Persóphatta

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This document used to be published as a two-pages html-document on our institute's old website (http://pages.unibas.ch/klaphil/idg/lekt/persophatta/), which, following the transfer to http://klaphil.unibas.ch/ in autumn 2008, had to be closed. The texts have been left unchanged, only the formatting had to be adjusted.

Girls or young women threshing?

	Die drei Drescherinnen
	Schon eine Zeit, ehvor in der Hauptstadt zu München die Cholera ausbrach, sah ein Bauer im Tegernseer Winkel nachts mit einem Male den Stadel hell erleuchtet. Er holte den Nachbarn und dann schauten die zwei durch die Ritzen des Tennentores. Sie sahen die drei Jungfrauen dreschen und hörten, wie sie laut dazu sagten: "Wir dreschen, wir dreschen den Armen zum Brot und den Reichen zum Tod." Etliche sagen, die drei Fräulein sind völlig schwarz gewandet gewesen; aber nur der jüngste Bub der Familie hat die Erscheinung ganz gesehen. Das ist vor hundert Jahren gewesen.
# 189 - Children - Labor. Girls threshing rice, Central Java, Indonesia. Photo © Sean Sprague	Quelle: Sagen aus dem Isarwinkel, Willibald Schmidt, Bad Tölz, 1936, 1979.

The original e-mail

On Sunday, 20 November 2005 I sent around the following circular letter concerning the etymology of Persephone that I had found four days earlier:

Date: Sun, 20 Nov 2005 19:27:06 +0100
To: Persephone
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>
Subject: Persephone

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I have been asked to publish the following etymology of the name Persephone, which I found last Wednesday, as quickly as possible. If you like (or dislike) it and want to cite it, please refer to my review of fascs. 19 and 20 of Lexikon des fruehgriechischen Epos (LfgrE) in Kratylos, vol. 51, forthcoming c. October 2006. You are welcome to forward this mail to whomever you wish.

Scholars nowadays agree that the most authentic form of the name Persephone is the one used in Attica, with its archaic sanctuary at Eleusis. The best form, however, is not *P(h)errephatta*, as is widely believed, but *P(h)errophatta*. There are 9 attestations with an [o], 7 of which on 5th c. B.C. Attic vases (by 7 different painters), and whereas *P(h)erre-* can be easily explained by analogy with the then well-known epic form *Perse-*, *P(h)erro-* seems impossible to explain by such secondary means and must therefore be old. As for the initial consonant, both assimilation *P-ph- > Ph-ph-* and dissimilation *Ph-ph- > P-ph-* are theoretically possible. Scholars equally agree that the epic form *Perse-* of the first part is due to a popular etymology with *pertho* 'destroy', as also understood, e.g., in the name *Perseus*. Yet, this popular etymology, most likely due to some poet (Homer or one of his predecessors), seems only plausible if the original form had [rs] and began with [p] not [ph]. So we should look for a (lost) word **perso-*. It exists! In the Rigveda there is a hapax legomenon (RV 10.48.7) *parsha-* m. 'sheaf', a perfect match phonologically ("sh" = s with dot underneath, the sound issued from *[s] after [r]), and semantically attractive too, of course. And this is not all. The word is used in a simile, when Indra boasts: "as on the threshing-floor the sheaves [acc. pl.], I beat them in masses". The verb used for 'I beat' is *hanmi*, from a root well-attested in I.-E. (Sanskrit *hanti* : *ghnanti* = Hittite *kuenzi* : *kunanzi*), not least in Greek (*theino*, *phonos* etc.). The same phrase 'beat the sheaves' occurs in Avestan (Yt. 13.71). (Both passages are conveniently cited in M. Mayrhofer, KEWA and EWAia, s.v. *parsha-*.) The phrase must have been traditional in Indo-Iranian. Therefore it seems highly significant that it was precisely this root **g^{wh}en/*g^{wh}on$ which the Greek poets understood in the second part of Persephone's name when they modernized *-phatta* to *-phoneia* or *-phone* (whereby making the name fit the hexameter). We can be almost certain that in this case the etymological adaptation was not "popular" but quite correct and that *-phatta* is formed, in a most archaic way, from the same root. It may be described as **-g^{wh}n-t-ih_2$, i.e. the root plus the frequent *t*-extension (as in Sanskrit *-kti-t-*, *-kr-t-* etc., see Wackernagel-Debrunner, Ai. Gramm., II.2, p. 41ff.), plus the feminine suffix *-ih_2$. In fact, the extended root **g^{wh}n-t-$ is attested as second part of a masculine/neuter compound in Greek (*odynéphata phármaka*, a Homeric formula, see E. Risch, Wortb. d. hom. Spr., 195f.). This is probably not inherited from I.-E., however, as the Sanskrit examples with this root are secondary (Wackernagel-Debrunner ibid. 43; *-han-* is normal), nor is the feminine motion of such extended-root compounds (ibid. 44f.). But since the addition of *-ih_2$ in Greek was no longer possible after the loss of consonant [i], fem. *-phatta* (like many other such feminine forms; Risch 137ff.) must at any rate have been formed in the 2nd millennium B.C. And since neither any other trace of **perso-* nor any other names from which *-phatta* could have been borrowed survive in Greek, the compound *Persophatta*

as a whole has a very good chance to have been formed in the 2nd millennium. -- It is, of course, quite likely that other scholars have analysed -*phatta* in the same way before (I would be grateful for references), but since for the last 3000 years or so nobody in the West seems to have understood what may have been beaten here, such attempts will not have appeared satisfactory to them. Now, I believe, we know again what Kore originally did: she (helped to) beat the sheaves. This interpretation recalls the 'corn maiden' (see J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, pt. 5) and, if accepted favourably, may have quite some implications for our understanding of the myth and cult of Demeter and her daughter, who used to be called up from the netherworld when the corn was ripe (Diodor. 5.4.5f. about Sicily).

That is it. Quod felix faustum fortunatumque sit. I am looking forward to your comments. (I may put some of them on our website, but not without your consent.)

With best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

Addendum of 21 November 2006

The new etymology has now been published in print as part of my review of Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos (LfgrE), fascs. 19 and 20, in *Kratylos* 51 (2006), 136–144 (Persephone: 139–144).

Page 2: The Discussion

About this page:

This page is now closed. I would like to express my warmest thanks to all who have reacted, some with a few words of approval, others with longer contributions: Michel Aberson, Raimo Anttila, Anne Bielman, Anton Bierl, Alain Blanc, Jürgen Blänsdorf, Catherine Dobias, Heiner Eichner, Ben Fortson, Jost Gippert, Heinrich Hettrich, Henry Immerwahr, Joshua Katz, Martin Korenjak, Martin Joachim Kümmel, Charles de Lamberterie, Joachim Latacz, Michael Meier-Brügger, Craig Melchert, Angelo Mercado, Nicholas Milner, Anna Morpurgo Davies, Sergio Neri, Norbert Oettinger, John Penney, Marcel Piérart, Georges Pinault, Christoph Riedweg, Don Ringe, Andrew Sihler, P. Oktor Skjærvø, Mark Southern, Brent Vine, Rémy Viredaz, Calvert Watkins, Michael Weiss, Martin West, Andreas Willi, Stefan Zimmer.

I have put on mainly the more detailed comments. Two main points are discussed at the bottom of this page.

I am looking forward to all future discussion of our 'threshing maiden', in particular from the specialists of Greek religion.

Rudolf Wachter, 11 December 2005

The first reaction I got was from Michael Meier-Brügger whom I had sent a pre-version of the mail on Thursday, 17th Nov.:

▶ Date: Thu, 17 Nov 2005 11:39:18 +0100
From: "Prof. Meier-Brügger" <drmeier@zedat.fu-berlin.de>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Lieber Ruedi,

gratuliere! So gehen tatsächlich die guten AHA-Erlebnisse vonstatten. ...

Herzliche Grüsse

Michael

▶ Date: Sun, 20 Nov 2005 14:15:55 -0600
From: andrew sihler <alsihler@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Dear Prof. Dr. Wachter,

The etymology looks outstanding to my eye. It's a pity that the -phatta part isn't a tiny bit more straightforward, but the excellent parallel in odune-phat- is crucially reassuring for the theory of a t-extension. All the other details are quite wonderful, including the (all-too-rare) fact that the formation makes excellent "sense". Congratulations!

