Farnah

Indo-Iranian and Indo-European Studies

in Honor of

Sasha Lubotsky
# Table of Contents

**Farnah**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography of Sasha Lubotsky</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. Students of Sasha Lubotsky</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Contributors</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter C. Bisschop, Vedic Elements in the <em>Pāṇḍitaśūtra</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Václav Blažek, The Case of Tocharian ‘silver’: Inherited or Borrowed?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michiel de Vaan, The Noncanonical Use of Instrumental Plurals in Young Avestan</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, Sogdian Plurals in the Vessantara Jātaka</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jost Gippert, A Middle Iranian Word Denoting an Office-Holder</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie W. Jamison, The Vedic Perfect Imperative and the Status of Modal Forms to Tense-Aspect Stems</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Janda, Vedisch <em>dhēna</em>-: Bedeutung und Etymologie</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay H. Jasanoff, The Phonology of Tocharian B <em>okso</em> ‘ox’</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared Klein, Syncretism in Indo-European: A Natural History</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alwin Kloeckhorst, The Origin of the Hittite <em>hi</em>-Conjugation</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werner Knobl, Das Demonstrativpronomen <em>ETĀD</em> im Rgveda</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petr Kocharov, A Comment on the Vocalization of Word-initial and Medial Laryngeals in Armenian</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederik Kortlandt, The Indo-European <em>k</em>-Aorist</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guus Kroonen, Lachmann’s Law, Thurneysen’s Law, and a New Explanation of the PIE <em>no</em>-Participle</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonid Kulikov, Vedic <em>ābanās</em>- and Its Relatives/Cognates within and outside Indo-Iranian</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martin Joachim Kümmel</td>
<td>The Survival of Laryngeals in Iranian</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemarie Lühr</td>
<td>Prosody in Indo-European Corpora</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrach Martirosyan</td>
<td>Armenian An´ndayin ōj and Vedic Áhi- Budhnyà- ‘Abyssal Serpent’</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranko Matasovič</td>
<td>Iranian Loanwords in Proto-Slavic: A Fresh Look</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Craig Melchert</td>
<td>Semantics and Etymology of Hittite takš-</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedicte Nielsen Whitehead</td>
<td>PIE *giw-h2-éty- ‘cow’</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan J. Nussbaum</td>
<td>A Dedicatory Thigh: Greek µηρός and µηταχυρμα Once Again</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norbert Oettinger</td>
<td>Vedisch Vivásvant- und seine avestische Entsprechung</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birgit Anette Olsen</td>
<td>The Development of Interconsonantal Laryngeals in Indo-Iranian and Old Avestan zqβα ptα</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michaël Peyrot</td>
<td>Tocharian B etswe ‘mule’ and Eastern East Iranian</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georges-Jean Pinault</td>
<td>New Look at Vedic ´sám</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tijmen Pronk</td>
<td>Old Church Slavonic (j)utro, Vedic usár- ‘daybreak, morning’</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velizar Sadovski</td>
<td>Vedic and Avestan Parallels from Ritual Litanies and Liturgical Practices I</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Starostin</td>
<td>Typological Expectations and Historic Reality: Once Again on the Issue of Lexical Cognates between Indo-European and Uralic</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucien van Beek</td>
<td>Greek πέδιλον ‘sandal’ and the Origin of the e-Grade in PIE ‘foot’</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Weiss</td>
<td>Veneti or Venetes? Observations on a Widespread Indo-European Tribal Name</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index Verborum</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vedic āhanás- and Its Relatives/Cognates within and outside Indo-Iranian

LEONID KULIKOV

1 Introductory remarks

This paper discusses possible etymological connections of two Vedic forms that are considered problematic in Mayrhofer’s etymological dictionary, āhanás- ‘lustful, obscene’ and jaghána- ‘genitals, pubis’.

In §§2 and 3, I will argue that there are good reasons to connect these formations with the root han ‘beat, strike, hit, kill’ (< PIE *gwen-), originally probably denoting repeated strikes or lashes. This meaning could easily develop the secondary semantics ‘perform sexual movements, have sex’, which, ultimately, must underlie such derivatives as āhanás- and jaghána-. §4 focuses on the reflexes of PIE *gwen- in Slavic, paying special attention to possible traces of its secondary meaning ‘have sex’.

