



BRILL

NOTE ON AVESTAN "AHŪ"

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BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

NOTE ON AVESTAN *AHŪ*

1. The assumption of a nom. sing. *ahū* 'lord' is based on two Old Avestan passages and is confirmed by the Later Avestan literature, where *ahu ratušca*, *ahūm ratūmca*, etc. occur frequently. The two OAv. passages are the first line of the Ahuna-Vairya prayer (Y. 27.13a) *yaθā ahū vairyō aθā ratuš ašātciṭ hacā* and Y. 29.6b *nōiṭ aēvā ahū vistō naēdā ratuš ašātciṭ hacā*. Understandably, the uncommon form *ahū* has given rise to attempts to eliminate this nom. sing. by explaining *ahū* as an instr. sing. In that case, however, the whole later literature must in this respect have been based on an incorrect grammatical understanding of the oldest texts. Since such textual misunderstandings do occur (Manu Leumann 1950), it was worth while making the experiment. Taking *ahū* as an instr. sing. also opened the possibility of interpreting *aēvā* in Y. 29.6b as an instr. sing. of *aēva*- 'one.' Thus Y. 27.13a was translated 'Just as He is to be chosen *by the world*, so has judgment . . . been given' (Duchesne-Guillemin 1958) and Y. 29.6b: '*Von keinem einzigen Lebensherrn ist er gefunden*' (Humbach 1959). As for *aēvā* cf. also Insler 1975: 'a master has not been found *by a single one* (of us).' On the other hand, the traditional Parsi interpretation of *aēvā* as a particle (= Vedic *evā*), which has been accepted by Western scholars ever since Spiegel 1869, fits in well with the context. Note that *nōiṭ aēvā* has a parallel in Rigvedic *néd evá*, cf. X. 51.4b (*āyam*) *néd evá mā yunājann ātra devāḥ* '(I have gone) in order that the gods will not appoint me in this (office).'

2. In a recent new study of the Ahuna-Vairya prayer,¹ in which Humbach derives a new argument from Yt 19.12 (and 90) *aθā ratuš*,² he maintains his interpretation of *ahū* as an instr. sing. In the new translation of Y. 29.6b *nōiṭ aēvā ahū vistō naēdā ratuš ašātciṭ hacā* 'Nicht ist es von der Welt gefunden, nicht gibt es ein der Wahrhaftigkeit selbst gemässes Urteil' (p. 251 n. 5) the main construction here assumed is, it seems, *nōiṭ vistō (ratuš)*, *naēdā (astī) ratuš*, that is, there is a correlation of two verb forms; but ellipsis of the second verb ('Nicht *gibt es* ein Urteil') is hardly possible.

Although it is understandable that attempts have been made to get rid of a nominative *ahū*, it would have been better first to have asked why every one, from the Late Avestan period onwards, had accepted the existence of such an anomalous nominative. The reason is quite obvious but it may not be superfluous to state it here explicitly.

Avestan *nōiṭ* . . . *naēdā/naēda* . . . 'non . . . neque' refer, with a single exception,

always to coordinated *nouns* (here denoted by A, B, etc.). Typical instances are:

Yt 10.50 *nōiṭ xšapa nōiṭ təmə, nōiṭ C nōiṭ D, nōiṭ E nōiṭ F, naēda dunman uzjasaiti*

Yt 8.44 *nōiṭ A, nōiṭ B, nōiṭ C, naēda D*

Yt 15.56 *nōiṭ A, nōiṭ B, nōiṭ C, nōiṭ D, naēda E.*

Slightly different is the construction in

Y. 11.6 *nōiṭ A, naēda B, naēda C*

Yt 1.6 *nōiṭ A naēda B, nōiṭ C naēda D*

Y. 45.2 (c) *nōiṭ A, nōiṭ B, / nōiṭ C*

(d) *naēda D, / nōiṭ E, naēda F /*

(e) *nōiṭ G, nōiṭ H*

and, with the *ya*-construction of the nouns, in Y. 46.lcd

nōiṭ mā xšnāuš yā vər əz ānā hēcā
naēdā dax̄yāuš yōi sātārō drəgvantō.

‘The community with which I have associated has not satisfied me, nor have (those who are) the deceitful rulers of the land.’

There is only one passage where the correlated negations refer to verbs, viz. Y. 49.2cd

nōiṭ spəntəm dōrašt ahmāi stōi ārmaitīm
naēdā vohū mazdā fraštā manarhā

‘Neither did he hold the beneficial *Ārmaiti* to be his, nor did he take counsel with *Aša*, O Wise One.’