Andrew Sihler

▶ Date: Sun, 20 Nov 2005 21:25:21 +0000 (GMT)
From: Anna Morpurgo Davies <anna.davies@somerville.oxford.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Dear Ruedi,

I am in Pavia at the moment lecturing for three weeks (until dec 3) and just saw both your messages (e-mail is not terribly easy to get from this college room).

It is a very impressive suggestion and it seems to me too that you should stake your claim to it as fast as possible as a preparation to a longer discussion.

I have no books here but two things come to me. One is that perhaps you should send this to Cal Watkins - just one of those things he likes and he may give you some further parallels. (cwatkins@humnet.ucla.edu) The other is that without books I do not really understand your odunephata. If on the model of kti-t-as we have gwhn-t-as then we can add iH or rather Greek -ya, but something ending in -phata looks like a form of a verbal adj in -tos. Or am I am completely wrong since I do not remember the passage?

Sorry about the brevity but the computer is ab out to give up.

Congratulations !

Anna

▶ Date: Mon, 21 Nov 2005 20:45:30 +0100
To: Anna Morpurgo Davies <anna.davies@somerville.oxford.ac.uk>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Anna,

Thanks for your reaction. Risch takes odynephata in odynephata pharmaka (ntr. pl.) 'medicine that cures belly-ache', a formula, as a "Scharnier" form between athematic and thematic, as -phat- must be original but active -phatos exists too. He may be right. Feminine -phatta has nothing immediately to do with that (except that -phatos 'beating' preserved the general active meaning of -phat-). It is written with <tt> on four of the eight vases, and -phassa is the form the tragic poets use. So it must be (if it is at all from *gwhen) -gwhntjh2 and cannot be from thematic -phatos (which is also - rarely - attested in Homer, by the way, but with passive meaning).

Do we have -gwhn-t-as? That would yield -phatas, but I know only of -phontes, so this is not quite identical with the zero-grade -kti-t-as type. It may have been re-made with a full grade when the labiovelar had changed and the resulting -phatas had become very unclear. Could Myc. -qo-ta have zero grade?

Enjoy warm Italy! It is freezing here.

Ruedi

▶ Date: Tue, 22 Nov 2005 07:45:28 +0000 (GMT)
From: Anna Morpurgo Davies <anna.davies@somerville.oxford.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Thank you. I have the feeling that someone (Heubeck) argued that Myc. -qota was zero grade - it would fit the rule that vocalic nasal after labial or labialized cons becomes o.

Pavia is pretty cold.

Anna

▶ Date: Sun, 20 Nov 2005 13:55:20 -0800
From: Eichner <heiner.eichner@univie.ac.at>
Subject: Pherophatta

Sehr geehrter, lieber Herr Wachter,

Nach kurzer Pruefung scheint mir voellig klar, dass Sie da ins Schwarze getroffen haben, eine grossartige Entdeckung, herzliche Gratulation!

Schoenen Gruss aus Wien

Ihr Heiner Eichner

PS Es folgt wohl noch eine Mail zu parsá-

▶ Date: Sun, 20 Nov 2005 13:59:48 -0800
From: Eichner <heiner.eichner@univie.ac.at>
Subject: parsá-

Nachtrag:

Die Bedeutung 'Garbe' steht zwar fest, doch entstanden ist wohl aus dem Dreschergebnis, wie dt. gedroschenes Stroh (nicht: Korn). Dann gehoert *persó- (mit dem e statt o vlt. Ableitung vom Wurzelnomen?) zur Wz. pers- 'staeuben, spritzen' Pokorny IEW 823 und geht urspruenglich auf die beim Dreschen entstehende Spreu.

▶ Date: Sun, 20 Nov 2005 21:12:12 -0500
From: "Joshua T. Katz" <jtkatz@Princeton.EDU>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Dear Rudi, Wow--this looks brilliant! I want to sleep on it, but if you're right that Perro- is the oldest form, then your analysis works linguistically and of course has all sorts of lovely cultural implications. Once in a while someone has an idea that is so good that I think to myself, Oh, if only I'd thought of that. This is one of those times. I imagine you've sent the message to Michael Janda, who is, after all, Mr. Persephone (so to speak). I will be particularly interested to know what he has to say. More later, but heartiest congratulations! Very best wishes, Joshua

▶ Date: Sun, 20 Nov 2005 18:33:43 -0800
From: "Watkins, Calvert" <CWATKINS@humnet.ucla.edu>
Subject: RE: Persephone

Dear Professor Wachter,

Felicitations on a truly felix faustum thing! The etym seems to me unassailable philologically, linguistically, and poetically, and other festivals of homoeoteleuton. I looked at both the RV and Av passages, which are quite similar in tone and register, Indra's a:tmastuti being with its two hapaxes very like what Hoffmann and I termed "warriors' slang", which I see reflections of in Iliad 10 as well. The syntax of 10.48.7c my reflect the same too. That one branch has a verb phrase and the other a compound name is mutatis mutandis exactly like kunes argoi

beside rjis'van-, etc. I havent yet checked to see if parsha- has descendants in later Indic and Iranian lges, but given its meaning is quite possible.

It was my pleasure to meet you too. With best wishes for speedy electronic

publication,

Calvert Watkins

▶ Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 11:46:02 +0100
To: "Watkins, Calvert" <CWATKINS@humnet.ucla.edu>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Professor Watkins,

Thank you for your reaction and your most precious remarks about "warrior's slang" and the parallel of the I.-E. dog (I always tend to think that h2rgi-/h2rgro- got its double meaning "shining" and "fast" from the lightning, see argikeraunos etc., and the comparison of a good dog with a lightning seems not at all far-fetched). ...

All best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Mon, 21 Nov 2005 10:35:35 +0100
From: Jost Gippert <gippert@em.uni-frankfurt.de>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Lieber Herr Wachter,

die Etymologie klingt fuer mich voellig ueberzeugend!

Herzl. GRuss,

J.G.

▶ Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 19:22:47 +0100
From: Jost Gippert <gippert@em.uni-frankfurt.de>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Lieber Herr Wachter,

... Sie sollten allerdings vielleicht darauf hinweisen, dass in der avestischen Passage (Yt. 13,71) parSanAm nicht die von Geldner in den Text gesetzte Variante ist, gleichwohl aber die bessere Lesart ist.

Herzlichen Gruss,

Ihr J.G.

▶ Date: Mon, 21 Nov 2005 14:06:49 -0500
From: Henry Immerwahr <hri@email.unc.edu>
Subject: Re: Persephone

This is very exciting. You will realize, of course, that I am in no way competent to either support or reject your interesting etymology, but I note that it is very much in the realm of Demeter.. I do have a few comments, though.

I could find only 5 instances of Pherrophatta in CAVI: 3371, 3425, 3442, 4501, 5288. Does this mean you have 2 items I do not have, or do you read an omicron where I read an epsilon?

There is also a problem with the fact that Persephone is a rather unsuitable person, at least in the historical period, to be in charge of the threshing floor. According to Nilsson, Persephone is the goddess of the GROWING grain;; as such she arrives in the fall, after the dead drought of summer, when things begin to grow. Remember she was abducted while picking flowers. In Greece, the dead time is the summer, not the winter, as Gene Vanderpool, the famous professor of archeology at the American School , never failed to point out. I do not know where Diodorus got the notion that she arrived at the beginning of the summer, but it is an absurdity. After the harvest, there would be nothing for her to do, and she is supposed to spend a half a year on earth. The harvesting of the grain thus belongs to Demeter properly. I admit that I have never pursued this matter independently; it would be good to know, e.g., what Walter Burkert has to say about Persephone.

I do think there may be two solutions to this problem: 1) the etymology, as you say, may go back to the second millennium when the agricultural situation was perceived differently and she was originally a helper of Demeter, who only later developed in the Kore we know. 2) she was given a name to signify an outstanding activity of her mother, with the aim of determining (magically) her living up to her mother. Giving children names that continue the qualities of their parent seems to have been one way of naming them. Was not Telemachos named after his father's activity. or so some have said. I would prefer the second explanation, you, perhaps the first.

