

## A Golden Amulet in Vedic and Avestan<sup>1</sup>

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I offer this small token in memory of Hanns-Peter Schmidt, whose scholarship was a model of textually engaged and imaginative philology and who often pursued the tracks of birds and beasts through Indo-Irania.

The Indra hymn Rig Veda I.33 immediately follows the famous Indra-Vṛtra hymn I.32 and is attributed to the same poet, Hiraṇyastūpa Āngirasa. However, I.33 is as unsung as I.32 is “sung” -- undeservedly so, for it is a finely crafted and striking hymn, with a focus on the human in sharp distinction to I.32. In its middle vss. (4–10ab) it particularly concerns the struggle between two human moities, the sacrificers and the non-sacrificers, with Indra coming to the aid of the former, not surprisingly. I will treat today a single phrase in one of these middle verses, vs. 8, and show that comparison with a near-cognate expression in Avestan enables a satisfying interpretation of what had been a puzzling locution.

The verse in question is the following, followed by my published translation (Jamison-Brereton 2014, ad loc.):

RV I.33.8 *cakrāṅśaḥ pariṅáham pṛthivyā́, hiraṇyena maṇínā́ súmbhamānāḥ |*  
*ná hinvā́śas titirus tá índram, pári spáśo adadhāt sūryeṇa ||*

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<sup>1</sup>-My thanks to Diego Loukata, Jesse Lundquist, Prods Oktor Skaervø, and Elizabeth Tucker for careful reading and valuable suggestions. It has also benefitted from discussion when presented at the American Oriental Society (Pittsburgh, March 2018) and the East Coast Indo-European Conference (Ann Arbor, June 2018). Errors and infelicities are, of course, my own.”

Having made for themselves a girdle from the earth, adorning themselves with a golden amulet, (though) urging themselves on, they did not overtake Indra. He clothed his spies with the sun.

In the preceding and following verses the enemies and allies of Indra get treated in implicitly contrastive fashion within the same verse. Here, in my view, the first three pādas concern the enemies, who despite their best efforts did not overcome Indra, while the last pāda concerns his friends and clients, who receive a raiment of sunlight from the god.

Three of the four pādas (ab, d) cast the struggle in the terms of personal adornment, with each expressing a powerful metaphor. The last pāda contains the rare lexeme *pāri* √*dhā*, lit. ‘put around’, which is almost exclusively found in the specialized sense of ‘clothe’. Here Indra “clothed (his) spies with the sun”; since sunlight, especially the ability to see it, often betokens continued life, this is a happy outcome of the battle for Indra’s “spies.” The other two adornment pādas are less immediately clear, the first because the voice of the participle has been consistently misinterpreted, the second because the referent of the item of adornment is uncertain.

To begin with pāda a, *cakrāṅśaḥ parīṅāham pṛthivyāḥ*, this expression has generally been interpreted as something that the subjects do to the earth, essentially “wrapping it up,” as Geldner’s “Sie hatten die Einhüllung der Erde bewirkt ...,” which he further specifies as “Verdunkelung” -- darkening or obscuring it. (Similar Schmidt 1968: 209, Scarlatta 1999: 283, Witzel-Gotō 2007 ad loc.) But this ignores the middle voice of the participle, a morphological fact that, if we take it seriously, should mean that the combatants did or made something for themselves.<sup>2</sup> This same middle participle is found in a clear clothing context in VIII.14.5 *cakrāṅā opaśaṃ divī* “creating for himself a headdress in heaven.”<sup>3</sup> Assuming the same general idiom here, Indra’s foes must have made a *parīṅāh-* for themselves from/out of the earth -- a cloak, coverlet, or other covering.<sup>4</sup> As a metaphor this must mean — in my view — that they have fallen in battle and died and are now covered over with earth. For a similar clothing motif indicating burial, see vs. 11 in the funeral hymn X.18 *mātā putrāṃ yāthā sicā bhy eṇam bhūma ūṛnuhi* “Like a mother her son with her hem, cover him, o Earth.”<sup>5</sup> The clothing images in pādas a and d frame the verse within a balanced opposition.

