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The Indo-Iranian root *stig-.

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Citation

Lubotsky, A. M. (2008). The Indo-Iranian root *stig-. In R. M. Kulikov L.I. (Ed.), *Indologica. T. Ya. Elizarenkova Memorial Volume, Book 1* (pp. 305-313). Moscow: RGGU. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14204>

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Russian
State University
for the Humanities

●**Orientalia**
et**Classica**
Papers of the Institute of Oriental
and Classical Studies

Issue XX

INDOLOGICA

T. Ya. Elizarenkova
Memorial Volume

Book 1

Compiled and edited by
L. Kulikov, M. Rusanov

Moscow
2008

Российский
государственный гуманитарный
университет

● **Orientalia**
etClassica

Труды Института восточных культур
и античности

Выпуск XX

INDOLOGICA

Сборник статей памяти
Т. Я. Елизаренковой

Книга 1

Составители:
Л. Куликов, М. Русанов

Москва
2008



Татъяна Яковлевна Елизаренкова (1929–2007)

Содержание

Предисловие	5
Preface	7
Вяч. Вc. Иванов (Москва–Los Angeles). Путь Т. Я.Елизаренковой в индологии	9
Список научных трудов Татьяны Яковлевны Елизаренковой	21
В. Н. Топоров. Сарасвати — река, речь, красноречие	39
В. М. Алпатов (Москва). Иван Павлович Минаев как языковед	63
М. С. Андронов. (Москва). Из заметок о тамильской фонетике	71
H. Bodewitz (Utrecht). The Refrain <i>kásmai devāya havíṣā vidhema</i> (RV 10, 121)	79
H. Falk (Berlin). The Solar Year in the Gavāmayana of the Nidānasūtra	99
T. Gotō (Sendai). Reisekarren und das Wohnen in der Hütte: <i>śālām as</i> im Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa	115
J. C. Heesterman (Leiden). The Epic Paragon of <i>dharma</i>	127
Вяч. Вc. Иванов (Москва–Los Angeles). К исследованию письменности Хараппы	141
S. Jamison (Los Angeles). Women's Language in the Rig Veda?	153
J. Klein (Athens, Georgia, USA). Adverbial Repetition in the Rigveda	167
W. Knobl (Kyoto). Conspicuous Absence. A New Case of Intended Metrical Irregularity: The Catalectic Line RV 10.129.7b	183
A. И. Коган (Москва). О статусе и происхождении звонкой придыхательной серии в ряде дардских языков	197
F. Kortlandt (Leiden). The Origin of the Indo-Iranian Desiderative	227
T. Krisch (Salzburg). Das neue Rigvedawörterbuch RIVELEX und die Bedeutung Tat'jana Elizarenkovas für das Projekt	231
L. I. Kulikov (Leiden). The Vedic Causative <i>saṁkhyāpáyati</i> / <i>saṁkṣāpáyati</i> Reconsidered	245
R. Lazzeroni (Pisa). Alternanza causativa e classi di presente in vedico: Contributo alla soluzione dell' "enigma" di Kuiper	263
Н. Р. Лидова (Москва). Царь и жрец в традиции Натьяшастры	273
В. П. Липеровский (Москва). Выражение в языке хинди квантитативной сегментации объектов на основе их исчисления в единицах измерения (мерах)	293
A. Lubotsky (Leiden). The Indo-Iranian Root <i>stig-</i>	305

Chr. Minkowski (Oxford). Meanings Numerous and Numerical: Nīlakaṇṭha and Magic Squares in the R̥gveda	315
С. Л. Невелева (С.-Петербург). Эпические риши (по данным Махабхараты)	329
G.-J. Pinault (Paris). About the Slaying of Soma: Uncovering the Rigvedic Witness	353
Н. И. Пригарина (Москва). Красота Йусуфа в зеркалах персидской поэзии и миниатюрной живописи	389
В. Н. Романов (Москва). О медитативном значении глагола <i>upa-ās</i> (к жанровой эволюции брахманической прозы)	419
М. А. Русанов (Москва). Нагарджуна и Пашупата в пракритском романе «Лилаваи»	435
С. Д. Серебряный (Москва). Строфа о «Бхагавад-гите» в «Нараянии» Меппаттура Нараяны Бхаттатири (XVI–XVII вв.)	449
Г. В. Стрелкова (Москва). Вепрь и котёнок. Метафоры в романе Хазари Прасада Двиведи «Автобиография Банабхаты»	459
E. Tichy (Freiburg). Mit dem Tag im Bunde: Vedisch <i>jyók</i> und lateinisch <i>diū, iūgis</i>	479
А. А. Вигасин (Москва). «Великие» и «малые» в надписях Ашоки	493
C. Wright (London). R̥gvedic <i>grāvan, úsri, and kṣíp</i>	501