By the way, what is the etymology of Proserpina? What is the connection?

Best wishes Henry

▶ Date: Mon, 21 Nov 2005 23:52:11 +0100
To: Henry Immerwahr <hri@email.unc.edu>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Henry,

Thanks for your reaction! I count CAVI 2731 amongst the [o] cases too (as I had already suggested in my "abbreviated writing" article in Kadmos 30, 1991, 65 with n. 84); and then there are, also with [o], CAVI 5651 (Perso-, with omega), a 4th c. stone (see Threatte), and a much later Cretan inscription (see LSJ Suppl.).

I agree that the passage from Diodorus, that in Sicily Persephone came up at harvest time, is odd. But the name, if correctly interpreted, would at any rate go back to the 2nd millennium, and we do not know what the myth was like in those days. Different versions may have developed. Perhaps Persophatta's original contribution was nevertheless mainly to harvesting and threshing. The most logical story, that she stayed on earth from sowing to harvesting, would not contradict that. Her abduction by Hades may originally have been some sort of punishment for the final act of beating the sheaves (to death, so to say). Should we assume a parallel to the Meuli-Burkert theory of guilt caused in men by the slaughtering of animals? (See bou-phonia etc., from the same root!)

The beginning of the story may have been added later: Her picking fresh flowers in autumn, Hades coming up to abduct her, her mother going on strike, and Zeus then allowing her to stay on earth for the period of vegetation. The first time, however, she would have disappeared precisely in autumn and come up again some time the following year. Maybe it was her first re-emergence that the Sicilians celebrated in May/June? After that the rhythm must have been the one we know from other sources: from sowing to threshing (2/3), and absence during the drought (1/3).

At any rate, it seems quite plausible to me that Persephone also played a role when the corn was harvested and threshed. The harvest is surely the most important act in agriculture and needs strong support from the gods.

I am very curious too about what the specialists for Greek religion will say.

Proserpina is an Etrusco-Latin distortion of the (literary!) form Persephone. I had also thought about it, but it cannot be from Persophatta. Obviously the Etruscans borrowed some Greek mythological names from a rather "high" register (the same applies to uthuze, which is not from Attic Oly- or Corinthian Oli-, but from Epic Odysseus, as I have stressed in NAGVI §254. (On Proserpina see my Altlateinische Inschriften, §46.)

Best wishes,

Rudolf

▶ Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 21:33:42 -0500
From: Henry Immerwahr <hri@email.unc.edu>
Subject: Re: Persephone

... I have looked at the Diodorus passage. Of course he does not talk of the harvest but only of the ripened corn. All I would deduce from this would be that there was a spring festival (or several) for Persephone in Sicily. It would not necessarily influence the chronology of the appearance and disappearance of Persephone. What makes me a little suspicious of the whole passage is the fact that the dates for the festivals of the Demeter and Persephone festivals are the same as the dates of the Athenian Greater Eleusinia (in Boedromion) and the Lesser (in Anthesterion). ...

▶ Date: Mon, 21 Nov 2005 11:59:27 +0100
From: heinrich.hettrich@mail.uni-wuerzburg.de
Subject: Kratylos usw.

Lieber Herr Wachter,

herzlichen Dank fuer Ihre Rezension und ebenso fuer den Rundbrief und nochmals meine Gratulation zu der Etymologie. Nachdem wir gestern darueber gesprochen hatten, habe ich gegenueber Ihren Ausfuehrungen fast nichts mehr zu ergaenzen. Allenfalls boete sich noch eine kurze Bemerkung ueber den vermutlichen Zeitpunkt der Umgestaltung des Hintergliedes in der homerischen und posthomerischen Lautgestalt an: Sie duerfte ja immerhin so frueh erfolgt sein, dass der etymologische Zusammenhang von -phatta mit phonos, phoneuo, -eis, -ei noch im Bewusstsein der Sprecher war.

Ansonsten bin ich sehr froh, dass Ihre Etymologie im Kratylos stehen wird, und warte auf Ihr endgueltiges Manuskript.

Herzliche Gruesse

Ihr

Heinrich Hettrich

▶ Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 11:47:33 +0100
To: heinrich.hettrich@mail.uni-wuerzburg.de
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>
Subject: Re: Kratylos usw.

Lieber Herr Hettrich,

Danke für Ihre sehr gute Bemerkung! Das Bewusstsein könnte bis in homerische Zeit erhalten geblieben sein angesichts von odynephata pharmaka und passivem -phatos. Der Ersatz wurde aber akut, als der Labiovelar zu einem Labial geworden war und sich zusätzliche Wurzeln für eine Interpretation anboten. Wann dies war, können wir kaum genauer sagen, irgendwann zwischen der mykenischen und der homerischen Zeit. Aber soviel scheint klar: Das Hinterglied -phatta muss wesentlich älter sein, ja wohl sogar Persophatta insgesamt, jedenfalls fehlt von anderen Komposita mit diesem (femininen) Hinterglied jede Spur. - In der Onomastik gibt es noch -phates, nämlich bei Homer Antiphates, dazu (spät) Polyphates, neben das man hom. Polyphontes stellen könnte. Aber bei der Interpretation von Eigennamen mit so unspezifischem Vorderglied ist höchste Vorsicht geboten.

Herzliche Grüsse,

Ihr Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Tue, 22 Nov 2005 11:18:59 +0100
From: Catherine Dobias <catherine.dobias@free.fr>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Cher collègue,

Merci pour la communication de cette intéressante étymologie, à laquelle je ne trouve rien à ajouter, si ce n'est une amusante correspondance bien tardive (fin IIe - début IIIe s. p.C.). Une base inscrite portant une dédicace (en koinè) de statue de Korè, dans le sanctuaire hors-les-murs de Dèmèter et Korè à Cyrène, désigne la déesse comme tèn épi tou sitou (SEG 35, 1721). Epithète que l'on attendait plutôt pour la mère que pour la fille, mais que votre explication rend plus convaincante. Merci !

Avec mon cordial souvenir

Catherine Dobias

▶ Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 11:48:33 +0100
To: Catherine Dobias <catherine.dobias@free.fr>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Chère collègue,

Je vous remercie de votre réaction et surtout de la référence à l'inscription avec ten epi tou sitou. Je me demande comment il faut interpréter "epi": comme indication temporelle ou plutôt de responsabilité? Qu'est-ce que vous en pensez? ...

Avec mes salutations très cordiales,

Rudolf Wachter

► Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 12:32:51 +0100
From: Catherine Dobias <catherine.dobias@free.fr>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Je comprends tèn epi tou sitou "la préposée aux céréales". J'en ai fait une brève mention, bien que l'expression ne soit pas dialectale, dans mon livre Le dialecte des inscriptions grecques de Cyrène, Paris 2000 (Karthago 25), p. 220. ...

Cordialement

Catherine Dobias

► Date: Tue, 22 Nov 2005 10:09:17 -0500
From: Ben Fortson <fortsonb@umich.edu>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Dear Prof. Wachter,

This is all very interesting, and seems quite plausible (and exciting if true). My only question is regarding the change -phatta > -phone(ia): You say this was not due to a "popular" folk-etymology, but was in fact an etymologically correct one. By this I assume you mean that, at the time the replacement happened, people still understood what -phatta meant. Now as far as I know, -phon- always means 'kill' in Greek, and not simply 'strike'. Are you suggesting, then, that -phatta had gotten reanalyzed as meaning 'slayer' by the time the morphological renewal to -phone(ia) happened? This seems not impossible to me, and it seems likely to have happened already in the 2nd millennium B.C. or earlier; it is a just a detail that needs clarification.

Sincerely yours,

Ben Fortson

University of Michigan

► Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 11:49:31 +0100
To: Ben Fortson <fortsonb@umich.edu>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your reaction. In fact, I had thought about the point you make and found that the meaning 'kill' is not exclusive for theino. Particularly the present stem is often used for beating in other contexts and with no letal consequences (see LSJ, after the Homeric references). What I have not found yet is its use for threshing. That would be nice to have! ...