Pāda b is grammatically and lexically unproblematic: *hiraṇyena maṇīnā śumbhamānāḥ* “adorning themselves with a golden amulet” (essentially identical Geldner, Scarlatta, Witzel-Gotō, with somewhat different renderings of the *maṇī-* word),<sup>6</sup> an interpretation already reflected by Sāyaṇa’s gloss: *hiraṇyena*

2- Or were made into something, in the passive.

Renou (1969: 13) does register the middle, translating “S’étant fait une bâche [awning, tarpaulin] de la terre,” but I have some trouble interpreting his meaning here.

3- Cf. I.173.6 *bhārti ... opaśam iva dyām* “He [=Indra] bears/wears heaven like a headdress.”

4- On *parīṅāh-* see Jamison 1997. In that short article the only Vedic occurrence of the word I found puzzling was in this vs., RV I.33.8, because I then subscribed to the Geldner (etc.) interpretation. I would now emend my published translation (in Jamison-Brereton 2014) to “having made for themselves a coverlet from the earth.”

For a similar image, though with very different lexical realization, see III.32.11 *sphigya kṣām āvaśthāḥ* “you wore the earth on your hip.” This passage is likewise generally interpreted as “you covered the earth with your hip,” but proper attention to the standard uses of the medial root pres. of √*vas* makes that interpretation impossible.

5- Somewhat similar is I.174.7 *kṣām dāsāyopabārhaṇīm kaḥ* “He has made the earth a pillow for the Dāsa,” which must ironically depict the earth as a comfortable resting place for a dead enemy.

6- Geldner “Zaubergehenk,” Scarlatta “Schmuck,” Witzel-Gotō “Halsschmuck.” Once again Renou goes slightly his own way: “se parant d’or (et) de joyau(x),” taking *hiraṇyena maṇīnā* as a conjoined NP, a tack followed by Gonda (1991: 34).

*hiranyayuktena mañinā kaṇṭhabāhvādigatena maṇyādyābhareṇa śumbhamānāḥ śobhamānāḥ.* But what is its purport in this context? This attention to personal adornment seems out of place in the desperate battle context in which the subjects find themselves, but it has attracted almost no comment. Geldner translates *mañi-* as “Zaubergehenk” -- something like a magical sword-belt -- and suggests (n. 8b) that it allows them to see in the dark, like a miner’s headlamp or a little flashlight! (followed by Witzel-Gotō in their n., where Zaubergehenk substitutes for the Halsschmuck in their translation). Frankly, this is pretty ludicrous. There is otherwise silence on this curious detail.

Comparison with an isolated Avestan compound will cast light on this problem. Younger Avestan attests a *bahuvrīhi* *zarənu-maini-* ‘having a golden amulet / neck ornament’<sup>7</sup> with almost exactly equivalent parts to our phrase,<sup>8</sup> found in Yt. 14.33 (Yt. 16.13). It characterizes a bird of prey (*kahrkāsa-*) with keen eyesight that zeros in on a piece of bloody meat from far away:

Yt. 14.33 ... *aomca sūkəm yim baraiti kahrkāsō zarənumainiš yō naomiiācit haca daiṛjhaot mušti.masarḥəm xrūm aiβi.vaēnaiti ...*

(And Vərəθraϥna gave him ...) the sight that he bears -- (that of) the vulture having a golden neck ornament that from nine lands away sees a bloody piece of meat the size of a fist ...

The Persian (/Southwestern) branch of Iranian attests an apparent exact cognate in Zoroastrian Pahlavi and NPersian *dālman*, also the name of a bird of prey. The equation was first made by Bailey (1943: 137, 230; repeated in 1958: 45<sup>9</sup>). The word shows the characteristic SWIranian development of PIran. \**z* to *d* (as in OP *daraniya-* = Aves. *zarañiia-* = Ved. *hiraṇya-* ‘gold’), as well as a posited \**arn* > MPers. *āl*.<sup>10</sup> The use of this compounded descriptive phrase as a bird’s name in two branches of Iranian is striking.

7- On amulet versus neck ornament, see below. The interpretations of *zarənu-maini-* are remarkably consistent (though see next n.): Darmesteter (1892–93: vol. II.569–70) ‘au collier d’or’, Bartholomae (1904 s.v. *zarənu-manay-*) ‘mit goldenem Hals-/schmuck’, Lommel (1927 ad loc.) ‘id.’

