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"BLOOD" IN SOGDIAN AND OLD IRANIAN

I

The Sogdian word for 'blood' is attested in a variety of spellings, the stem appearing in the indigenous script as *wγrn*- and *γwrn*-, and in the Manichean script as well as in the Estrangela script (used by members of the East Syrian Church) as *xwrn*-, *yxwrn*-, *yxwn*-, and *ywxn*-. These spellings indicate respective pronunciations *wxrn*-, *xwrn*- or *xurn*-, *yxurn*-, *yxun*-, and *yuxn*-. Apart from an alternation in the position of *w/u*,[1] the features distinguishing the forms are the occurrence or non-occurrence of *y*- and of -*r*-. Otherwise the forms are similar to the words for 'blood' found in the various Iranian languages (for present purposes we may cite Avestan *vohunī*[2] and New Persian *xūn*). It has therefore been assumed hitherto that the Sogdian forms have a simple cognate relationship to the other Iranian words for 'blood' which show the common pattern. In the opening section of the present paper I intend to show that this view is inadequate.

In his authoritative reference work on Sogdian historical phonology, I. Gershevitch treats the issues of *y*- and -*r*- as constituting no real problem for the straightforward derivation of the forms from Old Iranian **wahunī/a*- (Av. *vohunī/a*-)[3]. Here the *y*- < **wa*- is viewed as somehow comparable with *y*- from **wi*- occurring in a large number of words[4], while for -*r*- inserted before -*n*- there is cited the spelling

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[1] The metathesis of *u/w*, together with the common insertion of a secondary *u* into clusters (which I have not indicated in my transcriptions), constitutes a characteristic trait of Sogdian.

[2] For transliteration of Avestan the system of Karl Hoffmann is employed in this paper, with minor changes.

[3] *A Grammar of Manichean Sogdian*. 1954 (repr. 1961), §§ 209 and 417; in § 1168 fn. it is noted that the forms with nom. and acc. ending -*y* (i.e. -*i*) may go back to the equivalent of Av. *vohuni(m)*, and those in nom. and acc. -*w* (i.e. -*u*) to a neuter in **-am*, possible represented by the Av. *vohuna*- in compounds. However -*w* may originally represent a metathetic secondary *u* (cf. *swynw*, Chr. *swxnw* < *sahwan*- § 417 with § 423), and *vohuna*- may be a thematic replacement of -*i*-, limited to compounds. For the sake of convenience I shall henceforth generally cite the Avestan form only as *vohuni*-, even where a neuter in **-a(m)* is also possible.

[4] § 220.

z'rcrnwqy' 'mercy' in a Christian text, alongside the common
z'rcnwqy'[5]. Yet these attempts to account for the problematic con-
sonants are not satisfactory. With *y-* from **wi-* it is the **i* that
became consonantal, this upon the loss of **w-* (which generally
occurs before labials and velars, and may therefore be regarded as
principally a matter of dissimilation[6]). Thus **wi- > y-* is of no relevance
for the alleged change of **wa-* to *y-*, which is moreover contradicted
by the evidence : S. *'ywmn'*, Man. *xwmn'* from **Wahu- Manah-* (Av. *Vohu
Manō*) 'Good Thought', and Man., Chr. *xwm'r* 'consolation' from
*Wahu- Manθra- (Av. *Vohu- Mąθra-*) 'Good Spell'[7]. Furthermore not
only the presence of *y-*, but also the *alternation* of forms with and
without *y-*, remains unexplained; note that *yC- ∼ C-* does not occur
in the words where **wi-* has become *y-* (e.g. the common *yxwāy-*,
yuxāy- 'to separate' does not alternate with **xwāy-* or **u/wxāy-*). Nor
is the supposedly intrusive *r* illuminated by the hapax spelling *z'rcrnwqy'*
against the many instances of *z'rcnwq/k(y')*. One must regard *z'rcrnwqy'*
as a misspelling, probably due to dittography of the *r*.

Since the *y-* and *-r-* cannot be explained as secondary phonetic
developments, and **wahunī-* cannot account for them, some other
explanation must be sought. On the basis of the firmly documented
y- < wi- on one hand, and the many examples of alternations like
xwrm ∼ xrwm 'soil' (cf. Av. *xrūmiia-* 'dusty'[8]) on the other, one may
provisionally reconstruct something like **wixrun-*, which would go to
*yxrun- and then (with metathesis to relieve the triconsonantal cluster)
to *yxurn-*, which could in turn become *yxun-* (*-Vrn-* being often simpli-
fied to *-Vn-*, as shall be discussed further below), and this by a further
metathesis would result in *yuxn-*, thus accounting at least for the
Man. and Chr. spellings.