The Indo-Iranian Root **stigh-*

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1. The Sanskrit root *stigh-* was identified by Leopold von Schroeder in two passages of the Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā, and he reported about this discovery in an article, published in ZDMG in 1879¹. The root was later included by Otto Böhtlingk in his “Sanskrit-Wörterbuch in kürzerer Fassung” (1879–1889) and from there it found its way into all our dictionaries. Böhtlingk gives the meaning of the verb as ‘+*ati* übersteigen; +*pra* emporsteigen’, Monier-Williams as ‘to step, stride, step up, mount (esp. in *ati-√stigh*, ‘to step over, overstep’, and in *pra-√stigh*, ‘to step up, rise up &c.’)’. Mayrhofer (EWAia) glosses the root with ‘schreiten, steigen, treten’. Neither the form nor the meaning of the root are assured, however, and new evidence from the Paippalāda-Saṃhitā of the Atharvaveda, for which see below, requires a reassessment of the facts.

Verbal forms of the root *stigh-* were thought to be attested five times in the MS. At MS 1.6.3:89.9, the edition presents a desiderative participle *atitīṣṭighiṣan* (nom.sg.)² and an infinitive *atīṣṭīgham*, while at MS 2.1.12:13.18–14.7 it presents pres. opt. *prastiñnuyāt* (2 times) and 3sg. pres. *prāstiñnoti*. Von Schroeder records various readings for all these forms:

1.6.3:89.9 *atitīṣṭighiṣann atīṣṭīgham*: “So meine Correctur, die Handschriften schwanken; M 1 u. 2 *atīṣṭīḡiṣamnn atīṣṭīgham*; B *atīṣṭīḡiṣamnn atīṣṭīghann*°; H *atīṣṭīḡiṣam tiṣṭīghann*°; Bb *atitīṣṭīḡiṣam tiṣṭīghann*°; s. meine Abhdlg. Ztschr. DMG. XXXIII S. 195”

2.1.12:13.18 *prastiñnuyād*: “So das Verb in Hg (u. A); in W *prastiñnayād*°; M3 *prastyāñnuyād*°; cf. meine Abhandlung ZDMG. XXXIII, S. 194 u. 195; Dhātup. 27,18; Maitr. S. 1,6,3 a.A.”

2.1.12:14.4 *prastiñnuyāt*: “W *prastignuyāt*; M3 *prāstyāñnuyāt*”

2.1.12:14.5 *prāstiñnoti*: “W *prāstignoti*; M3 *prāstiññnoti*”

Despite minor variations, the manuscripts are unanimous as far as the form of the root is concerned: it is obvious that the root underlying the attested forms is

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Arlo Griffiths and Werner Knobl for valuable comments on an earlier version of the article.

² The accentuation of this form must be emended to **atitīṣṭighiṣan* (Werba 1997: 258 nr. 227), since the desideratives in Vedic are accented on the reduplication syllable.

stig- and not *stigh-*. The main reason why von Schroeder emended the text is that the Dhātupāṭha (27.18) contains a root *stigh-* with the gloss *āskandane* ‘to assault’, which he etymologically connected with Gr. *στείχω* ‘to march, mount’, OHG *stīgan* ‘to mount, ascend’, etc., cf. von Schroeder 1879: 194f.

2. Etymological considerations were instrumental in determining the meaning of the root, too. Whereas von Schroeder translated the root ‘angreifen’ (for MS 2.1.12), ‘bemeistern’ (for MS 1.6.3) in accordance with the Dhātupāṭha, later scholarship switched to the etymological meaning ‘to stride, mount’. Let us now take an unbiased look at the MS passages (the text is given as it appears in von Schroeder’s edition).

