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Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. A, Řada jazykovědná. 1996, vol. 45, iss. A44, pp. [9]-13

ISBN 80-210-1408-3

ISSN 0231-7567

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/101403>

Access Date: 30. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

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INDO-EUROPEAN „LAMB“

Dedicated to Professor Adolf Erhart to his 70th birthday

The most wide-spread Indo-European denotation of „lamb“, attested only in European branches, reflects more archetypes (using the Brugmannian reconstruction):

(1) **ag^wnos, -ā*

Greek *amnós, -ῆ* „lamb“ < **abnós, -ā*

Latin *agnus, -ā* id. and *avillus* „agnus recentis partus“ < **auenlos* < **ag^{w(h)}nelos* or **ag^{w(h)}ṅlos*;

Umbrian *habina* f. „agna“ < **abnīno-*

(*h-* has been explained by a contamination with **hēdīno-* „haedīnus“, cf. Walde & Hofmann 1938: 23, following Kent).

(2) **og^wnos*

Old Irish *úan*, gen.sg. *uain*, dim. *uainin*, Welsh *oen*, pl. *wyn*, Middle Cornish *oin*,

Cornish *o(a)n*, Breton *oan*, pl. *ein* „lamb“

(**o-* instead the expected **a-* has been explained by a contamination with the continuants of Indo-European **owi-* „sheep“ > Old Irish *oí*, see Vendryes 1978: U-8).

(3) **ag^whⁿ-*

Old English *ge-éan* „(sheep) with young“, *éanian* „to yean“, West Frisian *eandje*, Dutch dial. *oonen* „to throw, cub“ < West Germanic **aunōjan*, derived from an unattested **auna-* < **aʒ^wna-* „lamb“ (the initial **o-* is also possible). Latvian *čuns* „wether“ is not borrowed from Germanic, how Mann 1984–87: 3 proposed, but has cognates in Lithuanian *āvinas* „ram“, Old Prussian *awins* - see Fraenkel 1962: 28.

(4) *ǵgʷ(h)n- or *ǵgʷ(h)n-

Old Church Slavonic *agnę*, gen. -*ęte* „lamb“ (Common Slavic), *ob-agniti se* „to yeau“, in Polabian *jogna* and Polish *jagnię* besides „lamb“ also „kid“ (Šarapatková, ESJS I: 46) a.s.o. There is no evident continuant in Baltic languages. At least an indirect evidence is based on the Balto-Fennic denotation of „lamb“: Finnish *vuona*, dial. *vuonna*, *vuorna*, Karelian *vuonnia*, Vepsian *vodn*, *vodnaz*, Estonian *voon*, *vũn* etc.

< *ǵdnas < Baltic **ǵgnas (SKES VI:1819–1820).

The same etymon could be recognized also in Indo-Iranian: Old Indic (RV) *ághnyā-*, *aghnyā-* f. „cow“, frequently „milker“ (cf. RV 10, 60, 11), *ághnya-*, *aghnyā-* m. „bull“, Old Avestan *agəniā-* f. „milk-cow“, usually derived from Indo-Iranian **a-gʰn-ijā-* < **ǵ-gʷʰn-iyō-/ā* „not to be killed“ (Schmidt, KZ 78 [1963]: 1–46, 305–306 inclusive the other etymologies; EWAI I: 46–47 with lit.), can be alternatively projected in **agʷʰniyo-* „belonging to ***agʷʰno-*“. It is possible only to speculate concerning the meaning of this unattested word. The semantic reconstruction „Milchkuh“ = „belonging to calf“ can be deduced as an alternative solution on the basis of e.g. the following contexts:

yáthā pumsó vṛṣṇyatá striyáṃ nihanyáte mánah,
evá te aghnye mánó `dhi vatsé ni hanyatām. (AV 6, 70, 1)
 „Wie das Herz eines lüsternen Mannes an einer Frau haftet —
 so soll dein Herz, o Kuh, am Kalbe haften!“

anyó anyám abhi haryata vatsám jātám ivāghnyā (AV 3, 30, 1)
 „Liebet einander wie die Kuh ihr Kalb, wenn es geboren ist“.