With best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

► Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 12:43:57 -0500
From: Ben Fortson <fortsonb@umich.edu>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Dear Prof. Wachter,

... By the way, to clarify my last email, I was in fact thinking specifically of o-grade and zero-grade forms of the root (these are the ones that I thought only meant 'kill'), not e-grade forms (like theino) which do show up meaning just 'beat' or 'strike' (as you say, "particularly the present stem"). So my question is whether any o-grade or zero-grade forms of the root appear in the meaning 'beat, strike'.

Yours truly,

Ben Fortson

► Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 22:47:38 +0100
To: Ben Fortson <fortsonb@umich.edu>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Colleague,

Now I get your point which is an excellent one, because it is pertinent to the question of when the replacement of -phatta (or a pre-form of it) by -phoneia/-phone (dito) may have taken place. I think that this must at any rate have happened in post-Mycenaean times since till the end of the Mycenaean period the labiovelars appear to have been intact, so the etymological connexion of the e- and o- and zero-grade forms of our root must still have been clear. Once the phonological link was losened, however, i.e. after the merger of the labiovelars with the dental and labial stops, the infect stem (e-grade, with [th]) and the aorist stem (with the zero-grade being dominant over the reduplication syllable, so producing [ph]) were free to go separate ways semantically, and it seems that the aorist took the o-grade forms along precisely because they also had [ph]. (Normally the o-grade compounds are closely related to the infect stem, see lego : -lógos etc.) And since our Persophatta with its zero-grade developed into the [ph] direction it (1) became more and more confusing as other roots started to intervene, so a re-modelling became urgent, and (2) it must have been more and more understood as 'killer' (particularly since the first part was no longer understood), which could then lead to the re-modelling with -phoneia/-phone. So we can say that the re-modelling of the name took place soon after the neutralization of the labiovelars. And since this neutralization must have taken place rather early in the Dark Ages, at least before the Ionic change [a:] > [e:] (as stressed by Lejeune, Phonétique, §39), we may agree on the 11th c. B.C. -- The main point in all this is of course that -phatta, which originally was 'striker' not 'killer', must have been formed before that particular moment. And since between the time when perso- + -phatta were first joined into a compound and the time of re-modelling of the name the noun perso- must have had the time to fall out of use, we can be quite confident that the original composition had taken place well back in the Mycenaean Age or even earlier.

So many thanks for your putting the finger on this point!

With best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 12:14:47 -0800
From: Brent Vine <vine@humnet.ucla.edu>
Subject: Persephone

Dear Rudi,

It's been a while since we met (in Berkeley); I hope all's well with you. I enjoyed, anyway, hearing (via an indirect channel) about your fascinating new etymology for "Persephone", which seems quite attractive to me. Congratulations!

Since your original message invited comments, I hope you won't mind these speculative marginalia. (This, by the way, is off the top of my head; perhaps the basic idea is already on the books somewhere -- I haven't checked KEWA, which apparently, according to EWAia, has information about earlier views on the background of pars.a-.)

It occurs to me that, depending on how one interprets the actual (or etymological) sense of Ved. pars.a- (actually plural in the RV passage, as you note), one could think of a connection with Hitt. pars-/parsiya- 'break (into pieces, esp. bread, in ritual contexts)', parsa- (and NINDAparsa-) 'morsel (of bread); kind of bread'. In that case, 'sheaves' (if that's the synchronic meaning -- is there any real evidence for this?) would be a more developed sense of what originally might have meant, say, 'cuttings (of grain)' -- unless that's still the literal meaning; I'm not enough of a farmer to know whether the 'beating-operation' that transpires on the threshing-floor would more likely operate on bundled sheaves as opposed to unbundled cuttings.

The further interest of this, which to some extent is independent of the Anatolian comparison, is that the morphological type involving e-grade thematic formations (*perso-) is somewhat rare, though obviously attested in a number of old items: *seno-, *leuko-, *leubho-, and a few others, including (perhaps interestingly) *yewo-, in the same semantic "field". (Pardon the pun.)

If Hitt. parsa- does belong here, it poses a difficulty, but one not without interest: since, according to the usual view, it could not go back to a full grade (> **parra-), one would have to operate with a zero-grade *pr.so- -- but that would be reminiscent of at least one or two of those R(e)-o- forms, where ablaut variation is sometimes found, as in, say, *werdho- (Lat. verbum etc.) vs. *wr.dho- (Go. waurd) (though this one is a bit more complex, in case something like *wer[h1]-dh(h1)o- is really what's behind it). There could, of course, be various ways of accounting for an ablaut difference of this sort (e.g. based on different thematizations from a root noun, cf. *luk- and *leuko-; etc.).

All of this is probably of no consequence; but it shows, at least, how stimulating your interesting idea was!

All the best,

-- Brent

▶ Date: Wed, 23 Nov 2005 22:47:08 -0500
From: michael weiss <mlw36@postoffice7.mail.cornell.edu>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Dear Professor Wachter,

Thank you for (re-)sending me this message. Your idea seems to me very plausible. I wonder if you've thought about the possibility that the *perso- 'sheaf' you reconstruct might be related to *prso- 'leek'? A leek after all is a plant that grows already sheaved, as it were. Traditionally Lat. porrum an Grk. prason are considered "Mediterranean", but there's no reason the name, if not the plant, couldn't be Indo-European. >From these one might extract a verbal root *pers- 'bundle' . Just a thought.

Best wishes,

Michael Weiss

▶ Date: Sat, 26 Nov 2005 08:59:52 +0100
To: michael weiss <mlw36@postoffice7.mail.cornell.edu>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Colleague,

This is a very nice contribution. I have had to think about it a bit more closely as others have also written about the etymology of *perso-. But I think I like your connexion best, although not with 'sheaf' but with 'ear'. For we cannot be sure whether *perso-, which one beat when threshing, was really 'sheaf', it could as well have been 'ear'. The difference in ablaut would at any rate transfer the variants *perso- and *prso- way back into I.-E., and since the leek, when it unfolds, with its alternating zig-zag structure is very similar to an ear of any two-row cereal, threaded or not, the two forms may very well have been the same word originally.

Thank you very much for that!

Best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Thu, 24 Nov 2005 08:37:37 +0000 (GMT)
From: Andreas Willi <andreas.willi@worcester.oxford.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Lieber Ruedi,

Ich hatte Dein erstes Mail tatsächlich nicht erhalten - darum erst jetzt meine Antwort. Vielen

herzlichen Dank: das ist wirklich eine spannende Sache! Besonders das Formale besticht natürlich unmittelbar. Beim Inhaltlichen könnte eine (höchstens kleine) Schwierigkeit darin bestehen, dass ich nicht sicher bin, wie stark Persephone wirklich als ursprüngliche Getreidegottheit oder dergleichen angesehen werden sollte (zumal die Gleichsetzung mit Kore ja nicht ursprünglich sein muss). Persephones Primärkonnotationen scheinen ja die mit der Unterwelt zu sein. Und beim Namen so einer infernalen Göttin muss man dann eben doch mit allerlei auch tabuistischen Umgestaltungen rechnen. Aber wenn es ohne geht, dann ist das natürlich viel schöner.

Ich schreibe dies vor allem, weil ich mir vor einiger Zeit selbst Gedanken zu dem Namen gemacht hatte und dabei auf eine andere Lösung gekommen war, die, wie ich gerne zugebe, mehr formale Zusatzannahmen (insbesondere das ebengenannte Tabu) machen muss. Möglicherweise gibt es mindestens eine sehr frühe Darstellung, die Persephone als Schlangengöttin zeigt, und das würde jedenfalls zu ihrem chthonischen Charakter ausgezeichnet passen. Darauf aufbauend hatte ich an ein Kompositum mit Vorderglied *serpnt- oder *serpo- (vgl. Skr. sarpa-, auch für einen Schlangendämon) gedacht, in dem tabuistisch metathetiert worden wäre: entweder von *serpo- direkt zu *perso- oder aber von *serpnt-p... zu *persnt-p... mit anschliessender Konsonantengruppenvereinfachung von -tp- zu -p- und o-Vokalisierung des vokalischen -n-. Das Hinterglied wäre entweder in deiner Art zu erklären (dann wäre Persephone eine 'liebe' Göttin; vgl. das Skr.-Kompositum sarpa-han-) oder aber, was ich semantisch vorgezogen hätte, obwohl es phonologisch wiederum schwieriger ist, ausgehend von *potniH (wobei man auch dann wieder mit Metathese operieren müsste und die Aspiration des Anlauts von -phatta etc. sekundär sein müsste).

