.

³⁶ Jamison 2007b: 111-117.

³⁷ Pinault 2019: 160-161. This may entail that **karpan*- had originally or secondarily a paradigm with mobile accent, see Jamison (2007b: 117).

together with Kutsa visits the sage Uśanā.³⁸ It remains impossible to decide which was the basic form, between *uśán- and uśíj-, both inherited from Indo-Iranian. Although the name Ved. *Uśán- remains partly opaque, it reflects certainly a constellation of Indo-Iranian figures which had a significant role in ancient myths, surfacing as stray fragments in our texts.

Bibliographical references and abbreviations

- ARNOLD, E. Vernon. 1905. *Vedic Metre in its historical development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- AVŚ = Atharvaveda, Śaunaka-saṁhitā.
- BERGAIGNE = BERGAIGNE, Abel. 1878-1883. *La religion védique d'après les hymnes du R̥gveda*. 3 vols. Paris : Vieweg (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études. Sciences historiques et philologiques. 36, 53, 54).
- BRERETON, Joel Peter. 2004. « Bráḥman, Brahmán and Sacrificer ». In: A. Griffiths & J.E.M. Houben (eds.), *The Vedas: Texts, Language and Ritual. Proceedings of the Third International Vedic Workshop (Leiden, 29 May – 2 June, 2002)*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten (Groningen Oriental Studies, Vol. XX), 325-344.
- DEBRUNNER, Albert. 1954. *Altindische Grammatik*. II/2: *Die Nominalsuffixe*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- EVP = RENO, Louis. 1955-1969. *Études védiques et pāṇinéennes*. I–XVII. Paris : Institut de Civilisation Indienne.
- EWAia = MAYRHOFER, Manfred. 1986-1996-2001. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*. I–III. Heidelberg: Winter.
- GELDNER = GELDNER, Karl Friedrich. 1951. *Der Rig-Veda. Aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt und mit einem laufenden Kommentar versehen*. 3 vols. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 33–34–35).
- GELDNER, Karl Friedrich. 1907-1909. *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*. 1. Teil: *Glossar*.- 2. Teil: *Kommentar*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- GOTŌ, Toshifumi. 2013. *Old Indo-Aryan morphology and its Indo-Iranian background*. Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- GRASSMANN = Grassmann, Hermann. 1872-1875. *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*. Leipzig : Brockhaus.
- HUMBACH, Helmut. 1991. *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the other Old Avestan texts*. In collaboration with Josef Elfenbein & Prods O. Skjaervø, 2 tomes. Heidelberg: Winter.
- IEW = Pokorny, Julius. 1959. *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern-München: Francke.
- JAMISON, Stephanie W. 2007a. *The Rig Veda between Two Worlds. Four Lectures at the Collège de France, May 2004*. (Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne. Série in-8°, fascicule 74). Paris: Collège de France.
- 2007b. « Vedic Uśanā Kāvya and Avestan Kauui Usan: On the morphology of the names ». In: Alan J. Nussbaum (ed.), *Verba Docenti. Studies in historical and Indo-European linguistics presented to Jay H. Jasanoff*. Ann Arbor–New York: Beech Stave Press, 155-168.
- 2009. « An Indo-Iranian priestly title lurking in the Rig Veda? An Indic equivalent to Avestan karapan ». *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*. New Series, Vol. 23 [Evo şuyadi. Essays in honor of Richard Salomon's 65th birthday], 2009[2013], 111-119.
- JAMISON-BRERETON = JAMISON, Stephanie, and Joel P. BRERETON. 2014. *The Rigveda. The earliest religious poetry of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁸ Jamison 2007b: 114-116.