2 Vedic āhanás- and its sources

The relatively rare Vedic word āhanás- is attested only in the Rgveda (RV) and is translated in some passages as ‘swelling, skimmed, beaten’ (of Soma). This meaning can be explained as based on a particular use of the verb han ‘beat, strike’, comparable to the case of whipped (cream), Russ. vzbityj id., etc. (cf. already Böhtlingk and Roth’s (1855–75:1.746) comparison with Russ. nabityj), and does not require special comments. In addition, we find a few occurrences of the same lexeme where it is rendered as ‘unchaste, wanton; obscene, lascivious, profligate’ (e.g. Monier-Williams 1899:162; Böhtlingk and Roth, ibid.: ‘geil, üppig’), as in the following passage from the Yama and Yamī hymn (where this word appears twice):

\footnote{Cf. also a brief discussion of this lexical entry, with an explanation of its etymology, in the letters from Otto Böhtlingk to Rudolf Roth, recently published in Böhtlingk 2008:97 (letter of 11/22 December 1854): “Bei āhanas bitte ich zu streichen, wenn Sie nicht einverstanden sind. Набитый bedeutet aufgeschlagen und dann vollgestopft, überfüllt.”}

\footnote{Also in the -ya-derivative āhanasya- ‘lasciviousness, obscenity, lascivious text’, attested from the Brāhmanas onwards.}
The form is regarded by many scholars as etymologically unclear. Mayrhofer (1986–96:1.184) translates it as ‘schwellend, strotzend, geil, üppig’ and derives this formation, together with “ghaná-” m. Klumpen, kompakte Masse,” from the hypothetical root *gʰen- ‘swollen’ (ibid., 184 and 512), to be distinguished from *gʰen- ‘beat, strike, kill’. This etymology essentially follows the morphological analysis proposed in Wackernagel 1896:245 and Debrunner 1954:234 and appears quite problematic from the semantic point of view (‘lump’ → ‘swollen’ (?) → ‘lustful’ (?)), let alone the dubious character of the alleged root *gʰen- (not adopted in LIV).

The analysis of this form as an -as-derivative of the root han ‘beat, strike’ and the meaning ‘make love, have sex, fuck’ is obvious and hardly requires special argumentation. This semantic development, in accordance with the diachronic scenario ‘beat, strike’ → ‘perform sexual strikes’ → ‘perform sexual movements’, is universal and occurs in many languages. Cf. a selection of examples from a variety of both Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages collected by Ogier (1996) (reproduced here with minor corrections):

- Eng. fuck ∼ PIE *peu(˘)g- ‘prick, stab’ (see also LIV 2.480)
- Hebrew dšykah ‘knock, beat’; (slang) ‘sexual intercourse’
- Rus. pixnut’ ‘push’ ∼ reciprocal pere-pixnut’-sja (slang) ‘have (occasional and/or quick) sex’
- Latin -futo ‘strike’ ∼ futuo ‘fuck, copulate’ (see e.g. de Vaan 2008:235f.)
- Germ. *bautan (> Eng. beat, ON bauta, OHG bozan) ∼ Eng. butt(ocks)

This list could easily be extended.

The secondary, obscene, meaning of han, 2. ‘perform sexual movements; have sex’, opens the way to the rise of a variety of nominal derivatives that could become part of the sexual vocabulary, referring to a plethora of meanings in the sexual domain, such as ‘obscene, lascivious, lustful’ or ‘body parts related to sex(ual movements), genitals’.

Our nominal formation, ahānās-, under this analysis, obviously represents an -as-derivative based on the compounded verb á-han. The Ved. verb han is more commonly attested

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1The morphological analysis and exact meaning of the form víṣā (which I am going to discuss elsewhere) are unclear, but, most likely, it represents the instrumental singular form of the adjective vyāte-, meaning ‘oriented to different directions; spreading out’ or the like.

