

Farnah

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in Honor of

Sasha Lubotsky



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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 **ǵʰen-*), 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 **ǵʰen-* 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 Ṛgveda (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*),¹ 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'),² as in the following passage from the Yama and Yamī hymn (where this word appears twice):

¹Cf. 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."

²Also in the *-ya*-derivative *āhanasya*- 'lasciviousness, obscenity, lascivious text', attested from the Brāhmaṇas onwards.

RV 10.10.6d

kád u brava āhano vīcyā nṛṇ“How can you talk to men, taking an obscene [posture (?)],³ o **lustful** one!?”

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 “*ghanaś*–² m. Klumpen, kompakte Masse,” from the hypothetical root **g^hen-* ‘schwellen’ (ibid., 184 and 512), to be distinguished from **g^{mh}en-* ‘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 **g^hen-* (not adopted in LIV).

The analysis of this form as an *-as*-derivative of the root *han* (with the preverb *ā*), adopted by Uhlenbeck (1898–9:23), who obviously follows Böhtlingk and Roth,⁴ is evident, at least from the formal point of view. However, this analysis is discarded by Mayrhofer (1956–80:1.84), following Oldenberg 1909–12:1.919, 2.206, and Neisser 1924–30:1.156. Yet, in my view, Ved. *āhanás*- in both uses (‘whipped’ and ‘lustful’) can be explained perfectly, both semantically and morphologically, as a derivative of *ā-han*.

First of all, the connection between the primary meaning 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(ǵ)-* ‘prick, stab’ (see also LIV² 480)
- Hebrew *dfykhah* ‘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 2008:253f.)
- 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 sexual movements), genitals’.

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

³The morphological analysis and exact meaning of the form *vīcyā* (which I am going to discuss elsewhere) are unclear, but, most likely, it represents the instrumental singular form of the adjective *vīcān-*, meaning ‘oriented to different directions; spreading out’ or the like.

⁴“schwellend, strotzend, üppig, *āhanás*-, zu *hānti* schlägt (vgl. russ. *nabityj* voll zu *biti* schlagen und *ghanás*).” More correct and accurate would be comparison with Russ. *vzbityj* ‘whipped’ (of cream). The second meaning of *āhanás*-, ‘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 *vi*. Yet compounds with *ā* 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

śúcī te cakrē yāt,yā́ ʾ v,yānó áksa 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, 1522)

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,yām riricyām ʾ ví cid vṛheva ráth,yeva cakrá

“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.⁵ 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 *āhanás-*, ‘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 **ǵʰen-*. 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,” LIV² 218) and, obviously, perfectly fits in the (secondary) meaning ‘perform sexual movements’. This repetitive meaning is also preserved for the Vedic reduplicated thematic present *jighma-te*.

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

The morphological structure and etymology of the Vedic nominal stem *jaghána-* (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,

⁵See Adams 1982:121f. 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 **ǵʰongʰ-/ǵʰngʰ-* 'tread, step' ('schreiten'), reflected, for instance, in Proto-Germanic **gangan-* and, presumably, in Ved. *jáṅghā-* '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 *cákri-* (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. *jaghána-* as one such reduplicated formation appears quite probable. In spite of the nonproductive character of the reduplicated nominal formations, the hypothetical connection of *ja-ghán-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. *jíghna-te* as opposed to Av. pres. *-jaṛnānte* (with aor. *-jaṛnat*). García Ramón (1998) takes the latter as original (**ǵʷhí-ǵʷhén-e-*), while LIV² (218) adopts the reconstruction **ǵʷhí-ǵʷhén-é-*.

In fact, both types of reduplication are likely to be traceable to the proto-language, co-existing within the same present paradigm (**ǵʷhí-ǵʷhén-/ǵʷhí-ǵʷhén-*) and thus instantiating the alternation preserved in such verbs as Ved. 3sg. act. *sí-śak-ti* '(s/he) follows' ~ 3pl. act. *sá-śc-ati* '(they) follow'; see Kortlandt 1987 and 2004 as well as Kulikov 2005 for further discussion.