Aber eben: mit Deiner Etymologie wird das alles wohl hinfällig. Darum noch einmal herzlichen Dank und bis bald in Basel (wo ich im Dezember auftauchen werde),

Dein Andreas

▶ Date: Thu, 24 Nov 2005 20:30:15 +0000 (GMT)
From: Andreas Willi <andreas.willi@worcester.oxford.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Lieber Ruedi,

Nachdem ich mir die Sache noch einmal überlegt habe und auch die älteren Quellen noch einmal angeschaut habe, würde ich nun Deine Etymologie noch freudiger begrüssen! Das hohe Alter der Identität Kore-Persephone scheint ja doch kaum zu bezweifeln, da lag ich ganz falsch. Nach wie vor ein wenig unklar ist mir, weshalb die Gottheit gerade in ihrer Vegetationsfunktion, also assoziiert mit der Getreidegöttin Demeter (und im entsprechenden kultischen Rahmen), eher Kore genannt wird, in ihrer chthonischen Funktion, als jugendliche Gattin des Hades, aber eher Persephone (Persophatta). Als Drescherin ist sie ja, trotz Deiner wunderbaren Sagenparallele auf der Webseite, mehr helfend denn furchteinflössend. Aber vielleicht sind da die Dinge einfach zu sehr ineinandergeflossen.

Noch einmal herzlichen Dank und herzliche Grüsse,

Dein Andreas

▶ Date: Fri, 25 Nov 2005 10:04:20 +0100
To: Andreas Willi <andreas.willi@worcester.oxford.ac.uk>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Lieber Andreas,

Herzlichen Dank für Deine Reaktion. Du hast offenbar überprüft, in welchem Zusammenhang welcher Name verwendet wird, eine sehr gute Idee! Wir dürfen wohl davon ausgehen, dass in historischer Zeit jedermann den langen Namen in der düsteren Weise verstanden hat. Das muss ja schon für die epischen Dichter, die Perso- zu Perse- gemacht haben, vorausgesetzt werden. So musste dann auf der anderen Seite für ihren "erfreulicheren" Aspekt, im Zusammenhang mit Demeter und im Kult, umso mehr die Bezeichnung "Kore" passend erscheinen. Die Verteilung ergibt also - in historischer Zeit - sehr guten Sinn.

Vielen Dank und herzliche Grüsse,

Dein Ruedi

▶ Date: Thu, 24 Nov 2005 11:06:10 +0100
From: Martin Joachim Kümmel <martin.kuemmel@mail.uni-freiburg.de>
Subject: AW: Persophatta

Lieber Herr Wachter,

mich hatte die ursprüngliche Fassung erreicht, aber der Hinweis auf die öffentliche Diskussion ist natürlich sehr nützlich.

Ich habe auch schon einmal kurz die iir. Daten geprüft, wo ich aber leider auch in jüngeren Sprachen keine weitere Bestätigung der beiden hap. leg. finden konnte. Das muss noch nichts beweisen, da die mittelindischen Lautentwicklungen für das Überleben des Wortes kaum günstig waren, und beim derzeitigen Stand der iranischen Lexikographie noch kein vollständiger Überblick zu erwarten ist. Das jav. paršanąm ist jedenfalls, da möchte ich Herrn Gippert zustimmen, die bessere Lesart (auch weil lectio difficilior).

Herrn Eichners Anschluss an Pokornys *pers- 'spritzen' wirft die Frage auf, ob *persó- nicht eine Vrddhi-Ableitung sein müsste: Falls nämlich deren Vollstufe *pres- im LIV richtig angesetzt ist (freilich nur wegen toch.A und mittelindisch pas-), wäre sonst Schwebeablaut anzunehmen (wie in germ. *deuza- 'Tier' < *dh-e-ws-ó- zu *dhwes-). Formal vergleichbar sind auch Adjektive vom Typ *leukó-.

Es gibt aber noch eine andere Möglichkeit, die gleichfalls zum Dreschen passen würde und besonders im Kontext der hier betroffenen Wörter/Stellen interessant wäre: Nämlich die Wurzel 3.*per- 'schlagen' (bisher nur arm., bsl.), zu der dann eine Ableitung eines s-Stamms vorliegen müsste, also *per-s-ó- (ähnlich ved. vatsá-).

In beiden Fällen bleibe die Frage, ob das jeweils für 'Garben' ein gutes Benennungsmotiv wäre.

Ansonsten scheinen mir keine entscheidenden Hindernisse für Ihren ausgezeichneten Vorschlag vorzuliegen, vorausgesetzt, die innergriechische Chronologie funktioniert.

Beste Grüße,

Ihr Martin Kümmel

▶ Date: Thu, 24 Nov 2005 22:17:54 +0100
To: Martin Joachim Kümmel <martin.kuemmel@mail.uni-freiburg.de>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Lieber Herr Kümmel,

Danke für Ihre Ausführungen. Es ist gut, dass Herr Eichner und Sie sich auch um die Bedeutung dieses archaischen Wortes kümmern. Es muss ja nicht partout Garbe gewesen sein, auch wenn mir das am wahrscheinlichsten scheint. ...

Herzliche Grüsse,

R. Wachter

▶ Date: Fri, 25 Nov 2005 10:58:17 +0100
From: Martin Joachim Kümmel <martin.kuemmel@mail.uni-freiburg.de>
Subject: AW: AW: Persophatta

Lieber Herr Wachter,

... Was die Bedeutung angeht, hat man ja auch für das Avestische 'Ähre' angenommen - das ist eben nicht so einfach, wenn das Wort zwar in drei Sprachen, aber nur in genau einem Kontext vorkommt. Die Kommentierung des Wortes durch Yaska, Nirukta 3,10 (non vidi) spricht wohl auch dafür, dass es schon bald nicht mehr verstanden wurde.

Herzliche Grüße,

Ihr M. Kümmel

▶ Date: Thu, 24 Nov 2005 12:07:56 +0100
From: "georges.pinault" <georges.pinault@wanadoo.fr>
Subject: Re: Persephone

Dear Colleague,

I thank you very much for the communication of your new etymogical proposal concerning the name Persephone. I found it quite convincing. I send you some more detailed comments in an attached file, that you can use as you wish. I will be of course much interested by anything which you will publish on this topic.

Many thanks again. Best regards,

Georges-Jean Pinault

Attachment:

Georges-Jean Pinault (Paris, EPHE)

Here are some remarks about the new etymology of Persephone, alias Persophatta 'beating the sheaves', which sounds better and more illuminating than anything proposed before.

N.B. N, M = syllabic nasals, sh = retroflex sibilant.

1) You know of course the long interpretation of the name of Persephone by Michael Janda, in his book Eleusis (Innsbruck, 2000), pp. 224-250. I never believed in his etymology, first because the explanation of the second member was very speculative from the morphological point of view, and second, because Persephone is definitely not a further avatar of Vedic Ushas, i.e. Dawn as goddess. The works of Hubert Petersmann (published on 1986, especially Die Sprache 32, pp. 286-307) contain also some interesting material.