MS 1.6.3 (89.8–11): *prajāpatiṛ vā idāṃ āgra āsīt. tāṃ vīrūdhō ’bhyāro-*
hann. asuryō vā etā yād oṣadhayas. tā atitiṣṭīghīṣann atitiṣṭīgham nāsaknot.
sō ’śocat. sō ’tapyata. tāto ’gnīṛ asṭjyata. tam agnīm sṛṣṭāṃ vīrūdhāṃ tējo
’gachat. tā aśuṣyan. nā tātaḥ purāśuṣyant. sá prajāpatiṛ agnīm ādhattemā
evā sahā. īti tā asahata.

“At the beginning, this [world] was Prajāpati. The plants were growing against him. Those herbs are female Asuras. Though trying to *ati stig(h)-* [the plants], he could not *ati stig(h)-* them. He was glowing [with pain]. He was burning [with heat]. From that [heat] Fire arose. The sharpness (vital power) of the plants went into the arisen Fire. They dried up. Before that [time] they had not dried up. Prajāpati established the fire with the intention: ‘In this way I shall prevail over these’. He prevailed over them.”³

Although the general sense of the passage is clear, it is difficult to determine the exact meaning of the root *stig(h)-*, which is strongly colored by the preverb *āti*: *āti stig(h)-* could mean ‘to step or go beyond’ (like *ati kram-*), ‘to pierce through, penetrate’ (like *ati tṛd-*, *ati vyadh-*), or ‘to overcome’ (like *ati tṛ-*). The latter option seems more probable to me because at the end of the passage it turns out that Prajāpati wanted to conquer the plants and not only to climb over them.

³ Compare Krick’s translation (1982: 42f): “Prajāpati war dies(e) Erdenwelt) am Anfang. Ihn überwuchsen die Pflanzen. Asura-artig (d.i. als Schlingpflanzen, Gift- und Zauberkrauter) sind ja die Kräuter. So sehr er sich auch aus ihnen herauskämpfen wollte, war er doch nicht fähig, über sie hinauszusteigen. Schmerz durchglühte ihn, er geriet in Hitze. Daraus entspann das Feuer. In dieses geschaffene Feuer (d.i. die zunehmende Sonnenkraft) ging die Glutkraft der Pflanzen ein, und sie verdorrten – zuvor nämlich waren sie noch nie vertrocknet. Prajāpati legte sich das Feuer (die Sonne) mit dem Auftrag an: ‘Bemächte dich dieser Pflanzen’, und das Feuer (die Sonne) hielt sie in seiner Macht.” Note that *sahā* can hardly be an impv. act. (as Krick’s translation implies), since in the present this verb is almost exclusively inflected in the middle (cf. Gotō 1987: 325f.), and, furthermore, sandhi would occur in that case. It must definitely be 1 sg. subj. middle, so that *asahata* in the next sentence refers to Prajāpati.

The second passage is MS 2.1.12:13.18–14.7 (the text is again given in accordance with von Schroeder's edition):

aindrābārhaspatyáñ havír nírvaṇed yó rāṣṭrīyo néva prastinnuyād. áditir vái prajākāmaudānam apacat. sóñśiṣṭam āśnāt. táñ vā índram antár evá gárbhañ sántam ayasmáyena dāmnāpaumbhat. só 'pobdho 'jāyata. táñ vā eténa bṛhaspátir ayājayad aindrābārhaspatyéna. táśya tād dāma svayám evá vyāpadyata. sá imā díśo vājreñābhiparyāvartata. yó rāṣṭrīyo néva prastinnuyāt tám eténa yājayed aindrābārhaspatyéna. páritato hí vā eṣá pāpmánāthaiśá na prástinnoti. bṛhaspátaye nirupyátā. índrāya kriyate. sarvāta eváinaṃ muñcati. vājreñemā díśo 'bhiparyāvartate.