A reconstruction **wixrūn°* (with a long vowel in the second syllable)
must be set up as the ancestor of the Zoroastrian Middle Persian
(Pahlavi) adjective *guxrūn* (*gwḥlwn'*), abstract noun *guxrūnīh*, taken
with the Avestan words they are used to translate, *xrūniia-* 'bloody
affair, rough treatment' and other related words meaning 'gory,
horrid' (*xrūta-*, *xrūra-*, *xruišiiaṇt-* etc.). The Pahlavi words are them-
selves glossed as referring to wounds (*rēš*) and slaughter (*zadārīh*).

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[5] §360.

[6] For the relationship of *w* to velars, see J. Ohala and J. Lorentz, "The story of [w]:
an exercise in the phonetic explanation of sound patterns", *Proceedings of the Third
Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 1977, 577-599.

[7] Gershevitch, *Grammar* §208.

[8] Gershevitch, *JRAS* 1942, 101; *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra*, 1967, 189.

The formal relationship of *wixrūn(y)a- to Av. xrūniia- requires clarification. A first segmentation *wi-xrūn(y)a- is unsatisfactory, since unlike the *preverb wi-*, the *noun* and *adjective prefix wi-* always has an adversative (separative or privative) value. It is in fact the privative sense that is encountered in Av. vixrūmaṇt-, which E. Benveniste showed to mean 'not bloody, bloodless' in all its contexts[9]. Here we would have a formal opposition to *xrūmaṇt-, poss. adj. in -mant- from xrū- 'gory matter, bloody flesh'. Chr. Bartholomae had wrongly set up two meanings for vixrūmaṇt-, 'über und über blutig'; 'unblutig'[10]. It would appear that Bthl. was at least in part misled by the Pahlavi translation (guxrūn, guxrūnōmand). One wonders however why the Pahlavi, which ordinarily interprets the separative-privative sense of vī- correctly, had misunderstood it here, where the context makes its meaning particularly clear. It is not very likely that the correspondence of MPers. gu- to Av. vī- in certain *verbs* would have sufficed to bring about an equation vī-xrūmaṇt- : gu(-)xrūn. Instead it may be suggested that *vīxrūn(ii)a- occurred in some part of the Avesta which is no longer extant (it may be recalled that we presently possess only a fraction of the text known to the Pahlavi commentators) and gave rise to the misunderstanding of vī(-)xrūmaṇt- (i.e. as vīxrū(-)maṇt- = *vīxrū(-)na-).

The wi- of *wixrūn(y)a-, with its non-adversative meaning, must represent the preverb (where it originally meant 'in more than one direction, from one direction to another' etc., hence its occasional intensive value), and thus we must see here a derivative in -na- from a verbal base *wi-xrū- 'to make or be bloody'. The discovery of a verbal base xrū- in such a sense was made by H. Humbach, who showed that the Gathic passage Y. 53.8 contains alongside jǝnar- < jan-nar- 'killing men' (cf. YAv. jannara-) a compound xrū-nar- 'making men bloody' (whose instrumental xrūnǝrā had been taken as a noun stem 'bloody treatment' by Bartholomae), where the root-stem xrū- is comparable to Vedic mitra-krū- 'mistreating (orig. 'bloodying') the contract', and the juxtaposition of miθra- and xrūniia- in Yt. 46.5[11].

It seems to me that the root krū now also explains the problematic kravaṇá- RV 5.44.9 (often taken as a proper name, or left untranslated), which has the appearance of a straightforward agent noun (*krowHeno-) i.e. 'shedder of blood, performer of a gory act,

[9] *Henning Memorial Volume*, ed. M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch, 1970, 39 seq.
[10] *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1436-1437.
[11] *IF* 1958, 209-211.

slaughterer'. H. Oldenberg (*Ṛgveda*, *Text-kritische und exegetische Noten* I, 1909, 342) noted the possibility "dass *kravaṇá* der Opfer-schlachter ist (vgl. *kravís* I 162, 9.10), dem sein blutiges Tun kein Grauen einflösst, da es durch reinigende Sprüche gesühnt wird". It is now also possible to take Av. *xrūta-* 'horrible, *bloody' (Pahl. *wixrūn* : *rēš kuned*) as the past passive participle of the verb **xrū-*, and *xruuaṇt-* of similar meaning may be from the present active participle (rather than immediately related to Lat. *cruentus*).