- JAMISON, Stephanie W. [and BRERETON, Joel P.]. 2020. *Rigveda Translation: Commentary (07-15-20)*. Consulted through: rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu
- KEWAI = MAYRHOFER, Manfred. 1956-1963-1976. *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*. I-III. Heidelberg: Winter.
- KÖHLER, Frank. 2011. *Kāvī im Ṛgveda: Dichtung, Ritual und Schöpfung im frühvedischen Denken*. Aachen: Shaker Verlag.
- LIV² = Rix, Helmut, ed. 2001. *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben. Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstammbildungen*. Zweite, erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage, bearbeitet von Martin Kümmel und Helmut Rix. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- LOMMEL, Hermann. 1939. « Kāvya Uçan ». In: *Mélanges de linguistique offerts à Charles Bally*. Genève : Georg et Cie, S.A., 209-214.
- 1978. *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Klaus L. Janert. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner (Glasenapp-Stiftung, Bd. 16).
- LUDWIG = Ludwig, Alfred. 1876-1888. *Der Rigveda oder die heiligen Hymnen der Brāhmana*. Zum ersten Male ins Deutsche übersetzt und mit Kommentar und Einleitung. 6 volumes. Prag: F. Tempsky.
- LUDWIG, Alfred. 2019 = *Alfred Ludwigs englische Übersetzung des Rigveda (1886-1893)*. Aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlaß hrsg. von Raik Strunk. 1. Teil: Bücher I-V. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz. Studien zur Indologie, Bd. 6).
- MACDONELL, Arthur A. 1897. *Vedic Mythology*. Strassburg: Trübner (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, III. Bd., Heft 1.A).
- MACDONELL, Arthur A. 1910. *Vedic Grammar*. Strassburg: Trübner (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, I. Bd., 4. Heft).
- MACDONELL, Arthur A. – Arthur Berriedale KEITH. 1912. *Vedic index of names and subjects*. 2 vols. London: John Murray (reprint 1958. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass).
- MAYRHOFER, Manfred. 1979. *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*. Bd. I: *Die altiranischen Namen*. Faszikel 1: *Die avestischen Namen*. Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- MW = MONIER-WILLIAMS, Sir Monier. 1899. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- NEISSER, Walter. 1924. *Zum Wörterbuch des Ṛgveda*. Erstes Heft (*a–ausāna*). Leipzig (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, XVI. Band, Nr. 4).
- Noten = Oldenberg, Hermann. 1909-1912. *Ṛgveda. Textkritische und exegetische Noten*.- I. *Erstes bis sechstes Buch*.- II. *Siebtentes bis zehntes Buch*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung (Abhandlungen d. königl. Gesellschaft d. Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Phil.-hist. Klasse. Neue Folge, Bd. XI, Nro. 5 & Bd. XIII, No. 3).
- OBERLIES, Thomas. 2012. *Der Rigveda und seine Religion*. Berlin : Insel.
- PIE = Proto-Indo-European.
- PINAULT, Georges-Jean. 2019. « Back to the source: the Rigvedic name Svārṇar(a)- ». In: P. Vinod Bhattathiripad & Shrikant Bahulkar (eds.) *Living Tradition of Vedas. Proceedings of the International Vedic Workshop (Kozhikode/Calicut, January 7-10, 2014)*. Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corporation, 153-174.
- PW = BÖHTLINGK, Otto & Rudolf von ROTH. 1855-1875. *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. I–VII. St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- RENOU, Louis. 1952. *Grammaire de la langue védique*. Lyon-Paris: IAC.
- RV = Saṁhitā of the Ṛgveda.
- SCARLATA, Salvatore. 1999. *Die Wurzelkomposita im Ṛg-Veda*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- SCHMIDT, Hanns-Peter. 1968. *Bṛhaspati und Indra. Untersuchungen zur vedischen Mythologie und Kulturgeschichte*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- DE VAAN, Michiel. 2003. *The Avestan vowels*. Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi.
- WACKERNAGEL, Jacob. 1905. *Altindische Grammatik*. II/1: *Einleitung zur Wortlehre. Nominalkomposition*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

- WACKERNAGEL, Jacob – Albert DEBRUNNER. 1930. *Altindische Grammatik. III: Nominalflexion – Zahlwort – Pronomen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- WATKINS, Calvert. 1995: *How to Kill a Dragon. Aspects of Indo-European poetics*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- WITZEL/GOTŌ I = Witzel, Michael & Toshifumi Gotō. 2007. *Rig-Veda. Das heilige Wissen. Erster und zweiter Liederkreis*. Aus dem vedischen Sanskrit übersetzt und herausgegeben von M.W. und T.G. unter Mitarbeit von Eijirō Dōyama und Mislav Ježić. Frankfurt a. M.–Leipzig: Verlag der Weltreligionen.
- WITZEL/GOTŌ II = 2013. *Rig-Veda. Das heilige Wissen. Dritter bis fünfter Liederkreis*. Aus dem vedischen Sanskrit übersetzt und herausgegeben von Michael Witzel (Buch III), Toshifumi Gotō (Buch IV) und Salvatore Scarlata (Buch V). Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen.

[Paris, October 27, 2022]