8- Although both parts of the equation have been subject to occasional doubts. On doubts about Aves. *-maini-* = Skt. *mañi-* see below. For an alternative interpretation of *zarənu-*, see Darmesteter’s n. 43 to this passage (op. cit.; sim. Bartholomae), citing the Bundahišn’s interpretation connecting it to the ‘old’ words. But Mayrhofer (1960: 143–44 n. 60) cites Altheim-Stiehl (1959: 77 n. 11) for Elamite *ša-ir-nu-* as confirming the ‘golden’ sense. See also Tavernier 2007: p. 370, nos. 4.2.2052–53 (under personal names). However, Elizabeth Tucker (p.c.) warns me that all these invocations of the Elamite evidence are essentially circular because they use the Aves. word to interpret the ambiguous Elamite spellings.

9- The latter publication caught Mayrhofer’s eye, and this additional comparandum was cited and enthusiastically accepted by Mayrhofer in numerous publications (1959: 92 n. 73; 1960: 143 n. 60; KEWA [vol. 2, 1963] s.v. *mañih*; 1974: 289 [=1979: 163]; EWA [fasc. 14, 1993] s.v. *mañi-*). See also the extensive discussion in the 1972 Würzburg dissertation of Ulrich Schapka, no. 316, pp. 92–93. (I owe this last reference to Prods Oktor Skjaervø.)

10- See the discussion by Schapka cited in the last note.

The particular bird in question has long been at least tentatively identified as the Lammergeier or Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*),<sup>11</sup> and this identification seems eminently reasonable.<sup>12</sup> Its geographical range is well within the ancient Iranian ambit, especially concentrated in high mountains, and it is an impressively large and noticeable creature, up to four feet tall with an astonishing wingspan that can reach beyond nine feet. It is a scavenger, eating mostly marrow from bones, and “these birds rely heavily on excellent eyesight to locate carcasses” (Encycl. of Life online; see the Avestan passage just cited). But the feature that seems to clinch the identification is the fact that their neck and underbody are “a rich rusty orange” (Vulture Conservation Foundation, website). A curious factoid about this color, which may nonetheless be philologically relevant: it is not natural; the feathers in question are naturally white. But the bird bathes in waters rich in iron oxide or rolls around in soil impregnated with iron oxide and then preens its feathers to spread the color, which is, judging from the many pictures online, more often yellowish-orange than red, a good approximation to “golden.” Again, judging from online pictures, the color is generally concentrated under the chin and down the body, where a neck ornament or amulet would be most in place. If the ancient Iranians (/Indo-Iranians) were aware that the bearded vulture’s striking color was not inborn but deliberately self-created -- and my regular assumption in investigating the intersections between ancient texts and natural history is that the ancients were keen observers of nature -- then calling its golden neck and breast a “neck-ornament” or an “amulet” would be especially appropriate, as a bodily feature that the bird put on itself, as it were, derived from an external source.

The equation between the Iranian bahuvrīhi *zarānu-maini-* and the Vedic noun phrase *hīranyena maṇinā* was made long ago by Mayrhofer (1959: 92 n. 73) and repeated regularly (esp. by him: KEWA s.v. *maṇih*, EWA, s.v. *maṇi-*),<sup>13</sup> but, as far as I can tell, it hasn’t gone further than the bare equation. Mayrhofer’s original treatment assembled a number of phrasal instantiations of “golden neck-ornament” not only in Vedic, but also in Germanic and Latin, but did not further pursue them in the texts. Most of his citations refer to actual neck ornaments,<sup>14</sup> not to the developed Iranian sense of a bird with such a figurative ornament. He made no attempt to connect the Avestan usage, the reference to a scavenging bird (supported by Pahlavi and NPers *dālman* ‘eagle’), to his comparanda.