2) The syntagma *perso- *gwhen- 'to beat the sheaves' (or maybe specifically the ears) is a good basis for a compound. There are some alternatives to your interpretation of the second member, however. You have clearly stated the problem in your message. It is of course possible to reconstruct *-gwhN-t- as second member of a VRK, but as you note yourself this formation is late in Vedic, it is probably and on the whole analogical: the old type is shown by RV vRtra-han-, and the other compounds in -han- (Av. -jan-). It is therefore not certain that it could be inherited in Greek. A problem connected with this is the feminine, since

this type of derivative (agent noun) in *-t- has a single form for masculine and feminine (AiGr II/2, p. 44), and does not show a feminine in *-iH2-. One could of course argue that this feminine formation appeared in the prehistory of Greek, on the model of other feminine names. From the Greek point of view, the reconstruction of *-phat- < *gwhN-t- (cf. nt. plural odunê-phat-a) seems to be nicely supported by –bat- < *-gwM-t in pro-bat-a, but the problem of the feminine would remain, and probat-a is quite isolated (albeit inherited). I would suggest, for the sake of argument, two other solutions: a) *-gwhNtiH2 as dissimilated from *gwhn-Nt-iH2, the regular feminine of the present participle of *gwhen-, cf. epiassa as epitheton of Dêmêter, with participle going back to *H1i-Nt-iH2; the dissimilation would have been extended in the prehistory of Greek to the whole paradigm, hence neuter *-phat- in plural odunê-phat-a. It would give a normal VRK, with participle as second member. b) Recharacterization as feminine in *-iH2- of a compound with second member *gwhN-ti- 'beating', by using the scheme of the 'Doppelpossessiva', according to Jochem Schindler (see Delbrück Colloquio, Madrid, published in 1997): the compound would mean literally: 'characterized by the beating of the sheaves'. Compounds with second member in *-ti- are commonplace and reflect a PIE type. There exists in (late) RV a compound a-hati- 'not killing'. The variant Perso-phonê would be also perfectly in order, with an alternative type of action noun 'beating' (< *gwhoneH2) as second member, but with exactly the same underlying syntax.

3) As far as the noun *perso- = Vedic parsha- = Av. parsa- is concerned, as meaning 'sheaf' or 'ear', one could mention a possible connection (so far not noted) with Toch. B pere, which refers to the part of a plant (probably a cereal), which I have interpreted as 'stalk' (cf. TIES 2, 1988, where I published this word for the first time, cf. now Adams, Dict. of Toch. B, 1999, p. 4). Now, this form is confirmed by genitive plural written peres (PK DA.M.507 (32), leaf 7, line 2) in a Tocharian economic text. Formally, Toch. B pere < Common Tocharian *paerae can go back to IE *poro- (a concretised action noun, as I proposed in 1988, pp. 147-148) or to *pêr-os, a sigmatic neuter with acrostatic inflection, i.e. lengthened grade in the strong stem (type Gk. hrêgos < *srêg-os, Ved. vâsas-). In the second alternative, one could possibly interpret IE *perso- as *pers-o-, derived from *per-s-, another allomorph of this sigmatic neuter. These nouns would be ultimately connected with the root *per- 'to cross', with the same evolution seen in Vedic parvan- (see the famous paper by K. Hoffmann, 1974) 'joint, knot' of a reed. I think that the same semantic transfer could be apply to the part of a cereal plant, the stalk of even the ear. If this scenario is accepted, the noun *perso- preserved in Greek as first member of this name would have cognates outside Indo-Iranian, and could belong to the inherited IE botanic vocabulary, especially of grain.

Reference: « Le Pratîtyasamutpâda en koutchéen », TIES 2, 1988, pp. 96-165.

Some parts of the above comments should certainly be refined, but this new etymology of the name of Persephone is so appealing that one would wish to make it absolutely convincing. Of course, the role of the daughter of Demeter in the process of ancient agriculture, as interpreted along this line, would have a deep symbolic meaning, and great consequences for the history of Greek religion. I wonder if the role of the Korê is not connected with the ritual gesture of collecting the first ripe ears of grains, by simply beating them.

Paris, November 24, 2005

▶ Date: Thu, 24 Nov 2005 12:44:18 +0100
From: "georges.pinault" <georges.pinault@wanadoo.fr>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Dear Colleague,

I hope that you have well received my message with joint comments. I have written these remarks before reading the comments that have been already sent to you, and which I have just read on the Basel web-site. Of course, you may put my attached message on line, if you want. It contains some non trivial points. Of course, I may have played devil's advocate, but you have raised in your message of announcement some real problems of morphology, that have to be accounted for. I find your etymology so convincing and important that I would like to see it perfect. By the way, I do not believe in Eichner's view that *pers-o- can be derived from a root noun: one would expect *pRs-o- on zero-grade, and the meaning of the root *pers- does not fit at all in this context. I remain at your disposal to pursue the discussion.

Best regards, Georges-Jean Pinault

▶ Date: Fri, 25 Nov 2005 08:00:12 +0100
To: "georges.pinault" <georges.pinault@wanadoo.fr>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Colleague,

Thanks for your comments. It is interesting to see how the noun parshá-, so far rather neglected, has now aroused the attention of etymologists. Indeed it would be important to know what exactly it means, although for the general point both the ears and the sheaves make equally good sense.

Of course I had thought of a present participle too, but had come to a negative result. First I found that it would probably have developed differently, e.g. *-gwhN-Nt-jh2 > *-kwha-at-ja > *-pha:ssa > att. -phe:ssa, which is not what we have. Your solution (a) with a dissimilation had not occurred to me. It seems possible, but do we have parallels? And might we not rather expect a slighter, only partial dissimilation which ultimately led to *-phnassa? The main reason why I discarded a solution with present participle is however that this form is not normally used in second members of compounds and very rarely even in proper names. There are a few names in Homer, but even of them the majority are Zusammenrückungen (E. Risch, Wb. d. hom. Spr. §75d), and the further back we go the less we should expect such a formation. Yet, with its -o- Persophatta is a proper compound. It is for these reasons that I preferred the explanation with t-extension.

Again many thanks for your important contribution, and kind regards,

Rudolf Wachter

► Date: Thu, 24 Nov 2005 18:39:00 +0100
From: Charles de Lamberterie <Charles.de-Lamberterie@paris4.sorbonne.fr>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Cher Collègue,

J'avais bien reçu la première version de votre message, et je vous en remercie. L'étymologie que vous proposez paraît, de fait, très séduisante. ... Par simple jeu, j'ai essayé de voir si l'arménien, qui est souvent un trait d'union entre l'indo-iranien et le grec, n'apporterait pas quelque lumière au dossier. Mais pour l'instant je n'ai malheureusement rien trouvé.

1) Le nom de la gerbe, qui dans la Bible traduit gr. dragma,

est oray, gén. orayoy, mot sans étymologie.

2) En appliquant mécaniquement les règles phonétiques, on aboutirait, pour un étymon *perso-, à un reflet her (r pointé = rr, par la même assimilation que dans lat. ferre < *ferse) en arménien. Un tel mot existe de fait, mais c'est un thème en -i- qui signifie « dispute, querelle ». L'étymologie qu'en donne Pokorny (i.-e. *ers-) n'est guère conviancante, mais on n'a pas trouvé mieux. Il existe par ailleurs un adjectif heri (r pointé là aussi) « lontain », que l'on rapproche à juste titre de got. fairra « loin ». Ni dans l'un ni dans l'autre cas je n'aperçois de relation sémantique possible avec la gerbe. C'est dommage, car si j'avais pu apporter à votre hypothèse un appui du côté de la grammaire comparée, c'est bien volontiers que je l'aurais fait.

Bien cordialement

Charles de Lamberterie

► Date: Fri, 25 Nov 2005 12:52:17 +0000 (GMT)
From: Martin West <martin.west@all-souls.oxford.ac.uk>
Subject: Persophatta

Dear Professor Wachter,

congratulations both on your brilliant etymology and on the wide acclaim it has received from many experts. I have just two comments.

First, I am surprised that you and you correspondents all refer to Homeric odynéphatos but not to the semantically more relevant myléphatos, "bruised in the mill".

Second, the name Persophatta (or whatever the original form was) must at first have been a title or epithet, and not the goddess's kyrion onoma.

With best wishes,

Martin West

► Date: Fri, 25 Nov 2005 23:11:49 +0100
To: Martin West <martin.west@all-souls.oxford.ac.uk>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Professor West,

Thank you for your comments which are very helpful. May I put them into the discussion forum too?