“He who, being a *rāṣṭrīya*, would not really *pra stig(h)-*, should sacrifice an Aindrābārhaspatya oblation. Aditi, desirous of offspring, cooked an odana-dish. She ate the remainder. She fettered Indra with an iron cord, although he was still a foetus inside. He was born fettered. Bṛhaspati sacrificed for him with this Aindrābārhaspatya. That cord of his fell off all by itself. He turned around unto these directions with his cudgel.⁴ [The priest] should sacrifice with this Aindrābārhaspatya for him who, being a *rāṣṭrīya*, would not really *pra stig(h)-*. For he is bound around by evil. That is why he does not *pra stig(h)-*. The oblation is offered to Bṛhaspati. It is made for Indra. In this way he [the priest] relieves him from all sides. He [the *rāṣṭrīya*] turns around unto these directions with his cudgel.”⁵

The interpretation of this passage is complicated by the fact that we do not know the exact meaning of *rāṣṭrīya*.⁶ From the analysis of the passages, parallel to MS 2.1.12 (KS 11.4:148.5–10, TS 2.4.13, MŚS 5.1.7.48–51, BŚS 13.42, ĀpŚS 19.27.22–23, ĀśvŚS 2.11.18–19), which are presented by Caland (1908: 64–65), it follows that the sacrifice to Indra and Bṛhaspati is performed for a Kṣatriya who would like to become successful (e.g. KS *rājanyāya bubhūṣate* ‘for a warrior who strives to succeed’, TS *yám kāmāyeta rājanyam ānapobdho jāyeta vṛtrān ghnāṃś*

⁴ For *abhi-pari-ā-vṛt-*, cf. Caland's (1908: 65) paraphrase of this sentence: “Indra hatte sich mit seiner Keule nach allen Himmelsgegenden, mit der Sonne umgewendet (er war also unüberwindlich geworden)”.

⁵ Cf. the translation given in Krick 1982: 270, fn. 670: “Aditi kochte mit dem Wunsch nach Nachkommenschaft einen Reisbrei, sie aß den Überrest. Ihn aber, den Indra, der in ihr als Leibesfrucht war (nach der Geburt der anderen Ādityas), umwickelte sie (in ihrem Leib) mit einer eisernen Fessel. Er kam unterdrückt zur Welt. Mit diesem (zuvor empfohlenen) Caru an Indra und Bṛhaspati opferte Bṛhaspati (als Purohita) für Indra (den Kṣatriya) – und diese Fessel fiel von selbst von ihm ab. Indra drehte sich mit seiner Donnerkeule nach allen Himmelsrichtungen hin dem Sonnenlauf nach herum (und eroberte so alle Weltgegenden). – Wer zur Königsherrschaft berufen ist, aber nicht emporkommt, für einen solchen soll er (der Adhvaryu/Purohita) diese Iṣṭi an Indra und Bṛhaspati vollziehen...”.

⁶ Cf. Rau (1957: 67): “*rāṣṭrīya* [...], *anyarāṣṭrīya* [...] und *rāṣṭriya* [...] sind so schwach belegt, daß sich nichts Sicheres ermitteln läßt”.

cared ‘If one desire of a warrior, “May he be born not fettered, may he continually slay his foes”’ (Keith)). Since it is clear that *rāṣṭrīya-* must be a warrior, somehow connected with kingship, Böhtlingk (1879–1889) glosses it ‘Thronfolger, Prä-tendent’ (Monier-Williams ‘an heir-apparent or pretender’). Caland (1908: 64) explains the word as “Kṣatriya, der ... dazu berufen war die Herrschaft zu führen”.

If this is correct, it follows that *pra stig(h)-* does not refer to the higher position of a Rāṣṭrīya (he is already designated to become a king), but to his success as a warrior. The verb *pra stig(h)-* is thus to be semantically compared with *pra sah-* ‘to conquer, be victorious’, *pra han-* ‘to strike, beat, slay, kill’ rather than with *pra gā-* ‘to go forward, proceed, advance’ and other verbs of movement.⁷

3. Now we can proceed to the new evidence from the Paippalāda-Saṃhitā of the Atharvaveda. PS 7.8.9 (in a charm against curses: with barley) reads in Arlo Griffiths’ edition (2004: 330):

<i>*anāstighyaṃ śapathair</i>	[7]
<i>anativyādhyaṃ kṛtam </i>	[8]
<i>bṛhad varma prati muñcāmi te yavam </i>	[12]

“As a tall armor, made [to be] insurmountable and impenetrable by curses,
I put on you the barley.”

