Indo-European "lamb"[*]

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The most wide-spread Indo-European denotation of "lamb" reflects more archetypes (using 'Brugmannian' reconstructions):

(1) *ag^wnos, -ā*
Greek ἀμνός, -ή "lamb" < *$abnós$, -ā́*
Latin *agnus*, -ā id.
Umbrian *habina* acc. pl. f. "agnas" < *$ab\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$- < *$abn\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$-*
(*h-* has been explained by a contamination with *$h\bar{e}d\bar{\imath}no$-* "haedīno-", cf. Kent, *Language* 2 [1925]: 189f; Walde & Hofmann 1938: 23; Untermann 2000: 314).
?Tocharian B *akwane* < *ag^wnos* in the sentence *akwaneṃ käryāmte 30 kᵤœāneṃtsa 550* "we bought 30 *akwaneṃ* for 550 *kᵤœāne*s" [490a-III-2], where *kᵤœāne* means 'a coin and measure of weight' (Adams 1999, 4, 186).

(2) *$ag^{w(h)}ny\bar{a}$*
Albanian *enjë ~ êjë* "dairy goat", pl. *enja ~ êja* (Orel 1998, following Çabej, Jokl etc.).

(3) *$og^{wh}nos$*
Old Irish *úan*, gen.sg. *uain*, dim. *uainin*, Welsh *oen*, pl. *wyn*, Middle Cornish *oin*, Cornish *o(a)n*, Breton *oan*, pl. *ein* "lamb"
(*o-* instead of the expected *a-* has been explained by a contamination with the continuants of Indo-European *owi-* "sheep" > Old Irish *oí*, see Vendryes 1978: U-8).

(4) *$ag^{wh}n$-*
Latin *avillus* "agnus recentis partus" < *$auenlos$ < *$ag^{wh}nelos$* or *$ag^{wh}\underset{\circ}{n}los$*;

Old English *ge-éan* "(sheep) with young", *éanian* "to yean", West Frisian *eandje*, Dutch dial. *oonen* "to throw, cub" < West Germanic *$aun\bar{o}jan$*, derived from an unattested *$auna$- < *$aȝ^wna$-* "lamb" (the initial *o-* is also possible).
Latvian *àuns* "wether" is not borrowed from Germanic, how Mann 1984-87: 3 proposed, but has cognates in Lithuanian *ãvinas* "ram", Old Prussian *awins* - see Fraenkel 1962: 28.

(5) *$\bar{a}g^{w(h)}n$-* or *$\bar{o}g^{w(h)}n$-*
Old Church Slavonic *agnę*, gen.-*ęte* "lamb" (Common Slavic), *ob-agniti sę* "to yean", in Polabian *jognǫ* and Polish *jagnię* besides "lamb" also "kid" (Šarapatková, ESJS I: 46). There is no evident continuant in Baltic languages. At least an indirect evidence is based on the Balto-Fennic denotation of "lamb": Finnish *vuona*, dial. *vuonna*, *vuorna*, Karelian *vuoññia*, Vepsian *vodn*, *vodnaz*, Estonian *voon*, *vûn* etc.
< *$\bar{o}\delta nas$* < Baltic **$\bar{o}gnas$* (SKES VI: 1819-1820).

The same etymon could be recognized also in Indo-Iranian, at least in two variants:

(6) Iranian *$\bar{a}gara$-* m. > Khufi, Roshani *ažor*, Bartangi, Oroshori *ažŭr/ōr̄* "male lamb up to 1 year old"; *$\bar{a}gar\bar{\imath}$-* f. > Khufi *ažær*, Roshani *ažēr*, Bartangi *ažīr*, Oroshari *ažŭr*, Sarikoli *žar-bast* "karakul", cf. Shugni *žer-bāst* "lamb-skin" (Morgenstierne 1974, 17). The Pamir forms projected by Morgenstierne into the Iranian starting point *$\bar{a}gar$°* are derivable from the protoform *$\bar{a}/\bar{o}g^{w(h)}\underset{\circ}{n}l$°* which convincingly agrees with the preceding particular protoforms.

