A sound law that distinguishes Sanskrit from Iranian is the loss of the two vocoid semivowels \( y \) and \( w \) before phonetically similar vowels: PInlr. \( *y > Q / \ldots \), \( *w > Q / \ldots \). Some details of the relative chronology are clear. The change postdates the Indic innovation of PInlr. \( *f > \text{Skt} \ \bar{\text{a}}r \), since \( *w\bar{f} > \text{Skt} \ \bar{\text{a}}r \), as in PIE \( *\text{wH-neh} \rightarrow \text{PInlr.} \ *\text{wṛnā} \rightarrow \text{Av. varṇā-} \text{but Skt \ 'wool'} \); by the same token, PInlr. \( *wṛ > \text{Indic} \ ur \), as in \( *wṛu- \ 'wide' > \text{Av. vouru-} \text{but Indic urī-}. \) On the other hand, the change evidently predates the textual tradition underlying the Rigveda, which never writes \( \bar{y} \) or \( \bar{v} \) (trivial exceptions to this generalization will be discussed shortly). The sound law is most evident in word-initial position, as in \( \text{ārnā-} \) cited above, but medial sequences occur as well: the samhitā always writes e.g. \( \text{prēśṭha-} \ 'most dear' \text{and vayyā-} \ 'companion, friend' \text{, but syllabic restoration to} \ \text{prāśṭha-} \text{and vaṣyā-} (< \ *\text{prāśṭha-} \text{and *vaṣyā-}) \text{is nearly always called for.} \) In the Rigveda a few -\( yi- \) sequences do exist, of course. We find adjectives like \( \text{māyīn-} \ 'miraculous; deceptive', \text{vayr-} \text{and vayr-} \ 'hastening', \text{and the pair} \text{vavyū-} \text{and pravyū-} \text{ (both hapax legomena and both in the same stanza, 8.19.37; the hymn is early, according to Arnold, but this particular stanza is on metrical grounds manifestly a distortion of some rather different original; Arnold p. 312 ad loc. points this out but does not venture an emendation). These forms cannot be taken as relics; they are plainly artifacts of productive morphological processes, and are younger than} \ *\text{prāśṭha-} < \ *\text{prāśṭha-}, \text{etc.; indeed, textual praṇetā, which occurs in the same stanza with} \text{vavyū-} \text{and pravyū-, must be read praṇaitā.} \text{There must have been some delay between the loss of} \ *y \text{before} \ i \text{in forms like} \ *\text{prāśṭha-} \text{and the rise of} -\text{yi-} \text{sequences like that in} \text{māyīn-}; \text{if the two processes had been going on concurrently, we would expect to see e.g.} \ *\text{prāśṭha-} \text{in the text at least occasionally; but we never do. There are a few other instances of leveling, on obvious models, mentioned in Wackernagel 1896 § 228: the aor. opt. vurtita from} \ vr \text{ 'choose'} \text{ contrasts with the aor. pple ur̄ṇā- (II.d below) < *vurānā-, and 3rd plurals in} -\text{ur,}} \text{Wackernagel 1896 § 228 discusses these and other relevant forms in detail, and points out that to a great degree} \ *\text{wū} \text{and} \ *\text{yi-} \text{sequences do not occur in PIE and arose from Indic innovations.} \ \text{Arnold § 142.iv. Textual vaṣya- < *vaṣya- admits of two different interpretations. Vedic} -\text{iy-} \text{ > Classical} -\text{y-} \text{(always so written in the samhitā and pada-pathā), and the orthography of} \text{vaṣya- is consistent with having undergone this development. However, the development of} -\text{aïy-} \rightarrow -\text{e-}, \text{in pronunciation if not in metrical use, was going on at much the same time. If} -\text{ayi-} \rightarrow -\text{ai̯-} \rightarrow -\text{e-} \text{ predated the change of} -\text{iy-} \rightarrow -\text{y-}; \text{then it presumably applied to} \text{vaṣya-} \text{, and a respelling of} -\text{aïy-} \text{ as} -\text{aayy- would result in the 'independent svarita' exactly like} -\text{iy-} \rightarrow -\text{yā-}.} \)
e.g. babhūvur < bhū 'become', ūvur < vā 'weave'. These all involve -uvu- sequences, but there is a Rigvedic aorist 3rd pl. acucyavur < cyu 'move, stir' that occurs oftener than all the -ūvur forms combined. The real puzzle, it seems to me, is that so many forms of the type uvāca 'spoke' escaped a similar leveling to *uvāca.3

Briefly, *y > 0/-7 and *w > 0/-h postdates the Indo-Iranian period and apparently predates the Vedic era. The routine necessity for 'syllabic restoration' in medial sequences in the Rigveda suggests, however, that the loss of y before i in those sequences took place either just prior to or concurrent with the early Vedic period. This prompts the question of the possible existence of other types of evidence in the Rigveda for dating the loss of y and w. As it happens, the importance of syllable weight in Vedic meter gives us an analytic tool for testing the hypothesis that the sequences *yi and *wu were still pronounced at the time of the composition of the Rigveda, or perhaps when the earlier hymns were composed, or at the very least at a time prior to the Vedic period but sufficiently recent for the pronunciation to be imperfectly reflected in bardic formulae and collocations.

The analytic techniques employed in such a study are similar to those used to prove the existence of *w ('digamma') in Homeric Greek. First: we know, from comparative evidence and internal reconstruction, what forms probably had a *w or *y etymologically. Then: we can inspect the occurrences of these forms in the poems, and ascertain for each instance whether the meter is (1) somewhat (or much) improved by reading the unwritten y or w; (2) somewhat (or much) impaired if we read the semivowel; or (3) wholly unaffected by the choice. Naturally type (3), referred to collectively in the following discussion as 'ambiguous', predominates. As for types (1) and (2), words of frequent occurrence rarely show one type of interpretation to the exclusion of the other; but this is hardly surprising. Even something as incontestable as the 'Homeric digamma' rests on conflicting evidence: it is the weight of the evidence on one side or the other that is crucial. In the Homeric example, the weight of the evidence emphatically favors the hypothesis that *w was a consonant when the bulk of the poem was composed. The evidence for *yī and *wā in the Rigveda is a good deal more complex; but if it were more straightforward, it presumably would have been described before now. (Even so close a student of Vedic meter as Arnold seems never to consider the possibility of restoring lost *w and *y in the word-initial position.)

An examination of the Rigveda supports the following conclusions:

1. *w > 0/-ā and *y > 0/-ī very early. There is nothing to speak of in the

A curiousum in this connection is the Rigvedic compound suūti 'very helpful', written so. The samhitā uniformly writes sv- before vowel in all other formations, which of course are still to be read su-. The extreme lateness of the hymn in which suūti- occurs, and the evidence in Part I, below, make it unlikely that the poet was working with the historically expected form *su-vāti; whatever the relative chronology, once *v > 0 in such a formation, there would be no patterns or parallels available either to the poets or the redactors for restoring the -v-.