The reconstruction **wixrūn(y)a-* is ideally suitable for the Middle Persian word and of help for the pan-Sogdian *-r-* and the Man. and Chr. *y-*, but does not account for *wγrn-*, *γwrn-*, *xwrn-* as against the spellings in *y-*; another difficulty, to which allusion was made above, is the fact that the Sogdian forms show light stems, pointing to a short *u*[12].

These problems are resolved by assuming that Sogdian had inherited, like all the other Middle and New Iranian languages, (1) a form of the Old Iranian word for 'blood', in this instance **wahunī-*, but also had (2) a cognate of MPers. *guxrūn* from **wixrūn(y)a-* 'gore, thick (*coagulated) blood'. In early Middle Sogdian these forms would have appeared respectively as (1) **wəxun-* and (2) **wixrūn(-)*, **wixūrn(-)*, and later as (1') **wxun-* (~ **xwun-*, **xun-*) and (2') **yxūrn(-)*. The similarity of 1/1') and (2/2') in both form and meaning would have made a confusion between the two words inevitable, with the result that the two were blended together as one lexeme with variant forms.

The merger (which occurred after the Rhythmic Law ceased to be productive) was aided by the fact that *-Vrn-* became *-Vn(n)-* in many varieties of Sogdian speech. This feature is regularly attested in Yagh-nobi, which is based on a Sogdian dialect which had become isolated from the major varieties of the language at an early date (i.e. long before the period in which our texts were composed); in the con-servative dialectal continuum documented by the Christian MS *C 2* (first edited by O. Hansen, *Berliner Sogdische Texte II*), and through occasional examples in other Chr. and Man. texts; *-Vrn-* > *-Vn(n)-* is also found as a regular change in Khwarezmian, the medieval language spoken to the south of the Sogdian territory. This distribution makes it likely that *-Vrn-* > *-Vn-* was found dialectally in Middle Sogdian at an early date.

One may now see that **wxun-*, the expected descendent of the proper

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[12] On stem weight (The Rhythmic Law) see Gershevitch, *Grammar* § 484 seq.

word for 'blood' (1), took on the -r- of the 'gore' word (2) with which
it was being confused, wxurn- being regarded as more correct than
*wxun- on the model of e.g. purn- (OIr. *pr̥na-) 'full' as against
substandard pun-. Under the influence of wxurn (> *xwurn-, xurn-),
*yxūrn(-) became yxurn with short u. This left yxurn- (dialectally or
colloquially > yxun-, yuxn-) alongside xurn- in the spoken language.
The forms with y- may have for a while retained the nuance 'thick
blood' and hence been more common in coarse or racy speech,
so that they may have come to be felt by some as substandard
forms of xurn-. Thus only wγrn- / γwrn- were fixed as the "correct"
spellings in the archaizing indigenous orthography. In the orthographies
of the Man. and Chr. scripts, which more accurately transcribed
Sogdian as actually spoken, spellings with and without y- occur,
although apparently each dialect or idiolect preferred one form against
the other.

II

Having pointed out that the origin of the Sogdian for 'blood' is only
partially OIr. *wahunī-, we may take the history of the latter word as
our next subject. *wahunī- does not continue the Indo-Iranian word
for 'blood', which is represented by OInd. ásr̥-g gen. asnás, whose
antiquity is assured by Hittite ešḫar gen. eš(ḫa)naš, Gr. ἥαρ, Latvian
asins, etc., and which seems to have disappeared from Iranian without
a trace[13]. The only suggestion for the origin of *wahunī- encountered
in the etymological handbooks would take it from a Proto-Indo-
European base *wes- pertaining to moisture and liquidity; thus J.
Pokorny[14], who qualifies this etymology with "vermütlich".

The etymon *wes- is however dubious even apart from the issue of
our Iranian word. There is no dependable confirmation of this
base in Indo-Iranian. OInd. vasā 'fat, lard' has an alternate form
vaśā, cf. also vasa- n. 'liquid fat'; possibly s/ś points to a non-Indo-
European source. Gr. ἐαρόν 'vessel for washing' is known only from

[13] Gershevitch, IF 75, 1970 [1971], 306-307, suggests that the obscure MPers.
'swd- corresponding to the unclear Sogd. xwrnptxwrk- (referring to teeth) may mean
'smeared (lit. 'rubbed') with blood', with 'swd- < *ārsūd < *ahr-sūta-, attesting the
equivalent of OInd. asr̥-g. The compound would have to be an early OIr. coinage, but the
ancient equivalent of MPers. sūd 'rubbed' was *sāta- (still surviving in NPers. sād
'rubbed, smooth, plain'), pres. stems in -āy- replacing MPers. past stems in -ād by
-ūd on the analogy of e.g. srāy- (< srāwaya-) : srūd. Thus '- can hardly be from ahr-; for
'swd- one must still stay with the alternatives offered by Henning, Sogdica, p. 23.
[14] Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch I, 1959, 1172.