2“schwellend, strotzend, üppig, ahānās-, zu hānti schlägt (vgl. russ. nabītyj voll zu biti schlagen und ghanās).” More correct and accurate would be comparison with Russ. szibityj ‘whipped’ (of cream). The second meaning of ahānās-, ‘lustful’, was obviously understood by Böhtlingk (2008:97; see n. 1 above) as based on ‘overstuffed, swollen’ (“vollgestopft, überfüllt”) → ‘curvaceous, voluptuous, buxom’.
with other preverbs, such as áva, ápa, or ví. Yet compounds with á do occur in Vedic, and, most importantly, among the few of its attestations we find one which is particularly relevant for our discussion:

RV 10.85.12ab
śucī te cakrē yat yā 'vyanā ākṣa āhataḥ
“The two gleaming ones [= Heaven and Earth?] were your two wheels as you drove. Breath was hammered in as the axle.” (Jamison and Brereton 2014:3, 152)

Obviously, at least one of the meanings of the compound ā-han was ‘hammer in, insert, stick (in)’, said, in particular, of an axle inserted into the hub of a wheel (Grassmann 1873:1641: “hineinstossen, hineinstecken”). Given the common connection between the meanings ‘beat’ and ‘perform sex’, the compound ā-han could easily develop, as part of the sexual dictionary, the meaning ‘insert, hammer in’ (of penis). The sexual metaphors of the type “insert the axle into the hub of a wheel” ~ “insert penis into vagina” or “two rolling wheels (connected with an axle)” ~ “two lovers having sex” (note that this erotic connotation is particularly appropriate in the context of the wedding hymn RV 10.85) was not uncommon for the Vedic Aryans; cf. another passage from the Yama and Yamī hymn RV 10.10:

RV 10.10.7cd
jāyēva pátye tan vām riricyām 'vi cid vyheva ráth yeva cakrā
“Like a wife to the husband I would like to offer [him] [my] body. Let us roll, mutually screwing [in and] out like two wheels of a chariot!”

The meaning ‘lascivious, lustful, obscene’ can be obtained for the agentive masculine -as-derivative of this compound, developing from ‘the one who strikes in(side), the one who hammers in’. The verbs of copulation are often non-symmetrical, so that only the male participant of the sexual act can be considered as agentive. Yet it is not impossible that the meanings such as ‘eager to have sex’ or ‘lustful’ that have developed for the noun referring to the agentive participant of the sexual act have been expanded to the female sexual partner. Note also that the first meaning attested for āhanās-, ‘skimmed, whipped’, points to the passive reading that could also be available for this derivative.

This etymology is further supported by the specific aspectual meaning posited for the source of Ved. han, PIE *gwhen-. According to García Ramón (1998), this root refers, above all, to repeated lashes or strikes (“Präsenswurzel wohl urspr. iterativer Aktionsart, aus der sich die bsl. Bedeutung ‘treiben’ am besten erklären läßt,” LIV 218) and, obviously, perfectly fits in the (secondary) meaning ‘perform sexual movements’. This repetitive meaning is also preserved for the Vedic reduplicated thematic present jīghna-.

3 Ved. jaghāna- and its possible connection with han ‘beat, strike’

The morphological structure and etymology of the Vedic nominal stem jaghāna- (RV +), for which Monier-Williams’s dictionary (1899:408) offers the translations ‘the hinder part, buttock, hip and loins, pudenda, mons veneris’ and Grassmann (1873:464) ‘Hinterbacke,

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1See Adams 1982:12f. on the use of Latin futuere: “Except in the passive, futuo was not as a rule used of the female role.”
Schamgegend', is not very clear. Mayrhofer (1986–96:1,563) and LIV² (175f.) adopt the analysis of this formation as a derivative of the root *gʰəngʰ-/*gʰəngʰ- ‘tread, step’ (‘schreiten’), reflected, for instance, in Proto-Germanic *gəngan- and, presumably, in Ved. jāṅgha- ‘foot’. Again, as in the case of āhanás-, compared by Mayrhofer with ghaná- ‘club, compact mass’, the alleged semantic connection (‘tread, (make) steps’ → ‘hinder part, buttock, genitals, pudenda’) can be questioned. By contrast, a connection with han ‘1. beat, strike; 2. have sex’ appears quite likely, at least from the semantic point of view.