The edition of Bhattacharya gives *ānastigmaṃ* (intending *ānas tigmaṃ* ?) in accordance with the unanimous readings of the Orissa mss., whereas the Kashmir ms. reads *anāstayajñam*. Griffiths provides **anāstighyaṃ* with an extensive comment, of which I here reproduce a large portion, only omitting the discussion of the various formations of the root *stig(h)-*, which have been dealt with above:

“The text as Bhattacharya edits it (‘Faceless, sharp, by curses...’) does not seem to yield any sense. Surely, as the meter and the syntax (juxtaposition with an instr.) demand, we must have here a gerundive similar in meaning to *anativyādhyaṃ* in the following pāda. Werner Knobl has found the elegant solution that is adopted here. I restore a gerundive of the root *stegh* ‘to mount’ ... In all the four occurrences [of the root *stegh* in the MS, AL], the MS mss. substitute either *stig*—or, in the last two cases ... also *stiñ*—for emended *stigh*; our **Or** and **K** readings, now, probably go back to a reading closely similar to or identical with what the Or. mss. preserve—also with *stig* for *stigh*! Should we perhaps consider, despite the evidence of etymology and of grammatical literature ..., but in line with the evidence of the mss. of both MS and PS, and in line with the principle to preserve linguistic oddities

⁷ The parallel passage is KS 11.4:148.9 *so ’napobdho vīryāya prasriyate* ‘der nicht mehr (durch Fesseln) Zusammengeschnürte streckt sich aus zur Heldenkraft’ (Narten 1969: 92 = 1995: 137), where *vīryāya prasriyate* can be seen as synonymous to *prā-stig(h)noti*.

as far as possible, to postulate a root *steg* rather than *stegh* ? Confusion *gm* :: *gy* is easily explained in the late Gupta script of the archetype...”

I believe that we can answer Griffiths’ query with an outright “yes”.⁸ The proof is found in PS 13.4, which is a charm against snakes and snake poison. Stanza 5 of this hymn must be edited as follows:

<i>nāpo jīryanti nāmṛtaṃ</i>	[8]
<i>nendrāṇī *vidhavā bhavat</i>	[8]
<i>na tvām ā *stegiṣad viṣam</i>	[8]
<i>aśmānam iva sāyakam</i>	[8]

“Neither the Waters grow old, nor does the ambrosia. Indrāṇī will not become a widow. The poison will not harm you, as an arrow [will not harm] a stone.”

Bhattacharya’s edition reads in pāda b *avidhavābhavat* with all manuscripts, but the initial *a-* of *avidhavā*⁹ cannot be correct, as indicated by the absence of sandhi and by the meter.⁹ In pāda c, Bhattacharya prints *āstebhiṣad* with the Orissa mss., but underlines it, which is his usual procedure for marking forms he does not understand, and reports Kashmir ms. to read *asteviśvag* in his critical apparatus. I propose to see here 3sg. subj. *iṣ-*aorist of the root *stig-* (for the meaning see below). For paleographic reasons, *stebhiṣad* points to **stegiṣad* rather than to **steghiṣad*. This mistake could have occurred either in the Gupta-archetype of all PS manuscripts or in the hyparchetype preceding all Orissa-mss., written in the so-called Proto-Bengali script (see Witzel 1985).

The stanza PS 13.4.5 is a kind of truth-spell or *satyakriyā* (for a recent treatment of this type of formulation I refer to Thompson 1998): the priest pronounces some evidently true statements, thereby magically reinforcing the statement that follows. Here the poet clearly refers to RV 10.86.11 (from the famous Vṛṣākapi hymn): *indrāṇīm āsú nāriṣu, subhāgām ahām aśravam* | *nahy āsyā aparāṃ canā, jarāsā mārāte pātir, viśvasmād indra úttaraḥ* || “Unter diesen Herrinnen, so hörte ich, ist Indrāṇī die Glückliche, denn nicht wird auch in Zukunft ihr Gemahl an Altersschwäche sterben.” – “Höher als alles steht Indra!” (Geldner).

This passage unequivocally shows that the verb *ā-stig-* means ‘to penetrate, assail’, so that **anāstigya-* in PS 7.8.9 must be translated ‘impenetrable, unassailable’. Now we may return to the MS passages. It becomes clear that Prajāpati in

⁸ I would only read **anāstigyaṃ* as **anāstigiyaṃ* in five syllables, which is demanded by the meter and which is only to be expected with the gerundives.