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- 11- Darmesteter (1892–93: 570 n. 43): “Le gypaète ou vautour doré (?); Bartholomae s.v. “Es könnte der Bartgeier damit gemeint sein.” Bailey in his 1958 article glosses *dālman* as ‘eagle’, but with no discussion of its attestations or contexts. Schapka glosses Pers. *dāl* as “‘Adler’ ... auch ‘Geier’”; Mackenzie (1971 s.v. *dālman*) ‘lammergeyer, eagle’.
- 12- Information on the Bearded Vulture has been aggregated from various natural history websites (all accessed January 2018), including  
 Wikipedia (“Bearded vulture”): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bearded\\_vulture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bearded_vulture)  
 Arkive: <https://www.arkive.org/lammergeier/gypaetus-barbatus/>  
 Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/pages/914578/details>  
 Earthtouch news: <https://www.earthtouchnews.com/natural-world/animal-behaviour/why-do-bone-eating-bearded-vultures-stain-their-feathers-rusty-red/>  
 Vulture Conservation Society: <https://www.4vultures.org/vultures/bearded-vulture/> Mental floss: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/58253/11-facts-about-bone-eating-bearded-vulture>
- 13- In a short 1974 article Mayrhofer added another comparandum for *\*mani-* ‘neck ornament’, a proposed Old Persian form *\*bara-mani-* ‘Halsband tragend’ preserved indirectly in the Elamite Nebenüberlieferung.
- 14- The ‘neck ornament’ correspondents include Lat. *monile* ‘Halsband’; ONorse *men*, OEng *mene* ‘Halsgeschmeide’. Cf. also Hitt. *mannin(n)i-* ‘necklace’, probably borrowed from Hurrian *maninni-*, in turn quite likely an Indo-Aryan borrowing into Hurrian. (See Puhvel 1984: 52.)

This is what I aim to do here. I will claim that the “golden amulet” of the Rigvedic passage is not, as all commentators and translators have taken it, an actual amulet or ornament, but a reference to the same type of bird of prey found in the Iranian compounds. If we plug the scavenger bird of Avestan into the RV I.33.8 passage with its battle context, we get a very powerful metaphor: the golden amulet is a vulture, and “adorning oneself with a golden amulet” equals “being set upon by a big bird of prey,” which, as it scavenges one’s body, is fixed on one’s (dead) breast like an ornament. Like the first pāda with the “coverlet of the earth” for the dead man, the image is shot through with black-comic irony. The “adornment” of the men’s bodies is actually a fierce and pitiless creature tearing up their bodies for its food. The irony is especially pointed because an amulet is supposed to be protective, but this particular amulet is quite the reverse.

To support my claim, there are three issues I need to address: 1) Is Vedic *mañi-* really the equivalent of Avestan *maini-*? What about the retroflex *ṇ*? 2) Is it a neck ornament or an amulet or, as in later Indo-Aryan, a jewel, and does it matter? 3) If it really refers to a bird that possesses a (figurative) amulet, not the amulet itself, why do we not have a bahuvrīhi *\*hīraṇya-maṇi-* like the Iranian forms in the RV passage? All of these can be dealt with fairly briskly, and, as it turns out, 1) and 2) are connected.

Wackernagel (AiG I.194) attributes the retroflex *ṇ* to Middle Indic influence, the rule whereby a single intervocalic *n* quite commonly becomes *ṇ* in MIA (see, e.g., von Hinüber 2001: 169–71), and Mayrhofer in all his discussions of the forms strenuously upholds this view (see esp. 1959: 92 n. 73 in detail), which seems now generally accepted (see, e.g., Lubotsky 1988: 32). The assumption of a Prakritic development in this word seems reasonable on grounds of its domain of usage, even though it is already attested in the RV. The extensive use of *mañi-* in the Atharva Veda in “magical”-type practices (discussed immediately below) suggests that it belongs to a lower speech register than the standard Rigvedic lexicon and could have already undergone Middle Indic influence. As Mayrhofer makes clear (see especially the work just cited as well as the smaller print in KEWA s.v. *mañih*), it is not as if there are other appealing etymological alternatives,<sup>15</sup> so the Prakritic retroflexion seems the best explanation, especially given the Iranian-Vedic phrasal equation. Moreover, assuming an original *\*mañi-* with dental *-n-* allows the word to be connected to *manā-* in RV VIII.78.2, with dental nasal, referring to a part of a dakṣiṇā (priestly gift) that is likewise golden, in a phrase (*manā hiraṇyāyā*) that can well mean “with a golden (neck) ornament”; and it allows further connection to the Indo-Iranian (and Indo-European) ‘neck-ornament’ words mentioned above and discussed at length by Mayrhofer.<sup>16</sup>

15- MIA developments of *\*mṛṇi* or *\*mṇi* would account more easily for the retroflex *ṇ*, but appropriate PIE (or PIIr) roots *\*mer* or *\*mel* (bzw. *\*mar*/*\*mal*) are lacking. Mayrhofer cites Kuiper as suggesting a Munda origin (1955: 153–54), but by 1967 Kuiper identified *mañi-* as an inherited word with a puzzling retroflex *ṇ* (1967: 86 and n. 27), and it is not mentioned in his collection of borrowed words in the misleadingly titled *Aryans in the Rigveda* (1991).