the lexicographer Hesychius (ηεαρα in an Old Theran inscription may
be another word); even if the form and gloss are correct, ἐαρόν
need hardly be from *wes-; its PIE prototype may have had *H or
*s or *y or *w as the consonant preceding the *e, and any of these
alternatives following it, or any of a number of clusters of these
consonants in either position; thus *sew(H)- (to Gr. ὕει 'rains'),
*seṣr- (to OInd. sarati 'flows'), and other combinations are possible.
Umbrian vestikatu, thought to mean 'libato', is based on a formation
*vestīkā; this in turn could be, if connected with 'liquidity', from
*vesti- (cf. also Umb. uest(e)is?) < PIE *(H₂)wed-ti- from the base
of water, wet, wash etc. The Germanic words of the type of OHG
waso 'moist sod', Dutch waas (< *wēsa-) 'frost, dampness', OEng.
wōs 'moisture, ooze' are now referred by Germanists to the PIE base
*wē-s-[15]. [I take Av. uštra-, fem. uštrā 'camel', OInd. úṣṭra-, 'buffalo,
camel' not from 'moisten', but, with reference to the distinctive hump(s),
from PIIr. *waʒ́- 'to swell, be full of sustenance'.[16]][17]

With dismissal of the etymology 'moisture, liquid', the only explana-
tion for *wahunī- produced by the approach through "root etymolo-
gy"[18] (ordinarily a last resort), let us now re-examine the data in
order to arrive at an inner-Iranian explanation. Avestan has vohunī
'blood' < *wahunī, whence (apart from the Sogdian) also Khwar. hwny;
either this or *wahuna- accounts for Pers. xūn, Khot. hūna- etc., while
forms in *wahwanV- (*wahwani-, *wahwanā- ?) explain Parthian
gwxn (prob. goxan) and the forms in the Pamir languages[19]. In addition
to the forms in -n- there is Avestan vohu-gaona- (gaona- 'color'), which
the Pahlavi takes as 'black'; for 'blood-colored' as 'dark-hued,

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[15] E.g. F. Kluge, Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, 18th ed. [ed. W.
Mitzka], 841. [C.D. Buck and G. Devoto regard the etymology of the Umbrian words
as "unknown"; see A. Ernout, Le dialecte ombrien, 1961, p. 136 for a collection of views.]

[16] [Note H. Humbach's discussion of Av. vāzišta- 'best fed' (MSS 2, 1952 [1957],
24-27, 33-34), the latter words are probably orig. superlative to OIr. vazra- (*'bloated' >)
'club', cf. OPers. vazṛka- 'big'. To H.'s observations on vāzišta- with asti- 'guest', and
OInd. vāja- '(gift of) sustenance, strengthening', vājáya- 'strengthen, energize', I add Oss.
(i)üazæg 'guest', < *wiwāza-ka-, verb *wi-wāzaya- *'feed thoroughly'.]

[17] [The alleged evidence for *wes- 'wet' was rejected independently (without mention
of the Ir. 'blood' word) by E.P. Hamp, Acta Linguistica Hafniensia 12/2, 1969, 159;
163-169.]

[18] One could also propose to compare vohuni etc. with Hitt. ḫuešu-, ḫuešu- 'living. raw,
fresh', ḫuiš-, ḫueš- 'to live'; however outside of Hittite the forms from PIE *H₂wes-
mean 'dwell, spend time' and the like and not 'live', and a noun vohuni 9tc. would
remain isolated.

[19] Cf. G. Morgenstierne, Etymological vocabulary of the Shughni Group, 1974, 93-94
with lit.

blackish' Bartholomae compares Gr. μέλαν αἷμα. There also occurs at the end of a series 'hair, spittle, excrement' the form *vaŋhutāt-* (*Vd.* 6.7 and 29), which is best taken as 'bloody matter' or 'blood and similar substances (lymph, bile, etc.?)'; for the abstract noun suffix *-tāt-* of the latter word note *ūθa-* followed by *ūθō.tāt-* in the phrase 'fat or fatty matter' ('fatlike matter : gelatin etc.'? The reference is to fingers), *Vd.* 6.10. Finally with the abstract suffix *-θβa-* there is *vaŋhuθβa-* 'bloodshed' Yt. 13.23. From *vohu-* in *vohu-gaona-* and *vaŋhu-* in *vaŋhu-tāt-* and *vaŋhu-θβa-* we may see that the basic OIr. word for 'blood' is **wahu-*, of which *vohu-* and *vaŋhu-* are the phonetically regular (*dialectal?) variant reflexes[20].