I have concentrated on odynéphata phármaka because here we have an active meaning whereas myléphatos (cited in the full article for KADMOS) is passive and formed with the verbal adjective / past participle *gwhn-tó-, from which no way leads to -phassa. You are quite right though that, semantically, grinding and threshing are closely related. That had escaped me. May we perhaps go on and claim that precisely because *gwhen does not mean 'grind' myléphatos could be a reflex of early Greek *-kwhat-/-kwhatja from a time when *persokwhatja vel sim. was still understood as 'beating something in connexion with corn'?

As for the question of epithet or name, the suffix -jh2 is not normally added to verbal compounds used in the feminine except when a compound passes from adjective (with a noun added) to a name (without a noun that would make the gender clear). I fully agree that in the beginning the compound must have been a title or epithet, but from the time the -jh2 suffix was first added, the compound must have been or at least could be considered a name. The meaning of such a "verbales Rektionskompositum" (masc./fem. *perso-gwhnt-s, ntr. -gwhnt) must have been quite concrete: 'thresher', and I wonder if the feminine form should not in the beginning have had this concrete meaning too (as even later the forms with -ia added e.g. to the nomen agentis suffix -tr-, i.e. -tria). Later on, a vaguer meaning ('the one associated with beating the sheaves') could easily develop, of course. -- I would like to know what the original story of Persephone was!

With best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Tue, 29 Nov 2005 18:59:10 +0000 (GMT)
From: Martin West <martin.west@all-souls.oxford.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Dear Professor Wachter,

thank you for your response. By all means put my comments into the forum, si tanti est.

The conclusion I would draw from myléphatos, which I assume to be a Greek compound (probably second millennium, but possibly later) is that at the time when it was coined the Greek reflex of *gwhen was still applicable to the processing of grain, no doubt threshing as well as milling.

I suppose that *Persokwhatja was originally honoured specifically at threshing time.

Best wishes,

Martin West.

▶ Date: Thu, 1 Dec 2005 18:41:31 +0100
To: Martin West <martin.west@all-souls.oxford.ac.uk>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Professor West,

I fully agree with your conclusions! As for the main time of honouring Persophatta, we now need a lot of good allusions to her being closely linked to harvesting and threshing, both from myth and art.

There are implications in terms of cultural prehistory on the Indo-Iranian side too, I think. Whatever the exact use of *gwhen with *perso- was (see the discussion with P. Oktor Skjaervo), the phrase, preserved in the name of Persephone and in Indo-Iranian, strikes me as a particularly strong parallel in the domain of I.-E. agriculture, for which Indo-Iranian is notoriously silent: all the traditional words for sowing, ploughing, milling, *agros as 'cultivated field', etc. are lacking or have different meanings. No wonder, I would say, that parsha- is a hapax legomenon both in Vedic and Avestan, dying out in front of our eyes.

With all best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Sun, 27 Nov 2005 16:11:07 +0100
From: Norbert Oettinger <norbert@oettinger-online.de>
Subject: Persophatta

Lieber Herr Wachter,

ich gratuliere zur überzeugenden Etymologie von Persophatta/Persephone! Ältere Vorschläge, wie z.B. bei Petersmann Sprache 32 oder Janda, Eleusis 244, können nicht konkurrieren. Die Variante Persophatta, also mit -t- hinter n-Sonans, ist m.E. trotz des vedischen Befunds potentiell alt, da ich für dieses -t- phonotaktischen Ursprung vermute, und zwar unter anderem gerade hinter n-Sonans und r-Sonans ; vgl. "Anatolisch und Indogermanisch", ed. O.Carruba, Innsbruck 2001, 308 ff. ...

Herzliche Grüße

Norbert Oettinger

▶ Date: Fri, 2 Dec 2005 10:05:37 +0100
To: Norbert Oettinger <norbert@oettinger-online.de>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Lieber Herr Oettinger,

Vielen Dank für Ihre Zeilen und vor allem für den Support der t-Ableitung bzw. in ihrer Interpretation t-Epenthese, die sich hinter [n] besonders häufig findet! Auch wenn das Kompositum trotzdem noch nicht grundsprachlichen Alters sein sollte, so scheint mir eine sehr frühe griechische Bildung dieser Art durchaus bedenkenlos. Der Befund im Sanskrit kann auch einfach auf der Popularität von -han- als Hinterglied beruhen, wogegen -hat- (ganz ähnlich wie gr. -phatta nach der Veränderung der Labiovelare) morphologisch weniger klar war (es gibt ja auch ha:- 'verlassen' mit einigen kurzvokaligen Formen, Präs. manchmal jahati, Pzp. jahat-).

Herzliche Grüsse,

Ihr Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Mon, 28 Nov 2005 20:28:06 -0500
From: "P. Oktor Skjaervo" <skjaervo@fas.harvard.edu>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Hello Professor Wachter,

thank you for distributing this interesting discussion (involving a lot of friends and several former students of mine).

Just a couple of remarks for when you write it up:

What Geldner put in his text is not strictly relevant since his edition is by no means authoritative (e-mail from Gippert), but you probably want to refer to Bartholomae, who also cited the Rigvedic parallel.

There are, however text-critical problems in the Yt.13 passage, F1 and the Khorde Avesta mss. "crossing" one another in parshanam and nijatem:

parshanam F1; pairishtanam J10, KhA.

nijathem F1; nijatem KhA.

The closest parallel is Yt.5.77 "that I have smashed down (nijatem, where the reading is unproblematic) as many daêwa-sacrificers as I carry hairs on the head," which shows that the simile in Yt.13.71 targets the multitude of soldiers standing as thickly as grain in the field, rather than grain on the threshing floor. The "ears" of the grain have been smashed down/off, probably like the heads of the soldiers, judging from the use of nijan- with heads in Yt.10.40 "Even their well-*wielded axes, which are smashed down upon the heads of men" (where the conjectured reading nighnaaire has now been confirmed by a manuscript).

This is not to say, that the formula parsham jan- was not involved in the choice of wording.

With best wishes.

POS

▶ Date: Thu, 1 Dec 2005 18:50:35 +0100
To: "P. Oktor Skjaervo" <skjaervo@fas.harvard.edu>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Dear Colleague,

Thank you very much for raising the important question of what *gwhen originally meant in combination with *perso- 'sheaf / ear'! We cannot be sure from Persophatta or the Yt. 13 passage, but at least RV 10.48 is clear

with its khala-, a word not too badly attested (although perhaps not I.-E.) for 'barn-floor', where corn was threshed and stored, not cut. And there is another reason for which I doubt that *gwhen could have had the meaning 'cut off an ear of corn like somebody's head' that you deduce from Yt. 5.77 (also ni + jan). I think one normally understands *gwhen as 'beat (mostly a person, often with letal consequences), slay', sometimes 'split', in the way Indra operates with his club and bolt vajra-, i.e. with a big and strong and mostly downward (ni) movement. Cutting ears of corn however was done by gripping a small bunch at a time with one hand and carefully cutting it in one or several quick movements towards one's body with a sharpened blade (stone knives, later bronze). A beating movement was of no use at all. In the second passage you cite, Yt. 10.40, ni jan- is used for blows with axes, which seems fully adequate. The second verb used for slaying the dragon in I.-E. apart from *gwhen, viz. wedh- (see C. Watkins, How to kill... ch. 32), cognate with Greek o:théo:, has nothing to do with cutting either. Of course we need not wonder that with metal technology progressing *gwhen could also mean fighting with a sharpened bronze sword, but I do not think that even in Homer it is often used for neatly cutting one's opponent's head off. There are inherited roots for cutting (motionless objects) in the I.-E. languages. So if we suppose a meaning 'harvesting' instead of 'threshing' for Persephone, I would rather expect, e.g., *persons ker- [*persom sker- ;-)]. I think for the time being I stick to 'threshing'.

With best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Sun, 27 Nov 2005 13:34:34 -0500
From: craig melchert <melchert@email.unc.edu>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Dear Professor Wachter: many thanks for this message and for sharing the news of your new etymology. I had somehow not received the earlier sending.

Like most others, I am convinced that the essentials of your analysis must be correct. Ich gratuliere! I will leave it to you and others to wrestle with the formal details, in particular the -phatta form.