16- On the derivational relationship between a putative *\*neck* and the neck ornament words, see the speculative suggestion of Schindler apud Mayrhofer 1974: 164 n. 13, repeated in EWA s.v. *mañi-*. I will not pursue this further here.

As just discussed, the Iranian and Indo-European words related to our *mañi-* seem to refer to something worn on the neck; in later Sanskrit and in Middle (and Modern) Indic *mañi-* generally means ‘jewel, gem’ (see Turner 1965, s.v. *mañi-*<sup>17</sup>; PTSD s.v. *mañi-*; etc.), frequently encountered even by non-Sanskritists in the famous Buddhist mantra *oṃ mañipadme hum*. And in I.33.8 I render the word as ‘amulet’. Which is it and how can we tell? We should first note that even in the RV the word is associated with the neck: in its only other occurrence it forms a bahuvrīhi with ‘neck’, *mañi-grīva-*<sup>17</sup> ‘having an ornamented neck, having a neck with an ornament on it’ (of the type *vájra-bāhu-* ‘mace-armed, having an arm with a mace in it’), so the etymological link with the ‘neck’ and ‘neck ornament’ words seems secure.

But our interpretation of the word in Vedic should be informed by the most extensive set of attestations of it in Vedic, namely those in the Atharva Veda. The word is extremely common in both Śaunaka and Paippalāda, and whole hymns are dedicated to particular *mañi-*s, e.g., AVŚ III.5 [=~ AVP III.13], AVŚ VIII.5 [= AVP XVI.27], AVŚ X.6 [= AVP XVI.42], including several exclusive to AVP (II.89 [see Zehnder 1999: 195–99], VII.5 [Griffiths 2009: 297–305]). Although it is clear from the AV occurrences that a *mañi-* is something one wears (e.g., AVŚ II.4.1 *bibhṛmah*, AVŚ VIII.5.12 *yó bíbhartīmáñ mañim*) and that is bound on ( $\sqrt{\text{bandh}}$ , e.g., AVŚ I.29.4, AVŚ III.5.8, AVŚ VIII.5.1 -- the place being once specified as “on the breast” [*úrasī*] AVŚ X.3.11), its primary purpose is not decorative, but rather protective and defensive against enemies, haters, and witchcraft, inter alia. See, e.g., AVP VII.5.6 ... *kṛtyādūṣiḥ sapatnahā ... viśvabheṣajaḥ ... mañiḥ* “... a witchcraft-spoiling slayer of rivals, all-healing ... amulet”; AVP VII.5.12 *āchedanaḥ prachedano dviṣatas tapano mañiḥ / \*śatruñjayaḥ sapatnahā dviṣantam apa bādhatām* “[It is] an amulet that cuts off, that rends, that scorches the one who hates [its wearer], that conquers the enemy, that slays the rival: let it drive away the one who hates [its wearer]” (both tr. Griffiths). These amulets are generally made of humble materials like grass or wood (e.g., *parṇa*-wood AVŚ III.5, probably *aśvattha*-wood AVP VII.5 [see Griffiths 2009: 297]), not jewels, though they are often called ‘golden’ (e.g., AVŚ X.3.3, AVP VII.5.1, 3, 7) whether or not the metal is meant (see Gonda 1991: 32–33). Although the occurrence in RV I.33.8 could simply refer to an ornamental neckpiece or the like, in a battle context it seems reasonable that the combatants would be wearing protective amulets -- fully developing the irony I mentioned above, of the figurative *mañi-*, the scavenger bird, destroying the body it is “decorating” and supposedly protecting.