The latter vocables *vohu-* and *vaŋhu-* are in fact formally identical to the attested Avestan variants reflecting the ordinary OIr. word for 'good', OIr. *wahu-* (OPers. *waʰu-*, cf. OInd. *vasu-*). This is the most obvious candidate for the etymon of the 'blood' words, yet our etymological reference works do not even mention it. This situation no doubt arises from a feeling that 'the good' misses the mark as an apt name for the vital fluid.

I believe that to understand why a word which appears to mean 'good' came to be employed for 'blood', it must be recalled that **wahu-* was a replacement of an older term. The OIr. cognate of OInd. *asr̥-g*, *asr̥-t-* would have been **ahr-* (cf. Av. *yākarə* : OInd. *yakr̥t*) or **ahra-* (if the Iranian had a thematicized form equivalent to post-Vedic *asra-*). The word for 'blood' would have therefore been similar or identical to OIr. **ahra-* etc. 'malevolent, malicious', whence Av. *angra-* (Gāthic), *aŋra-* (Younger Av.) 'id.' (cf. OPers. *aʰrika-* 'malevolent', Bab. *libbi biššu*), as in *Aŋra- Mainiiu-* (> MPers. *Ahrema/en*), translated by MPers. *Gannāg Mēnōg* 'Evil Spirit'. Here we would have an instance of the situation where one word is accidentally homonymous with another referring to something bad, so that the first word is replaced by a form expressing the good. An example well known to Iranists is the history of the name of the Black Sea : The Scythians who dwelt in the area called it *Axšaina-*, *Axšēn* 'dark blue', which was Hellenized as Ἄξεινος; since however the latter

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[20] [For *vaŋhuθβa-*, instead of *'bloodiness' one would expect a meaning similar to that of the parallel *vərəθraɣniia-* 'victory'; see E. Benveniste and L. Renou, *Vr̥tra et Vr̥θragna*, 25-26. Conceivably here *vaŋhu-* is < **wan-h-u-* (like OInd. *dakṣu-*) formed from the sigmatic stem attested in Av. *vāŋhaitī*, *vaŋhəntąm* (= fut.), *vāṇghaṭ* (aor.); hence *vaŋhuθβa-* 'conquest', which also morphologically would be clearer than interpretations with *vaŋhu-* < *wahu-* 'blood' or 'good(s)'.]

happened to sound like 'no (place for) strangers' in Greek, it was replaced by Ἔυξεινος 'good to strangers'. Another illustration from the world of seafaring is the Late Latin history of Greek μαλακία 'gentle weather, doldrums'; borrowed as *malacia*, it sounded sinister to the Romance ear and was replaced by **bonacia*, whence e.g. Macedonian Rumanian *bunaţă*, Spanish *bonanza* etc.[19] This type of euphemism is of course not limited to loanwords, as may be shown from an interesting example from Yiddish. Where other dialects have a distinction between 'to dwell' (*voynen* = NHG *wohnen*) and 'to weep' (*veynen* [or *vaynen*] = NHG *weinen*), Northern Yiddish ("Litviš"), in which *oy* and *ey* merged as *ey*, has *veynen* in both senses; many speakers of this dialect therefore say for 'where do you live' not *vu veynt ir* but *vu laxt ir* 'where are you laughing?' or *vu freyt ir zex* 'where are you rejoicing?'.

From these parallels it may be concluded that in order to avoid attributing evil to blood, **ahr(a)-* was replaced by **wahu-* 'the good (stuff)'. This simple form, preserved only by Avestan in two abstract nouns and a compound, came to assume greater formal specificity as a substantive by taking on the stem suffix -(*a*)*n*- (cf. Av. *spərəzan-* 'spleen', *nāh-*, *nåŋhan-* 'nose'); to the zero-grade of the suffix was added, in conformity with a common pattern, the fem. suffix -*ī*-, or to the medium grade various vocalic suffixes, as reflected by the Parthian and Pamir forms.

[21] Kindly called to my attention by Prof. Yakov Malkiel, who refers me to Meyer-Lübke, *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 1935, p. 428, no. 5254.