Indo-European "lamb"

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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) $*ag^wnos$, $-\bar{a}$
Greek *amnós*, $-\acute{e}$ „lamb" < $*abnós$, $-\acute{a}$
Latin *agnus*, $-\bar{a}$ id. and *avillus* „agnus recentis partus" < $*auenlos$ < $*ag^{w(h)}nelos$ or $*ag^{w(h)}nlos$;
Umbrian *habina* f. „agna" < $*abnīno-$
(*h-* has been explained by a contamination with $*h\bar{e}dīno-$ „haedīnus", cf. Walde & Hofmann 1938: 23, following Kent).

(2) $*og^{wh}nos$
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) $*ag^{wh}n-$
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 *ęuns* „wether" is not borrowed from Germanic, how Mann 1984–87: 3 proposed, but has cognates in Lithuanian *ãvinas* „ram", Old Prussian *awins* - see Fraenkel 1962: 28.

(4) *$\bar{a}g^w(^h)n$- or *$\bar{o}g^w(^h)n$-

Old Church Slavonic agnę, gen. -ęte „lamb" (Common Slavic), ob-agniti sę „to yean", in Polabian jogną 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 vuońńia , Vepsian vodn, vodnaz, Estonian voon, vûn etc.
< *$\bar{o}\delta nas$ < Baltic **$\bar{o}gnas$ (SKES VI:1819–1820).

The same etymon could be recognized also in Indo-Iranian: Old Indic (RV) ághnyā-, aghnyā́- f. „cow", frequently „milker" (cf. RV 10, 60, 11), ághnya-, aghnyá- m. „bull", Old Avestan agəniiā- f. „milk-cow", usually derived from Indo-Iranian *a-g^hn-$i\dot{i}\bar{a}$- < *n-$g^{wh}n$-iyo-/$\bar{a}$ „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 *$ag^{wh}niyo$- „belonging to **$ag^{wh}no$-" . 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 puṃsó vŕṣṇyatá striyā́ṃ níhanyáte mánaḥ,
> evā́ te aghnye mánó 'dhi vatsé ní 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 abhí haryata vatsáṃ jātám ivāghnyā́ (AV 3, 30, 1)
> „Liebet einander wie die Kuh ihr Kalb, wenn es geboren ist".

Attending to the connection

> aghnyā́yāḥ kṣīrám (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 Ausdrück für die Biestmilch ist, gewinnt man aus dieser Stelle den Eindruck, als sei aghnyā́ 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 unambiguos.

> apascā vå azīščā vå mātərąščā vå agəniiå drigudāiiaŋhō
> vīspō.pitīš āuuaocāmā vahištå sraēštå

„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 *agəniiā-,* 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) *agəniiā-* (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 *agəniiā-.* The Humbach's version corresponds to the traditional etymological interpretation of the Indo-Iranian **aghniyā- < *n̥-gʷʰn-iyā.*
Probably the more cautious point of view of Schmidt, concluding „*Die Bedeutung von* agəniiā *lässt sich daraus nicht erschliessen...",* seems to be more appropriate. Omitting the Humbach's translation, the hypothesis connecting *aᵒ* 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 **gʷʰen-* „to kill" by a „laryngeal metathesis". In spite of its semantic attractivity (**agʷʰno-*"lamb" = „an animal **killed** for a sacrifice" vs.
Indo-Iranian **agʰnyā-* „cow" < **n̥-gʷʰn-iyo-*"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 **gʷʰ : *gʷ* 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. $*\partial g^{w(h)}no$-.

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 ($*óg^{wh}$ & $*\acute{o}g^{wh}$: $*og^w$-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. $*n\acute{e}g^hw_{o}^r$: $*\eta g^wnés$ „kidney" > Greek *nephrós* : Latin *inguen* (Gercenberg 1981: 50). Accepting this rule, one could expect a heteroclitic paradigm of the type of: nom. $*H_2\acute{e}g^h$-$w_{o}^r /\!/$ gen. $*H_2g^{(h)}$-$wén$-$s > *H_2g^wnés$ with a following paradigmatic leveling (cf. $*s\acute{e}H_2$-$w\!/$, 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 $*H_2e\hat{k}$- „sharp"):

(i) nom.-acc. $*H_2\acute{o}\hat{k}$-$\underset{o}{r}$: gen. $*H_2\acute{e}\hat{k}$-$\underset{o}{n}$-s

(ii) nom.-acc. $*H_2\acute{e}\hat{k}$-$\underset{o}{r}$: gen. $*H_2\acute{e}\hat{k}$-$\underset{o}{n}$-s

There are no hopeful traces of r-stem (Petersson 1921: 50 sees it in Greek *óbria* „the youngs"). A more promising candidate could be l-stem represented perhaps by Celtic $*aglo$- (< $*ag^hwlo$- ?) > 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 $*H_2\acute{e}g^hw\!/$: $*H_2g^hwéns$ or $*H_2\acute{o}/\acute{e}g^hw\!/$: $*H_2\acute{e}g^{(h)}w\eta s$ „young one" = „lamb / calf / foal" significantly support the hypothesis identifying a Semitic borrowing in this cultural term (Illič-Svityč 1964: 4), cf. Proto-Semitic $*\Upsilon agul$- ~ $*\Upsilon igul$- > Akkadian *agalu* „ass", Ugaritic Υgl „calf", Hebrew $\Upsilon \bar{e}gel$ „bullock", Aramaic $\Upsilon igl\bar{a}$, Arabic $\Upsilon i\check{g}l$, pl. $\Upsilon i\check{g}\bar{a}l$ & $\Upsilon u\check{g}\bar{u}l$ „calf", Geez $\Upsilon \partial g^w(a)l$ „young one", Tigre $\Upsilon \partial gal$ „calf", Amhara $g\partial lg\ddot{a}l$ „lamb" (Leslau 1987: 11).

Accepting this suggestive explanation, the substitution $*\Upsilon \geq *H_2$ 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 $*agny\overset{\circ}{a}$.

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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