I think it likely that the Indo-Iranian sense of the word was simply ‘neck-ornament’, but that in early Vedic it had developed the ‘amulet’ sense -- that is, something hung around the neck to which magical protective powers were attributed -- and this is the sense found in the RV and AV. The ‘jewel’ sense found in later Sanskrit and in Middle Indic can be an independent development from ‘neck ornament’, since such ornaments were

17- The word is transmitted without accent, monstrously in the view of Oldenberg (*Noten*, ad loc.). It modifies *árṇaḥ* ‘flood’, with the ‘flood’ referring to a metaphorical flood — a large seething herd of cattle that constitute a dakṣiṇā — and it immediately follows the bahuvrīhi *híraṇya-karṇa-* ‘golden eared’. I therefore wonder if the phrase *híraṇyakarṇam mañigrīvam* actually represents a dvandva consisting of two bahuvrīhis (‘possessing golden ears and ornamented necks’), which could account for the single accent. The geminate *m* across the compound boundary (*-karṇam mañi-*) might have been redactionally introduced from *\*-karṇa-maṇi-*. A dvandva of this type would be highly unusual, indeed unprecedented as far as I know, in the RV, but would not pose too much interpretational challenge. Note in passing that the first members of the two compounds *híraṇya-* and *mañi-* are the constituents of our phrase in I.33.8.

presumably often strung or hung on strings, or can have lost the magical connotations found in early Vedic.<sup>18</sup>

The last question -- why do we not have a bahuvrīhi rather than a phrasal expression? -- can be the most easily answered -- with the single word “poetics.” I assume that the bahuvrīhi descriptor “having a golden neck ornament/amulet” for a bearded vulture was pan-Indo-Iranian, as the independent attestations of the bird name in two branches of Iranian suggest, and that the Rigvedic audience would easily recognize the bird behind the name. This shared knowledge of the common name of the bird give the Rigvedic poet the liberty to play with it -- and he took the description back to its foundations. A formulation “adorning themselves with (something) that possesses a golden amulet (i.e., a scavenger bird)” would have been flatfooted and overly literal; to make the amulet stand for the bird (pars pro toto, as it were) is a bold poetic move and emphasizes the horror of the dead warriors’ “adornment.”

As far as I know, this is the sole example of this image in Vedic (though I have hardly combed the literature looking for it), and it occupies just a single Triṣṭubh pāda in the RV. However, similar images of animals scavenging dead bodies on the battlefield are common in the Sanskrit epic.<sup>19</sup> The most sustained example I know of is in the Strī Parvan of the Mahābhārata (XI):<sup>20</sup> the terrible vision that Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s wife Gāndhārī sees with her divine eye (*divyena cakṣuṣā* MBh XI.16.1) -- remember that she has been blindfolded through the whole epic and remains so -- of the battlefield strewn with corpses at the end of the final battle (XI.16–25). It is a one-note description and more powerful for its obsessive repetitiveness: again and again she returns to the bodies being torn apart and eaten by vultures, jackals, and other such animals, as in

MBh XI.16.27 *tān suparnās ca ṛdhrās ca niṣkarṣanty asṛgukṣitān  
nighrya kavaceṣūgrā bhakṣayanti sahasraśaḥ*

18- Diego Loukata (p.c., email 2/14/18) suggests to me that both senses of *maṇi*, amulet and jewel, may have continued to coexist for some time. “The impression I get is that in the early centuries AD, the word *maṇi* may have still had a double usage: on the one hand, the auspicious/apotropaic/supernatural ‘amulet’, and on the other the generic and commercial ‘gem’, of course with significant overlap between the two. This is clearest in the *Arthaśāstra*: the *maṇis* in 14.4.11-12 are clearly apotropaic concoctions made with different ingredients that include woods (the *aśvattha* comes up again), spices, and foodstuffs, but then in 2.11.28-36 you get a description of *maṇis* that designate unequivocally precious and semiprecious stones (separate from *vajra*=diamond) carved in different ways (btw., 2.11.21-26, right above this passage, suggests that a technical sense of *maṇi* is ‘gem at the center of a necklace’). The Chinese in their Buddhist translations rendered *maṇi* mostly in two ways: either with their word for ‘pearl’, or else with a phonetic rendering of the Indic word, which is an unusual treatment reserved for items for which no adequate cultural equivalent was felt to be found, presumably here a gem/jewel with apotropaic qualities (the Chinese have their own amulets, of course, but I get the impression that a central feature of those is the written charm/petition on ritual paper). What you find most often in Buddhist literature is the wish-granting *cintāmaṇi*, which in China eventually came to be visualized, of all things, as a bejewelled back-scratcher!”