From the foregoing it follows that in Y. 29.6b *nōiṭ aēvā ahū vistō naēdā ratuš* the syntax of *nōiṭ . . . naēdā* compels us to take *ahū* and *ratuš* as coordinated nouns, that is, as two nominatives. The same, then, holds good for the Ahuna Vairya prayer. Since this philological text interpretation takes precedence of preconceived ideas about which forms are linguistically possible and which are not, the existence of a nom. sing. *ahu* must be accepted, irrespective of what historical explanation may be proposed for it.

3. But for the Old Iranian evidence no one would ever have dared to suggest that Vedic *kaviḥ*, acc. *kavim* stand for the older forms **kavā*, acc. **kavāyam* (cf. GLav. *kavā*, *kava*, LAv. *kavaēm*), or that Vedic *dāsyuḥ*, acc. *dāsyum* stand for **dāsyāu*, acc. **dāsyavam* (cf. OP. *dahyāuš*, LAv. *dar̄haom*, beside LAv. *dar̄huš*, GLav. *dax̄yūm*). The scanty evidence points to the conclusion that the ending -s was added to the nominatives at different times and that this was not a uniform process. On the one hand the -s was added to the ending -āu, as in Old Persian

dahyāuš, LAv. *-bāzāuš*, on the other hand it stands after a short *-u* in the noun-class of Ved. *krátuḥ* (gen. *krátvaḥ*), Av. *xratuš* (gen. *xraθwō*), which historically belongs to *-bāzāuš*, gen. *bāzvō*. These forms look as if *-s* has been suffixed to an analogical nominative **krātu*, like Av. *ahu*. As for *ahu*, Beekes 1985,91 is right in rejecting in this case a secondary ablaut *ū:u* (as found in Greek *deiknūmi* : *deiknumen*).

Admittedly, the nominative *ahu* stands alone in Indo-Iranian, but this is hardly a counter-argument. It would certainly have been helpful if among the last few remainders of this prehistoric declension another instance of an analogical nominative in *-u* had survived but demanding this is, I am afraid, asking too much of Chance (and of the small corpus of seventeen songs).

Recently Beekes has advanced the theory that the (prehistoric) nom. sing. of the hysterodynamic declension often had zero grade of the ending instead of the lengthened grade as found in Skt *sákhā*, *pitā*, etc. As for *ahu* he argues (1985, 91): 'If **-āu* was reshaped, we could only expect *-āuš* or *-uš*. Therefore *-u* must be old' (that is, it must be the original Proto-Indo-European ending). Is this a valid argument? Nothing, as far as I can see, prevents our assuming that between the initial stage **kavā* (Av. *kavā*) and the final stage Ved. *kaviḥ* there existed at one time an intermediate stage **kavī*, which survives in Av. *ahu*. Since, however, the nominative of the animate nouns in *-i* and *-u* was thus no longer differentiated from that of the neuter words, an *-s* must soon have been suffixed so as to characterize it again as animate.

The existence of a word *ahu*- 'lord, overlord' (see, e.g., Schlerath, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. I, p. 681) cannot be questioned. Etymologically it has been connected with Hitt. *haššu*- 'king' and Latin *erus* 'lord'.

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NOTES

¹ 'Weiteres zum Ahuna Vairya-Gebet,' *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin Emerito Oblata* (Hommages et Opera Minora, Vol. IX) Leiden-Téhéran-Liège 1984, pp. 225–241.

² Yt 19.12 *+niš +taṭ paiti druxš nāšāite yaδāṭ aišiciṭ jaγmaṭ . . . āδaṭca mare nāšātaēca mairyō +aδā ratuš* 'die Lüge wird wieder dorthin fortgebracht werden, woher sie auch gekommen ist . . . und (fort)gebracht werden wird der Schurke. So (lautet) das Urteil.' Humbach reads *āδaδca* with F1 (but see Geldner, Prolegomena p. XLIV n. 3 in fine) and apparently deletes *mare* (MSS.: *mārə*, but see ad 19.90). He rightly points out that in 19.12 all MSS. read *aδā* and that this is a Gāthism. It must accordingly be a quotation from Old Avestan, and since in 19.12 all MSS. have *vairyō* (*varyō*, etc.) *aδā ratuš* (instead of *mairyō aδa ratuš* at 19.90), this inevitably calls to mind *vairyō aδā ratuš* of the Ahuna-Vairya prayer. Either *mairyō* was misread as *vairyō*, which then entailed the interpolation of *aδā ratuš* or the prayer had been inserted at this place, after which *mairyō yaδā ahū* before *vairyō* was dropped through

haplography (see Lommel, *Die Yasht's des Awesta*, Göttingen-Leipzig 1927, p. 177 n. 2).
Otherwise Geldner, *Drei Yasht aus dem Zendavesta* (Stuttgart 1884), p. 14.

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