⁹ This emendation has already been suggested by Lopez (2000: 233), who, however, further largely misunderstood the stanza. For semantic reasons (cf. also the subj. **stegiṣad* in pāda c), I analyze *bhavat* as an irregular subjunctive, for which see Hoffmann 1967: 107. Formally, an injunctive and an imperfect are also possible.

MS 1.6.3 (⁺*atitṣṭiṣṭiṣann atitṣṭigam*), being attacked by the plants, tried to assail them, but was unable to do so (see also footnote 10). In the second MS passage (2.1.12), the warrior called for the kingship has to perform an oblation to Indra and Br̥haspati, if he does not succeed in assailing his enemies.

On the basis of combined evidence of the MS and PS we may conclude that the correct shape of our root is *stig-* and that it means something like ‘to penetrate’.

4. From an etymological point of view, it seems obvious that the root *stig-* is a variant with an *s*-mobile of Skt. *tig-* ‘to sharpen’, abundantly attested from the oldest texts onwards in both finite forms—pres. *téjate*, intensive *tétikte*, *ta*-ptc. *ní-tikta*—‘urged on, sharpened’, *tigítá-* ‘sharp, pointed’, and in nominal derivatives—*tigmá-* adj. ‘sharp, pointed’, *tīkṣṇá-* adj. ‘sharp, keen-eyed’ (the long *-ī-* of which has not been sufficiently explained), *téjas-* n. ‘sharp edge (of knife), sharpness’,¹⁰ *téjana-* n. ‘measuring reed stick’ (RV), ‘shaft of an arrow, bamboo’ (AV+), etc. In Iranian, however, only nominal forms of this root are attested (for Plr. **staij-* with an *s*-mobile see below): YAv. *bi-taēya-* adj. ‘having two sharp edges’, *brōiθrō.taēža-* adj. ‘sharp due to the blade’, *tiyra-* adj. ‘cutting, pointed, sharp’ (Caland-variant *tiži°*, cf. *tiži.dąstra-* adj. ‘with sharp tusks’, etc.); OP *tigra-* adj. ‘pointed’, MP *tēz* adj. ‘sharp’, and so on. It is not unusual that the variants both with and without an *s*-mobile are preserved in Indo-Iranian, albeit with semantic differentiation: a typical example is Vedic *spas-* ‘to spy, watch’ vs. *pas-* ‘to see’.¹¹ As is well known, other Indo-European languages mostly attest forms with an *s*-mobile (Gr. *στίζω* ‘to sting, tattoo’, Lat. *īn-stīgāre* ‘to urge on’, ON *steikja* ‘to roast on a spit’). Only Germanic **pī(h)stila-* (e.g. ON *pistill*, OE *ðistel*) ‘thistle’, which is usually derived from this root, has no initial *s*, but its etymology is uncertain.

In Vedic, I know of only one possible nominal derivative of the root *stig-*, viz. the difficult Vedic word *stegá-*, occurring in RV 10.31.9a¹² (*stegó ná kṣām áty eti pr̥thvīm* ‘like a *stegá-*, he (Agni) goes over the broad earth’) and in an Aśvamedha mantra VS 25.1 *śádaṃ dadbhír ávakāṃ dantamūlāir mṛdaṃ bārsvai stegān dāmṣṭrābhyām* ‘[I gratify] the *śáda*-grass with [his] teeth (i.e. of the sacrificed horse), the *ávakā*-grass with his gums, clay with his tooth-sockets, the *stegás* with his fangs” (with minor variants in MS 3.15.1:177.7 and KSA 5.13.1:187.10); TS

¹⁰ As Werner Knobl points out to me, the co-occurrence of *téjas-* and the root *stig-* in the MS 1.6.3 passage may not be accidental, so that the passage can be rendered ‘Though trying to out-sting [the stinging plants], he could not out-sting them. ... The sting of the plants went into the arisen Fire.’

¹¹ For the Indo-Aryan roots *chand-*, *cand-*, and *śad-*, which seem to reflect a similar situation, see Lubotsky 2001.

¹² Parallel passages are AVŚ 18.1.39a, PS 18.60.9a.