19- And elsewhere, of course. The prime representative of early Indo-European epic, the Iliad, presents us at the very beginning with an image of dogs and birds preying on the dead at the end of the Trojan War (1.4–5), and scavenging dogs and vultures on the battlefield recur in the text (e.g., 2.393, 4.237, 17.241, 18.271). For a recent detailed discussion of birds in the Iliad, including these scavengers, with ornithological commentary, see the 2012 dissertation of Karin Johansson, a reference I owed to Jesse Lundquist. Inter alia, she argues that the αἰγυπιός is properly identified as the Lammergeier.

20- Besides the passages cited in the text, cf. in the Strī Parvan XI.16.7–8, 10, 24; 17.13; 18.4; 19.3–4, etc. And scenes of scavenging animals regularly represent the aftermath of battles elsewhere in the epic. E.g., in the Droṇa Parvan MBh VII.20.37, 29.40, 31.76, 48.47, 48.51; in the Rāmāyaṇa Yuddhakāṇḍa, R VI.26.24, 31.11, 33.44, 46.25–28. Many more such passages could be collected.

Eagles and vultures tear them apart -- those wet with blood;  
the terrible ones, grasping onto their armor, eat them by the thousands (/in a thousand pieces?).

... .29 *grdhrakaṅkabaḍaśyenaśvasṛgālādanīkṛtān*

... them, made food for vultures, herons, ?, falcons, dogs, and jackals.

And in this long account we find a description that resonates especially with our Rigvedic passage. Gāndhārī contrasts the luxurious lives the warriors led previously, with beds to lie in and costly cosmetics on their bodies, with their current state:

MBh XI.16.33 *ye purā śerate vīrāḥ śayaneṣu yaśasvinaḥ*  
*candanāgurudigdhāṅgās te 'dya pāmsuṣu śerate*  
.34 *teṣām ābhāraṇāny ete grdhragomāyuvāyasaḥ*

Those glorious heroes who previously lay in beds, their limbs smeared with sandalwood paste and aloe. Today they lie in the dust.

Their ornaments are vultures, jackals, and crows.

The vulture as golden amulet adorning the dead warrior in RV I.33.8 is here represented by a whole host of scavenging animals serving as ornaments for the slain.<sup>21</sup>

As was noted extensively above, the equation of the Vedic phrase with the Iranian compounds is not new. But my interpretation of the “golden amulet” phrase in RV I.33.8 not only strengthens the lexico-phrasal equation, but also provides a third witness to the real-world referent already identified in the two Iranian branches. This intersection of poetics and natural history -- naming a bird after its metaphorical adornment -- takes us back into Proto-Indo-Iranian and adds another small item to the dossier of shared Indo-Iranian poetic phraseology.

21- Note in passing that the word for ‘ornament’ here, *ābhāraṇa-*, is also found in Sāyana’s gloss of the Rigvedic passage.

Another passage in which the scavengers are configured as decoration is MBh VII.31.18 *grdhrapatrādhivāsāṃsi śayanāni narādhipāḥ, ... adhiśerate* “The lords of men lay upon beds with coverlets of vulture feathers.”

At ECIEC (June 2018) Yaroslav Gorbachov adduced a strikingly similar passage from the Old Russian “Tale of Igor’s Campaign” (“Slovo o polku Igorevě”), composed in, or shortly after, 1185:

(489) *družinu tvoju, knjaže,*  
retinue.ACC your.ACC, o Prince  
(490) *ptic' krily priodě,*  
bird.COLL wing.INSTR.PL dress.3SG.AOR  
(491) *a zvěri krov' polizaša*  
and beasts blood.ACC. lick.3SG.AOR.

“Birds dressed/covered/adorned your warriors with wings, o Prince, and (wild) beasts licked (their) blood.”

(According to Sreznevsky (*Materialy dlja slovarja drevnerusskago jazyka*, vol. 2., pp. 91–92), Old Russ. *prioděti* means both ‘to cover’ and ‘to adorn’.)

I am grateful to Slava for this lovely parallel.



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