The nominal formation *jaghána-* can thus be analyzed as based on the reduplicated present ***jaghma-* (~ *jíghma-te*; 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, *jaghána-* 'buttock(s), genitals' and *āhanás-* 'lustful', as derivatives of the root *han* (< PIE **ǵʷhén-*) 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. *jaghána-* 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-

⁶"The almost complete identity with Skt. *jaghána-* [m., n.] 'buttocks' can hardly be a coincidence, but the further analysis remains hypothetical" (Beekes 2010:766); see also Schwyzler 1939:381, etc.

ments, which are universally and cross-linguistically not uncommon for taboo words (see §4).

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

4.1 Reflexes of PIE **ǵʰen-* ‘strike’ and **ǵʷen-(eh₂-)* ‘woman’

The reflex of the Proto-Indo-European root **ǵʰen-* is well-preserved in the Slavic verb for ‘drive, impel’, OCS *ǵonati*, *ženŋ*, etc. (see, e.g., LIV² 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 **ǵʰ* had merged with the reflex of PIE **ǵʷ*. This implies that the reflex of our root **ǵʰen-* should be identical with the reflex of the well-known PIE root **ǵʷen-* (with its main derivative, the *ā*-stem **ǵʷ(e)n-eh₂-*; see e.g. NIL 177ff.) ‘woman, wife’. Indeed, the root of the verb *ženŋ* is homonymous with that of *žen-a* (< **ǵʷen-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-* < **ǵʷ(e)n-* ‘woman, wife’, even though not being direct derivatives of **žen-/ǵon-*, 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]:125f.) 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 **-s-*; see, e.g. Vaillant 1974:4.658ff.; Matasović 2014:85f.) from the verbal stem *ženi-(t’sja)*, at least from a formal point of view, may represent a morphological quasi-cognate of Ved. (*ā-*)*hanás-* (< **ǵʰen-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. *ženiti* ‘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 **ǵʰen-* 2. ‘perform

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 **ǵʰen-* 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 *κοχώνη*) 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 (*ǵ* > *ž*), possible suffixal 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 **ǵʰen-* 2. ‘have sex’ (many of which could be taboo words) should eventually have been ousted by the derivatives of the homophonous root **ǵʰen-* (**ǵʰ(e)n-eh₂-*), such as, first of all, *žena* ‘woman, wife’. Some of these hypothetical derivatives of **ǵʰen-* 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(v)* > *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 **ǵʰen-* (**ǵʰ(e)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 *bl’ad* ‘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;⁸ 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,

⁸With examples from other languages, cf. Polish *dać komuś w Portugalie* ‘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.⁹ Assuming the existence of a hypothetical derivative of the reflex of **ǵʷen-* 2. ‘have sex’, i.e. *žen-*, we arrive at forms such as, for instance, ***žen-a* > ***zon-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, *popa*.

The etymological source of *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 *pop-* shows much wider semantics and clearly belongs to the sexual vocabulary, cf. Middle Polish (17th–18th cent.) *pop* ‘penis’ (Lewinson 1999:187).

Thus, the resulting form, *žopa*, could obtain its initial part (the first syllable) from the hypothetical source form ***žon-a*, while the second part (second consonant) was borrowed from the more neutral *popa*, in accordance with the scenario of the type *blʹadʹ* → *blin* mentioned above.

5 Concluding remarks

The indirect connection of words such as *ženima*, *ženitʹsja*, *ženix(-atʹsja)*, and, presumably, *žopa* with the secondary meaning of **ǵʷen-* 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 **ǵebh-* ‘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

LIV² = Kümmel, Martin, and Helmut Rix (eds.). 2001. *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben: Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstammbildungen*. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Reichert.

NIL = Wodtko, Dagmar S., Britta Irslinger, and Carolin Schneider. 2008. *Nomina im indogermanischen Lexikon*. Heidelberg: Winter.

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⁹All comparisons proposed for this form so far, such as Polish *dupa* ‘buttocks’ (further compared to Germanic **deupa-* ‘deep’, cf. Goth. *diups*, etc.; see Derksen 2008:124f.), *gap* ‘onlooker’, Latin *gibbus* ‘hump; bulging’, or Old Icelandic *gumpr* ‘buttocks, body’ (see Vasmer 1967:2.62f.) are hardly tenable, being both phonetically problematic and semantically implausible.

¹⁰This paper was written with the support of the NCN POLONEZ grant (grant agreement No. 2015/19/P/SH2/02028).

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