(7) Old Indic (RV) *ághnyā-*, *aghnyā́-* f. "cow", frequently "milker" (cf. RV 10, 60, 11), *ághnya-*, *aghnyá-* m. "bull", Old Avestan *agǝniiā-* f. "milk-cow", usually derived from Indo-Iranian *a-g^hn-$i\underset{\smile}{\i}\bar{a}$-* < *$\underset{\circ}{n}$-$g^{wh}n$-$iyo$-$/\bar{a}$* "not to be killed" (Schmidt 1963: 1-46, 305-306 including the other etymologies; EWAI I: 46-47 with lit.), can be alternatively projected in *$ag^{wh}niyo$-* "belonging to **$ag^{wh}no$-". It is possible only to speculate concerning the meaning of this unattested word. The semantic reconstruction "Milchkuh" = "belonging to **calf**" can be deduced as an alternative solution on the basis of e.g. the following contexts:

> *yáthā puṃsó vṛṣṇyatá striyā́ṃ níhanyáte mánaḥ,*
> *evā́ te aghnye mánó 'dhi vatsé ní hanyatām.* (AV 6, 70, 1)
> "Wie das Herz eines lüsternen Mannes an einer Frau haftet -
> so soll dein Herz, o Kuh, am Kalbe haften! "

anyó anyám abhí haryata   vatsáṃ jātám ivāghnyā́   (AV 3, 30, 1)

"Liebet einander wie die Kuh ihr Kalb, wenn es geboren ist".

Attending to the connection

aghnyā́yāḥ kṣīrám (RV 10, 87, 16) "die (Biest)milch der Kuh",

H.-P. Schmidt, the author of the preceding translations (1963: 12-13), concludes: "*Da* **kṣīrá** *kein geläufiger Ausdrück für die Biestmilch ist, gewinnt man aus dieser Stelle den Eindruck, als sei* **aghnyā́** *ein spezifischer Ausdruck für die Kuh, die eben gekalbt hat, und dass somit das Wort hier gewählt worden sei, um diese von der Kuh im allgemeinen zu unterschieden*".

The Avestan equivalent appears only in one passage in Yasna 38,5. Its translation is not unambiguos.

apascā vå̄ azīšèā vå̄ mātərą̄šèā vå̄ agəniiå̄ drigudāiiaŋhō
vīspō.pitīš āuuaocāmā vahištå̄ sraēštå̄

 "Und euch Wasser rufen wir an als die trächtigen und euch als die Mutter(kühe
  und) die melken Kühe, (die) für den Armen sorgen, die alltränkenden, besten
  (und) schönsten".   [Wolff 1910: 68]

 "We call upon you the waters, you the *azīš*, you the mothers, you the *agəniiā-*,
  as the nourishers of the indigent ('followers'), possessing all types of *piti-*
  ('drink'), the best, the richest."   [Bailey 1957: 44]

 "Wir rufen an euch, die Wasser, euch, die trächtigen (Kühe), und euch,
  die Mutter(kühe), (die) *agəniiā-* (sind), den Armen nährend, alle
  Getränke besitzend, die besten, die schönsten."   [Schmidt 1963: 13-14]

 "We address You (as) the waters, and (as) the fertile (cows), and (as) the
  mother(-cow)s, who are not to be killed because they nurse the poor (and)
  provide drink for all beings, best and most beautiful." [Humbach 1991: 148]

It is evident, the most recent translation differs substantively from that preceding ones just in the interpretation of the word *agəniiā-*. The Humbach's version corresponds to the traditional etymological interpretation of the Indo-Iranian **aghniyā- < *n̥-gʷʰn-iyā*.

Probably the more cautious point of view of Schmidt, concluding "*Die Bedeutung von* agəniiā *lässt sich daraus nicht erschliessen...*", seems to be more more appropriate. Omitting the Humbach's translation, the hypothesis connecting *a*ᵒ with "calf" is not in a contradiction with the sense of the quoted passage.

Perhaps only J. Knobloch (1990: 227) has presented any deeper etymology. He derives the "lamb" from the root **gʷʰen-* "to kill" by a "laryngeal metathesis". In spite of its semantic attractivity (**agʷʰno-*"lamb" = "an animal **killed** for a sacrifice" vs. Indo-Iranian **agʰnyā-* "cow" < **n̥-gʷʰn-iyo-*"an animal **not killed** for a sacrifice") it remains doubtful (cf. also the solution presented above).

Till the present time no unambiguous reconstruction of the word exists. On the basis of the difference **gʷʰ :*gʷ* Meillet, *BSL* 24/1[1923]: 184 even separates the Celtic, Germanic and Slavic continuants from the Latin and Greek ones.