As is well-known, the system of the reduplicated nominal formations is rather weakly elaborated in Vedic. Next to the relatively productive type cākri- (see Grestenberger 2013), there are a few other, rarer and isolated, types, mainly based on verbal formations, especially on reduplicated presents and intensives; see Debrunner 1954:83ff. Most of them show zero grade in the root (cf. va-vr-á- ‘hiding oneself’ etc.), but there are also a few instances of full grade stems, such as ca-car-á- RV 10.106.8 ‘movable’ (?).

The analysis of Ved. jāghāna- as one such reduplicated formation appears quite probable. In spite of the nonproductive character of the reduplicated nominal formations, the hypothetical connection of ja-ghan-a- with the root han can be indirectly corroborated by the existence of the reduplicated thematic present derived from this root in Indo-Iranian (see §2), particularly fitting for the meanings in the sexual domain, such as ‘perform sexual movements’ ← ‘perform repeated strikes’. We find in Indo-Iranian traces of both i- and a-reduplication, cf. Ved. jīgnā-te as opposed to Av. pres. -jagnante (with aor. -jagnat). Garcia Ramón (1998) takes the latter as original (*gwhē-gwhēn-), while LIV² (218) adopts the reconstruction *gwhē-gwhēn-.

In fact, both types of reduplication are likely to be traceable to the proto-language, co-existing within the same present paradigm (*gwhē-gwhēn-/*gwhē-gwhēn-) and thus instantiating the alternation preserved in such verbs as Ved. 3sg. act. sī-s.akti ‘(s/he) follows’ ∼ 3pl. act. sā-sce-ati ‘(they) follow’; see Kortlandt 1987 and 2004 as well as Kulikov 2005 for further discussion.

The nominal formation jāghāna- can thus be analyzed as based on the reduplicated present **jaghna- (~ jīgnā-; preserved with a-reduplication only in Iranian), with secondary full grade of the root. From the semantic point of view, it can be explained as resulting from the metonymic development ‘sexual movements’ → ‘body part related to sexual movements’ → ‘genitals and adjacent area’.

The analysis of the two nominal formations under study, jāghāna- ‘buttock(s), genitals’ and āhanás- ‘lustful’, as derivatives of the root han (< PIE *gwhēn-) points to the fact that this verb could readily furnish nominal stems for sexual vocabulary. Accordingly, it might be appropriate to look for its possible derivatives in sexual vocabularies of other Indo-European languages outside Indo-Iranian.

As is well-known, one such form is the Greek noun κοχώνη ‘buttocks’. No doubt, the similarity of κοχώνη and Ved. jāghāna- cannot be accidental, though the exact character of the relationship between them is a difficult problem, remaining the subject of lively debates.⁶ The Greek form may result from some secondary analogical (and/or euphemistic?) replace-
ments, which are universally and cross-linguistically not uncommon for taboo words (see §4).

4 Slavic sexual vocabulary and possible reflexes of PIE *gwen- 2. ‘have sex’

4.1 Reflexes of PIE *gwen- ‘strike’ and *gwen-(ebh-) ‘woman’

The reflex of the Proto-Indo-European root *gwen- is well-preserved in the Slavic verb for ‘drive, impel’, OCS *gonati, ženq, etc. (see, e.g., LIV 218f.). At first glance, we find no direct traces of the secondary meaning ‘perform sexual movements, have sex’ or, more generally, anything which might belong to sexual vocabulary among the attested derivatives of this Slavic verbal root.

Let it be recalled, however, that, due to the loss of the opposition between aspirate and simple (non-aspirate) voiced consonants in Slavic, the reflex of PIE *gwh had merged with the reflex of PIE *gwh. This implies that the reflex of our root *gwh- should be identical with the reflex of the well-known PIE root *gwen- (with its main derivative, the ā-stem *gwen(ē)n-(ebh2)-; see e.g. NIL 177ff.) ‘woman, wife’. Indeed, the root of the verb žen-q is homonymous with that of žen-a (< *gwen-eh2-) ‘woman, wife’.