5.7.11.1, TB 3.9.11.1, ĀpŚS 20.21.9 *stegān dāṃṣṭrābhyām maṇḍūkāñ jámbhyebhis* “the *stegás* with the fangs, the frogs with the incisors”.¹³ The indigenous commentators did not know the word and had to guess at its meaning. Oberlies (1992: 123 and 124, footnote 26), in a discussion of this word, proposes two possible interpretations: either *stegá-* means ‘der Stecher (=) Schlange’ or it means ‘cane’. In either interpretation, the connection of *stegá-* with the root *stig-* is unmistakable.¹⁴

5. In Iranian, we find the etymologically related verb **staij-* with the meaning ‘to stab; to be contentious’ (Cheung 2007: 361f.). The major representatives are: MP ‘*styz-* ‘to quarrel’, *styck /stēzag/* ‘quarrel, strife’; Parth. ‘*styh’g*, ‘*štyyh’g* ‘contentious’, ‘*styh’gyft* ‘contention’; NP *sītehīdan* denom. ‘to quarrel, brawl’, *sītēzīdan* ‘to fight’, *sītēz* ‘battle, combat, conflict’; Oss. *stiğyn / (æ)st’ eğun* ‘to skin; to clean the skin [of fruits and vegetables]; to plunder, loot’.

YAv. *stig-/stij-* (Yt 10.71) probably also belongs here, although its meaning is uncertain and has been much debated. The passage runs as follows:

yō frąštacō hamərəθāda
upa.haxtō ā.manayha
haθra nairiia hqm.varəta
stija nijaiṇti hamərəθā
naēda maniiete jaynuuā
naēda cim yəṇqm sadaieiti
yauuata aēm nijaiṇti
mərəzuca stūnō gaiiehe
mərəzuca xā uštānahe

“as he (= Vərəθraγna = boar) catches up with the opponent(s), beset by passion—simultaneously by manly valour—, he knocks them (*lit.* the opponents) down with a toss (of his head): he does not even think he has struck, nor has he the impression he is hitting anybody, until he has smashed even the vertebrae, the pillars of life, even the vertebrae, the springs of vitality” (Gershevitch 1959: 107).

Gershevitch (p. 220f.) provides *stija* with a lengthy footnote where he dismisses Geiger’s translation ‘spitze Waffe’ (later revived by Duchesne-Guillemin)

¹³ I would like to stress that the word is definitely *stegá-* with an initial *s-*: in the latter variant where the mantra stands after a *danḍa*, we find *stegá-*, whereas in the former the anlaut is ambiguous due to sandhi. Therefore, the notation (*s*)*tegá-*, as we often find it in the literature, is superfluous and confusing.

¹⁴ Arlo Griffiths points out to me that whatever the precise meaning of *stegá-* may be, it is clear that the authors of the *stegān dāṃṣṭrābhyām* mantra definitely associated this word with the root for ‘to be sharp’, inspired by compounds like *tīkṣṇa-dāṃṣṭra-* ‘with sharp teeth’ (TĀ+), cf. also Avestan *tiži.dqstra-* ‘id.’.

because “the bestial treatment meted out to the victim clearly shows that the attacker is the boar, not Vərəθraϥna, let alone Mithra, as might appear from some translations; the boar’s fangs and tusks having been mentioned, there is no room for further ‘pointed weapons’”. But also the translation ‘im, mit Kampf’, proposed by Justi and repeated by many other scholars is unattractive because “‘battle’ or ‘quarrel’ in the case of a fleeing opponent is also questionable”. Gershevitch’s own alternative ‘tossing motion of the boar’s head’ has only a fairly weak etymological justification (Ossetic *tiğyn* / *teğun* ‘to sift’, *ræ-tiğyn* / *ræ-teğun* ‘to push, swing’: note the absence of initial *s*-). In my opinion, *stija* can simply mean ‘with the point / tip (of the tusks)’, nor can ‘in struggle’ be completely ruled out,¹⁵ but whatever solution is to be preferred, the etymological connection of YAv. *stij-* with the Indo-Iranian root **stig-* can hardly be doubted.

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¹⁵ The text must then be emended to **stiji*, cf. Kellens 1974: 84f.

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[314: пустая]