Avestan āsitō.gātu-

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1. The quasi-hapax āsitō.gātūm is found in Y 62.5 (= Yt 19.39), in a description of ḫam.varōiti-, something like 'Valour', the main feature of which is alertness:

   nairiīam pascaēta ḫam.varōitīm
   ārōbbō.zaŋgam ax'afniīam
   āsitō.gātūm jaẏāurūm

   '[Give me] further the manly Valour, with upright shanks, without sleep, āsitō.gātu-, vigilant.'

2. The analysis of ax'afniīam 'without sleep' and jaẏāurūm 'vigilant, awake' is uncontroversial, but the other two epithets have been interpreted in various ways. Usually, ārōbbō.zaŋga-, literally 'with upright shanks', is taken to indicate "the posture of the watchful servant" (Gershevitch 1959: 210), which is no doubt the most probable solution, cf. further Yt 10.61 mītrōm ... jayauruuănham ārōbbō.zaŋgəm zaēṇaṇhūṇtōm spasəm taxməm viiāxnəm "Mithra [we worship], who stands watchful with upright shanks, the challenging watcher" (Gershevitch). Geldner's suggestion (1881: 522) that ārōbbō.zaŋga- means "die beine hinauf, in die hęhe gezogen habend, d.h. der lange nach auf dem lager, bett u.s.f. liegend" is improbable. The Sanskrit parallel which he adduced, viz. ārdhvajānu- (cf. also MS KS ārdhvąjṇu-1) '(sitting) with knees pointing up', describes a sitting posture with knees in a vertical position and does not have the general implication "auf dem boden sitzend". Moreover, both Avestan ārōbbā- and Sanskrit ārdhvà- specifically denote a vertical position, so that 'with shanks in a vertical position' can only refer to a standing posture.

   Geldner's other argument concerned an apparently parallel construction in the next line, but, as we shall presently see, the construction of the next line is different. In spite of the fact that Geldner's suggestion found some cautious acclaim of Gershevitch (1954: 210), it seems clear that ārōbbō.zaŋga- means 'with vertical shanks' = '(always) on the feet'.

3. The epithet āsitō.gātu- was translated 'with quick pace' (cf. Darmesteter: "vite levée"), until Geldner (op.cit.) pointed out that Avestan gātu- never has this meaning and that āsita- cannot be derived from āsu- 'quick'. He suggested to take āsita- as a ptc. of as- 'to achieve' and translated

   1MS 1.10.9 (149,18-20) ārdhvajānu āsīnāh yajati. ārdhvajāṇavaḥ hī pasāvah pasūṣu réto ṛāḍhaty. ātho ārdhvajānu hī praṇāpātiḥ praṇā āśjata 'He sacrifices sitting with his knees up. For the cattle put the semen in the cattle with their knees up (i.e. standing?). For Prajāpati produced the creatures with his knees up.
the compound 'der sein lager (ruhesitz und dergl.) erreicht, aufgesucht hat; ruhend, ausruhend'. Since Geldner’s analysis of āśita- is also morphologically impossible, Bartholomae derived āśita-
from ā-√śi- 'to lie’. The meaning of the compound remained the same: ‘auf dem Lager ruhend’.

This analysis of āśitō,gātu- has become canonical and is found in all handbooks and translations. The derivation from the root sī- must be correct, considering the fixed collocation √sī- + gātu-(acc.) 'to lie on a couch’, attested in V 3.25 sarāta gātūs saiāmanō ‘lying on the spread couches’ and in an unclear passage Yt 5.102 gātu saite x’āēui.staratōm.

However, there are several problems. First, the construction 'lying on a couch [and still]
awake’ is rather strange within the whole context. We expect āśitō,gātu- to belong to the semantic field of 'watchful, alert’. Secondly, this is the only example of ā + sī- in the Avesta, which is, admittedly, a minor point (cf. Skt. ā-√śi-). Thirdly, if āśita- means 'lying’, the bahuvrīhi compound āśitō,gātu- can only mean 'of a "lied on" couch’ = 'whose couch has been used’, from where there is no way to get to 'lying on a couch’. Since there are some misunderstandings concerning the Sanskrit and Avestan bahuvrīhi compounds with ta-particiles as a first member, a short digression is in place.

4. As pointed out by Wackernagel 1905: 276, Sanskrit bahuvrīhi compounds with ta-particiles as a first member show ambiguity in respect to the agent of the action. For instance, Vedic compound rātā-havya- 'of presented offering’ allows of two interpretations: either the referent has presented the offering himself (he then is the sacrificer), or the offering is presented by somebody else, and the referent then is a deity. Both meanings are attested in the Rgveda.² From the fact that the referent is often the agent of the action, we may not, however, draw the conclusion that "diese Komposita [sind] den alten Komposita mit verbalem Vorderglied und dem Synthetika gleichwertig; z.B. für v. vājam-bhara- "den Preis davon tragend" S. vāja-bhṛt-
einerseits und v. bharad-vāja- n. pr. anderseits wäre auch bhṛta-vāja- denkbar" (Wackernagel ibid.). The essential difference between the two types is that bahuvrīhi compounds with ta-particiles refer to an action in the past or to the result of this action, whereas the other type describes an action being carried out in the present.

In Bartholomae’s dictionary we often find such imprecise renderings of compounds with ta-particiles, and Duchesne-Guillemin plainly states in his book on Avestan compounds (1936: 170): "le mot qualifié par le composé est sujet du procès exprimé par le 1er t.: ainsi dātō.saoka-
signifie, non pas seulement «ayant profit donné», mais «par qui du profit est donné», c.-à.-d. «qui donne du profit»..."³ This is not the case, however. For instance, Av. dātō.rāzah- does not

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² For instance, in 4.7.7c rātā-havya- refers to Agni, in 7.35.1b to Indrāvaruṇā, whereas in 1.118.11c and 2.25.1b this term refers to the sacrificer; cf. especially the formula namasā rātahavya- ‘bringing offerings with homage’, attested five times.

³ As was convincingly argued by Kellens (1974: 195), Av. saokā- is derived from the root suc- 'to shine' and means something like 'lustre'.
mean "qui fait les lois" given by Duchesne-Guillemin, but 'of the established Law' = 'he who has established the Law'. Similarly, *frakərəstō.frasāna- means 'of caused destruction' = 'he who has caused the destruction' and not "qui produit la destruction", etc.

5. Let us now return to *āsitō.gātu-. If *āsitā- is the ta-participle of sī- 'to lie' with the preverb ă, the compound cannot mean 'auf dem Lager ruhend' (Bartholomae) or 'qui occupe la couche', but only 'whose couch has been used', which does not make sense in the given context. The solution of the problem is rather simple. We must assume that the length of the initial ă- is unetymological, the compound being *asita-gātu- 'of "unlied" couch', i.e. 'who never sees his bed'. In this way, we get four epithets of hām.varəiti-, referring to her alertness: əɾəəə.əŋəm aṅəafiiəm *āsitō.gātii jayāurūm 'always on her feet, without sleep, never seeing her bed, vigilant'. We can thus add *āsitō.gātu- to the fairly long list of polysyllabic words with unetymological long ă in the first syllable (cf. Kuiper 1939: 35ff., Oettinger 1983: 354ff., Hoffmann – Forssman 1996: 56), e.g. hātəm/hataam/, āiia əəm, Xştiiuuiiiō, āərauuun-/, ārmaiti-/aramati-/hataam/, kāuuaiias-cā, srāuuahiieiti, etc.

References