It would appear that the meanings of these two roots and their derivatives in Slavic, albeit homophonous, are clearly distinct and do not have any semantic overlaps. Yet the meanings ‘women’, ‘wife’, and, especially, ‘female’ are of course not totally unrelated to the semantics of sexual vocabulary. Accordingly, one might assume that some derivatives of the root žen- < *gwen- ‘woman, wife’, even though not being direct derivatives of žen-/g¢n-, could have been influenced by some derivatives of this root in its secondary, sexual, use 2. ‘have sex’.

There are indeed a few forms that might be qualified as possible traces of this hypothetical contamination. Thus, the dictionary of the Russian dialects (Filin et al. 1965–, vyp. 9[1972]:12f.) records for the verb ženit’sja, next to its principal meaning ‘marry [a woman]’, the meaning “vstupat’ v polovuju svjaz” (have sex). Likewise, the verbal derivative (denominal verb) of ženix ‘groom, fiancé’ (itself a derivative of ženi-(t’sja)), ženix-at’sja, alongside the meanings ‘court (a girl); ask in marriage’ can also be used in the sense ‘have premarital sex’ (ibid., 126). Note, incidentally, that the noun ženix, derived with the non-productive suffix -x- (going back to PIE *-x-; see, e.g. Vaillant 1974:4.658ff.; Matasović 2014:8ff.) from the verbal stem žen-i-(t’sja), at least from a formal point of view, may represent a morphological quasi-cognate of Ved. (ā-)hanás- (< *gwen-es-) ‘lustful, eager to have sex, etc.’.

Finally, of special interest is the form ženima ‘concubine’, attested only in the early period, in particular in Old Russian (see Sreznevskij 1893–1912:1.857 for textual attestations) and Old Czech; see Vasmer 1967:2.46. Morphologically, this might be a substantivized present passive participle of the verb OCS, Old Russ. żenit ‘marry (tr.)’, which would imply the meaning ‘being married’ or the like. This meaning is indeed attested for the regular forms of the present passive participle, but it can hardly explain the older meaning ‘concubine’,7 which may be a relic of a more archaic (?) use, perhaps based on a different root. Assuming a direct connection of this word with the secondary use of the verb *gwen- 2. ‘perform

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7According to Sobolevskij 1911:335 (= 2006:333), this word may instantiate a rare formation with the diminutive (or pejorative) suffix -im(a), but evidence for the existence of this suffix is very meager.
sexual movements ("strikes"); fuck’, we obtain a straightforward explanation of this word as present passive participle meaning ‘fuckable’ (lit. ‘sexually strikeable’) or the like, which, obviously, could easily develop the meaning ‘concubine’.

4.2 Possible relatives of Ved. jaghána- ‘buttock, pudenda’ etc. in Slavic?

Next to these few, mostly indirect and uncertain, traces of the secondary meaning of *gʷen- 2. ‘have sex’ in Slavic (which could probably be explained differently, as resulting from the internal development of the meaning ‘women, wife’, etc.), there is yet another Slavic (Russian) form which, as I will argue, may be related, at least indirectly, to Ved. jaghána- ‘buttock, pudenda’ etc. and therefore should be relevant for our discussion.

Let it first be recalled that reduplicated stems of the type jaghána- (or kozóvě) are very rare and marginal in Slavic. Therefore, even if such forms existed in the proto-language, they should have been replaced by non-reduplicated formations in the Proto-Indo-European dialect that was the source of Proto-Slavic. Depending on the vocalic grade of the root, e or o, where the former caused palatalization of the initial velar (g > ž), possible suffixed derivatives might start with **žen- or **gon-, for instance, **žen-a (becoming further žón-a under the accent, due to the change e > o after the 12–13th century; see e.g. Kiparsky 1963:107ff.) or **gon-a.

Obviously, such hypothetical derivatives of the supposed reflex of *gʷen- 2. ‘have sex’ (many of which could be taboo words) should eventually have been ousted by the derivatives of the homophonous root *gʷn- (*gʷ(ε)n-eh2-), such as, first of all, žena ‘woman, wife’. Some of these hypothetical derivatives of *gʷen- 2. ‘have sex’ perhaps never existed or disappeared before the documented period had started, or even within the historical period, but without leaving any traces in written sources. This is not surprising in view of taboo operating in this part of the lexicon and the understandable tendency to avoid unwanted similarity of the type žená ‘woman, wife’ (gen. pl. žen(ə) > žón etc.) / **žón-a ‘related to sexual act’.