Attending to the connection

aghnyāyāḥ kṣīrām (RV 10, 87, 16) „die (Biest)milch der Kuh“,

H.-P. Schmidt, the author of the preceding translations (KZ 78 [1963]: 12–13), concludes: „*Da kṣīrá kein geläufiger Ausdruck für die Biestmilch ist, gewinnt man aus dieser Stelle den Eindruck, als sei aghnyā ein spezifischer Ausdruck für die Kuh, die eben gekalbt hat, und dass somit das Wort hier gewählt worden sei, um diese von der Kuh im allgemeinen zu unterscheiden*“.

The Avestan equivalent appears only in one passage in Yasna 38,5. Its translation is not unambiguous.

apascā vā azīščā vā mātəraščā vā agəniā drigudāiiəḥ
vīspō.pitīš āuuacāmā vahištā sraēštā

„Und euch Wasser rufen wir an als die trächtigen und euch als die Mutter(kühe und) die melken Kühe, (die) für den Armen sorgen, die alltränkenden, besten (und) schönsten.“
[Wolff 1910: 68]

„We call upon you the waters, you the *azīš*, you the mothers, you the *agəniīā-*, as the nourishers of the indigent ('followers'), possessing all types of *piti-* ('drink'), the best, the richest.“
[Bailey, BSOAS 20: 44]

„Wir rufen an euch, die Wasser, euch, die trächtigen (Kühe), und euch, die Mutter(kühe), (die) *agəniīā-* (sind), den Armen nährend, alle Getränke besitzend, die besten, die schönsten.“
[Schmidt, KZ 78: 13–14]

„We address You (as) the waters, and (as) the fertile (cows), and (as) the mother(-cow)s, who are not to be killed because they nurse the poor (and) provide drink for all beings, best and most beautiful.“
[Humbach 1991: 148]

It is evident, the most recent translation differs substantively from the preceding ones just in the interpretation of the word *agəniīā-*. The Humbach's version corresponds to the traditional etymological interpretation of the Indo-Iranian **aghniyā-* < **ǵ-g^{wh}n-iyā*.

Probably the more cautious point of view of Schmidt, concluding „*Die Bedeutung von agəniīā lässt sich daraus nicht erschliessen...*“, seems to be more appropriate. Omitting the Humbach's translation, the hypothesis connecting *a^o* with „calf“ is not in a contradiction with the sense of the quoted passage.

Perhaps only J. Knobloch (HS 103[1990]: 227) has presented any deeper etymology.

He derives the „lamb“ from the root **g^{wh}en-* „to kill“ by a „laryngeal metathesis“. In spite of its semantic attractivity (**ag^{wh}no-*“lamb“ = „an animal killed for a sacrifice“ vs.

Indo-Iranian **ag^hnyā-* „cow“ < **ǵ-g^{wh}n-iyō-*“an animal not killed for a sacrifice“) it remains doubtful (cf. also the solution presented above).

Till the present time no unambiguous reconstruction of the word exists. On the basis of the difference **g^{wh} : *g^w* Meillet, BSL 24/1[1923]: 184 even separates the Celtic, Germanic and Slavic continuants from the Latin and Greek ones.

There are more attempts to explain the vacillation in vocalism. So called Winter's law offers one possibility. Winter 1978: 439 concludes: *In Baltic and Slavic languages, the Proto-Indo-European sequence of short vowel plus voiced stop was reflected by lengthened vowel plus voiced stop, while short vowel plus*

aspirate developed into short vowel plus voiced stop. Kortlandt, *Baltistica* 21/2 [1985]:121 adds: *This Balto-Slavic „lengthened vowel“ has acute tone, unlike the lengthened grade vowels of PIE. origin.*

Pokorny 1959: 9 supposes the apophony $*\bar{o}g^{w(h)}no-$ vs. $*\bar{a}g^{w(h)}no-$.