There are more attempts to explain the vacillation in vocalism. So called Winter's law offers one possibility. Winter 1978: 439 concludes: *In Baltic and Slavic languages, the Proto-Indo-European sequence of short vowel plus voiced stop was reflected by lengthened vowel plus voiced stop, while short vowel plus aspirate developed into short vowel plus voiced stop.* Kortlandt, *Baltistica* 21/2[1985]: 121 adds: *This Balto-Slavic "lengthened vowel" has acute tone, unlike the lengthened grade vowels of PIE. origin* ."

Pokorny 1959: 9 supposes the apophony **ōgʷ⁽ʰ⁾no-* vs. **əgʷ⁽ʰ⁾no-*.
Beekes, *Sprache* 18[1972]: 129 admits the apophony **H₂e- : *H₂o-*.
Gercenberg 1981: 137 postulates the old heteroclitic paradigm   **ōgʷʰ : *agʷnés*, following Petersson 1921 : 49-50 (**ógʷʰ & *ṓgʷʰ : *ᵒgʷ-n-és*). The variation **gʷʰ: *gʷ* has a distributive character: the aspirate voiced stops occur in a syllable final posttonic position of nom.-acc. of heteroclitic nouns, while the voiceless stops appear in the cases extended by *-n-* in a pretonic position, e.g. **nég̑ʰwr̥ : *n̥gʷnés* "kidney" > Greek νεφρός : Latin *inguen* (Gercenberg 1981: 50). Accepting this rule, one could expect a heteroclitic paradigm of the type nom. **H₂égʰ-wr̥ /i̯* : gen. **H₂g(ʰ)-wén-s > *H₂gʷnés* with a following paradigmatic leveling (cf. **séH₂-wl̥* , gen. **sH₂-wén-s* "sun", see Beekes, *MSS* 43[1984]: 5-8; Id. 1995: 187, 177) . On the other hand, the paradigmatic apophony supposed for akrostatic heteroclitics corresponds perfectly to the vowel variants reconstructed above (cf. Oettinger, *HS* 107[1994]: 81-82 for derivatives of the root **H₂ek̑-* "sharp"):

(i) nom.-acc. **H₂ók̑-r̥* : gen. **H₂ék̑-n̥-s*

(ii) nom.-acc. $*H_2\acute{e}\hat{k}$-$r̥$: gen. $*H_2\acute{e}\hat{k}$-$n̥$-s

There are no hopeful traces of r-stem (Petersson 1921: 50 sees it in Greek ὄβρια "the youngs"). A more promising candidate could be l-stem represented perhaps by Celtic $*aglo$- (< $*ag^{wh}lo$- ?) > Breton eal "foal", Middle Cornish $ehal$ "pecus vel iumentum", Middle Welsh ael "cubbing; breed, race", Old Irish $ál$ "offspring, cubbing" (Vendryes 1959: A-58 finds a cognate in Greek $agel\bar{e}$ "herd, flock"). The preceding thoughts leading to the morphological and semantical reconstruction $*H_2\acute{e}g^hw̥l̥$: $*H_2g^hw\acute{e}ns$ or $*H_2\acute{o}/\acute{e}g^hw̥l̥$: $*H_2\acute{e}g(^h)wn̥s$ "young one" = "lamb / calf / foal" significantly support the hypothesis identifying a Semitic borrowing in this cultural term (Illič-Svityč 1964: 4), cf. Proto-Semitic $*ʕagul$- ~ $*ʕigul$- > Akkadian $agalu$ "ass", Ugaritic $ʕgl$ "calf", Hebrew $ʕēgel$ "bullock", Aramaic $ʕiglā$, Arabic $ʕiǧl$, pl. $ʕiǧāl$ & $ʕuǧūl$ "calf", Geez $ʔəg^w(a)l$ "young one", Tigre $ʔəgal$ "calf", Amhara $gəlgäl$ "lamb" (Leslau 1987: 11).

Accepting this suggestive explanation, the substitution $*ʕ ≥ *H_2$ confirms this traditionally supposed identification (cf. Beekes 1995: 126).

Note: For the Albanian & Iranian cognates I owe K.T. Witczak from Łodž (Poland).

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BSL *Bulletin de la Société Linguistique de Paris*.

BSOAS *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*.

ESJS I. *Etymologický slovník jazyka staroslovìnského*, I (1989). Praha: Academia.

EWAI Mayrhofer, Mannfred. 1986f: *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, I. Heidelberg: Winter.

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HS *Historische Sprachforschung*.

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MSS *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft*.

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SKES *Suomen kielen etymologinen sanakirja*, VI (1978). Helsinki: Suomalais-ugrilainen seura.

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