Next to the two logical options in the history of such taboo words, that is, (i) complete loss without leaving any trace, and (ii) indirect and marginal uncertain traces within the rich derivational network of *gʷen- (*gʷ(ε)n-eh2-) ‘woman, wife’ (see §4.1), one might assume yet another, third, path of development that such hypothetical derivatives could follow. This is the way of irregular changes and analogical replacements under the influence of other, historically unrelated, forms that did not make up part of the sexual vocabulary and therefore were not subject to taboo. Examples of such euphemism-driven changes include, for instance, the replacements of taboo words of the type Mod. Russian blad’ ‘whore’ → blin! (lit. ‘pancake’) or job… ‘fuck…!’ → jolki – palki! (lit. ‘spruces-sticks’). Both expressive exclamations retain the initial part (the initial syllable, or some part of it) of the underlying taboo words and are used in colloquial speech approximately like Eng. shoot! On this mechanism of euphemistic replacement, see, e.g., Vidlak 1967; Golev 2004; Ximik 2004.

A similar mechanism may account for the origin of an old puzzle of Russian etymology, the semi-tabooed substantive žopa ‘buttocks’. Albeit remaining the subject of lively debates,

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*With examples from other languages, cf. Polish dać komu w Portugalię ‘to give s.o. a kick in the ass’, with the replacement Portugalia ‘Portugal’ ← portki ‘pants’.
this word has never received any satisfactory etymological explanation. Assuming the existence of a hypothetical derivative of the reflex of *$gwh^\text{en}$- 2. ‘have sex’, i.e. *$\derv{\text{\textit{zen}}}$-, we arrive at forms such as, for instance, **$\derv{\text{\textit{zen}}}$-a > **$\derv{\text{\textit{son}}}$-a (see above). This latter form could further be replaced by a co-sounding euphemistic substitute under the influence of a more neutral, but meaning essentially the same, word for buttocks, *$\derv{\text{\textit{popa}}}$.

The etymological source of *$\derv{\text{\textit{popa}}}$, which is not a taboo word and sometimes is considered as originating from the child lexicon, is unclear and deserves a separate study. Unfortunately, Vasmer (1967) does not even include this word in his etymological vocabulary. Note that in some Slavic languages the root *$\derv{\text{\textit{pop}}}$- shows much wider semantics and clearly belongs to the sexual vocabulary, cf. Middle Polish (17th–18th cent.) *$\derv{\text{\textit{pop}}} $ ‘penis’ (Lewinson 1999:187).

Thus, the resulting form, *$\derv{\text{\textit{zopa}}}$, could obtain its initial part (the first syllable) from the hypothetical source form **$\derv{\text{\textit{zon}}}$-a, while the second part (second consonant) was borrowed from the more neutral *$\derv{\text{\textit{popa}}}$, in accordance with the scenario of the type *$\text{bl'ad'} \rightarrow \text{blin}$ mentioned above.

5 Concluding remarks

The indirect connection of words such as *$\derv{\text{\textit{zenima}}}$, *$\derv{\text{\textit{zenit'ja}}}$, *$\derv{\text{\textit{zenix}(-at'ja)}}$, and, presumably, *$\derv{\text{\textit{zopa}}}$ with the secondary meaning of *$\text{gwh}^\text{en}$- 2. ‘have sex’, which, as I hope to have demonstrated in this paper, is quite probable, provides additional evidence for the archaic character of Slavic sexual and obscene vocabulary; recall that Slavic is the only branch of Indo-European that preserves the PIE root *$\text{iebh}$- ‘copulate, fuck’ in its original use up to the present. As is well-known, this part of the lexicon poses serious difficulties for historical linguistics and Proto-Indo-European reconstruction. Due to severe taboo operating in this domain, we observe rapid turnover and frequent euphemistic replacements in the sexual lexicon. Yet, even for this, quite unstable, subset of vocabulary, we are able to uncover a number of relics, “splinters” of the original forms, that can help us to reconstruct this important and very archaic layer of the Proto-Indo-European lexicon.¹⁰

Abbreviations


References


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