Beekes, *Sprache* 18[1972]: 129 admits the apophony $*H_2e-$: $*H_2o-$.

Gercenberg 1981: 137 postulates the old heteroclitic paradigm $*\bar{o}g^{wh}$: $*ag^{wnés}$, following Petersson 1921: 49–50 ($*\bar{o}g^{wh}$ & $*\bar{ó}g^{wh}$: $*og^{w-n-és}$). The variation $*g^{wh}$: $*g^w$ has a distributive character: the aspirate voiced stops appear in a syllable final posttonic position of nom.-acc. of heteroclitic nouns, while the voiceless stops appear in the cases extended by $-n-$ in a pretonic position, e.g. $*nég^hw_1$: $*ng^{wnés}$ „kidney“ > Greek *nephros* : Latin *inguen* (Gercenberg 1981: 50). Accepting this rule, one could expect a heteroclitic paradigm of the type of: nom. $*H_2ég^h-w_1$ / 1 : gen. $*H_2g^{(h)}-wén-s$ > $*H_2g^{wnés}$ with a following paradigmatic leveling (cf. $*séH_2-w_1$, gen. $*sH_2-wén-s$ „sun“, see Beekes, *MSS* 43[1984]: 5–8; *Id.* 1995: 187, 177). On the other hand, the paradigmatic apophony supposed for akrostatic heteroclitics corresponds perfectly to the vowel variants reconstructed above (cf. Oettinger, *HS* 107[1994]: 81–82 for derivatives of the root $*H_2ék-$ „sharp“):

(i) nom.-acc. $*H_2ók-1$: gen. $*H_2ék-n-s$

(ii) nom.-acc. $*H_2éĕ-1$: gen. $*H_2éĕ-n-s$

There are no hopeful traces of r -stem (Petersson 1921: 50 sees it in Greek *óbria* „the young“). A more promising candidate could be l -stem represented perhaps by Celtic $*aglo-$ (< $*ag^{hw}lo-$?) > Breton *eal* „foal“, Middle Cornish *ehal* „pecus vel iumentum“, Middle Welsh *ael* „cubbing; breed, race“, Old Irish *ál* „offspring, cubbing“ (Vendryes 1959: A-58 finds a cognate in Greek *agelē* „herd, flock“).

The preceding thoughts leading to the morphological and semantical reconstruction $*H_2ég^hw_1$: $*H_2g^{hwéns}$ or $*H_2ó/ég^hw_1$: $*H_2ég^{(h)}w_1s$ „young one“ = „lamb / calf / foal“ significantly support the hypothesis identifying a Semitic borrowing in this cultural term (Illič-Svityč 1964: 4), cf. Proto-Semitic $*\bar{y}agul-$ ~ $*\bar{y}igul-$ > Akkadian *agalu* „ass“, Ugaritic *1gl* „calf“, Hebrew *fēgel* „bullock“, Aramaic *1glā*, Arabic *1gl*, pl. *1ḡāl* & *1gūl* „calf“, Geez *1agw(a)l* „young one“, Tigre *1agal* „calf“, Amhara *gəlgāl* „lamb“ (Leslau 1987: 11).

Accepting this suggestive explanation, the substitution $*1 \geq *H_2$ confirms this traditionally supposed identification (cf. lastly Beekes 1995: 126).

Post scriptum

Krzysztof T. Witczak in the letter to author from March 1996 proposes very important cognate in Albanian: Tosk *enjë*, Old Gheg *ëjë* f. „Mutterschaft, das seine Jungen verloren hat“ < proto-Albanian $*agnyā$.

Witczak differentiates between late Indo-European terms

$*ag^wn-$ „lamb“ (Greek, Italic, Slavic) and

$*ogh^wn-$ (sic) „milk-sheep, milk-cow“ (Indo-Iranian, Albanian, Celtic, Germanic).

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