For me it is the semantic implications that are of most interest. I had not known of the isolated Vedica and Avestan passages where *gWhen- is used to mean "to beat". Your further evidence that this usage is old helps support the idea that the root was originally "presential" and processual (see most recently García-Ramón, FS Watkins).

As to *perso-, I must say that I do not find Professor Eichner's account in terms of "Spreu" convincing as given. Nor does any connection with Hittite pars- "to break" (esp. of bread) make sense to me semantically. Incidentally, Hittite parsa- "crumb, morsel" is not problematic formally, since deverbal action nouns in Hittite are productive. Thus this example, like gulssa- "fate" < gulss- "to draw" (NB the zero-grade), may be a Hittite innovation and take its form from the verbal root. Thus it need not continue an o-grade *porso-, which as Brent Vine indicated should yield *parra-.

As far as I know, "sheaf" normally is named from verbs for "gather" or "bind". Nothing of the shape *pers- presents itself with these meanings. In looking up words for "sheaf" I found that some languages make a distinction between a true bound sheaf and a loose one. In fact, as far as I can see from the Vedic passage cited, all that parsa- has to mean is stalks of grain put down and beaten to remove the grain. Nothing requires that they be bound. I therefore would suggest that we should modify the original meaning of the known root *pres- to "to strew". *perso- would then refer to the stalks of grain strewn on the threshing floor. The development to the more established meanings like "sprinkle, spray" (Hitt. pappars- etc.) would merely reflect the use of the verb with smaller, finer materials. "spraying" water or "sprinkling" grains is simply "strewing" in a sense. If I am right with this line of reasoning, then *perso- would reflect the oldest sense of the root, which in verbal forms seems to have already progressed to "to spray". The "state I" *perso- from *pres- does not seem to me to be a serious obstacle. With best wishes, Craig M.

▶ Date: Thu, 1 Dec 2005 19:06:40 +0100
To: craig melchert <melchert@email.unc.edu>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Dear Colleague,

Thank you very much for this, in particular for pointing to the processual character of *gwhen. But pace García-Ramón, even killing somebody would normally, I imagine, need a series of blows rather than just a single one.

So the root present is appropriate even for this "letal" meaning. At any rate, for threshing, the root with its basic iterative meaning seems perfect.

As for *perso-, whatever the root behind it (if there is one), Michael Weiss has suggested a connexion with Latin porrum, Greek prason 'leek', whose formation as a matter of fact looks far more Indo-European than "Mediterranean". Yet I would rather connect 'leek' with 'ear' than with 'sheaf', if I imagine the usual alternating form of leek and ears. You too suggest that parsha- need not mean sheaf but could be a stalk of grain, of which the ear is of course the essential part. Others too have doubted the meaning 'sheaf'. If the connexion with 'leek' is correct, Persophatta would have beaten ears not sheaves, but I would then have difficulties to connect it with the verbal root you mention. ...

With all best wishes,

Rudolf Wachter

▶ Date: Thu, 01 Dec 2005 15:49:55 -0500
From: craig melchert <melchert@email.unc.edu>
Subject: Re: Persophatta

Dear Colleague: ... Michael Weiss's idea would certainly be an alternative to think about. We would then have to leave the root as indeterminate. Not all old nouns can be analyzed in terms of a verbal or adjectival root. Yes, I agree that the sense "kill" does not argue against a fundamental processual meaning for *gWhen-. It is worth noting in this connection that Hittite kuen- regularly means "kill" only when the particle -kan is present. Otherwise it usually means merely "strike". Best wishes, Craig M.

▶ Date: Tue, 06 Dec 2005 20:45:50 +0100
From: Rémy Viredaz <remy.viredaz@bluewin.ch>
Subject: Perrophatta

Cher Professeur Wachter,

Félicitations pour votre étymologie nouvelle de Perrophatta/Persephonê.

Quelques commentaires sur celle-ci ou sur certaines questions soulevées dans le forum :

– La question du sens 'gerbe' ou 'épi' de l'élément *perso- est liée à la façon dont on comprend l'élément signifiant 'frapper': soit l'on frappe les gerbes contre le sol ou contre un objet comme sur la photo, soit l'on frappe à l'aide d'un fléau les épis répandus au sol (entre autres méthodes). *gWhen- 'frapper' peut se construire avec l'accusatif de l'objet qui reçoit les coups ou de l'objet que l'on tient en main pour frapper.

– On ne peut pas tirer de conclusions du vocalisme *e de *perso-, car on ne peut pas exclure une dissimilation de *porso- (comparer la double forme Erkhomenos / Orkhomenos, où cependant je ne sais pas quel est le vocalisme ancien). La reconstruction du mot repose sur deux langues seulement, et celle de son vocalisme sur une seule langue. La comparaison du tokharien B pere (Pinault, ci-dessus) pourrait améliorer la situation, mais n'est pas sûre (le mot peut théoriquement aussi continuer *bhoro-).

– Le lien sémantique entre les acceptions 'frapper' et 'tuer' de la racine durative *gWhen- n'est pas dépendant du fait que l'on doive frapper plusieurs fois pour tuer (cf. votre réponse à Melchert, 1 Dec 2005). Le même développement sémantique s'observe en effet pour la racine aoristique védique VADH(I)- 'frapper, tuer'. Je crois aussi que l'on peut tuer quelqu'un d'un seul coup. Quoi qu'il en soit, l'aoriste peut aussi bien s'employer lorsqu'il y a plusieurs coups considérés comme une action unique : dâru ápavadhît 'a abattu un arbre' RV 10.146.4. La différence d'aspect entre l'aoriste et le présent, du moins en védique (je n'ai pas étudié les emplois grecs), semble être plutôt : 'tuer une personne' (ou un animal, un démon) : 'tuer de nombreuses personnes' (ou tuer habituellement).

– La formation du composé est antérieure non seulement à la spécialisation sémantique ph(o)n- 'tuer' / the(i)n- 'frapper' en grec (après l'élimination phonologique des labio-vélaires, cf. Fortson et Wachter, 23 novembre), mais aussi à la disparition du simple *perso- 'gerbe' (date inconnue) et à la perte de productivité du suffixe d'agent féminin *-t-ya, donc sans doute largement prémycénienne.

– Le suffixe *-t-ya de Perrophatta se comprend bien si l'on se souvient que le suffixe grec de noms d'agent masculins -tâ- est l'élargissement d'un plus ancien *-t- (voir la thèse d'Alex Leukart et son article antérieur dans la 5. Fachtagung der Idg. Gesellschaft, 1975), innovation prémycénienne mais suffisamment récente du point de vue indo-européen pour que le dérivé du myc. eqeta, rawaketa soit eqesijo, rawakesijo et non *-tajo (comme le relève également Leukart).

Meilleures salutations,

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▶ Date: Sun, 11 Dec 2005 20:27:03 +0100
To: Rémy Viredaz <remy.viredaz@bluewin.ch>
From: Rudolf Wachter <Rudolf.Wachter@unibas.ch>

Cher Monsieur,

Merci de votre réponse avec laquelle je suis cent pour cent d'accord!

Meilleures salutations,

Rudolf Wachter

Epilogue

No objection was raised against the general etymology of Persophatta/Persephone as 'threshing maiden'. Two questions, concerning the precise meanings of the two parts of the compound, had to be discussed in a more detailed manner:

(1) It was asked whether the meaning of *$g^{wh}en$ if used with *perso- could not have been 'harvesting' rather than 'threshing'. This, I think, can be answered in favour of the latter: First, RV 10.48 is clear with its *khala-*, a word not too badly attested (although perhaps not I.-E.) for 'barn-floor', where corn was threshed and stored, not cut. Second, the meaning of *$g^{wh}en$ is 'beat (mostly a person, often with letal consequences), slay', sometimes 'split', in the way Indra operates with his club and bolt *vajra-*, i.e. with a big and strong and mostly downward (*ni*) movement. Cutting ears of corn however was done by gripping a small bunch at a time with one hand and carefully cutting it in one or several quick movements towards one's body with a sharpened blade (stone knives, later bronze). A beating movement was of no use at all. The second verb used for slaying the dragon in I.-E. apart from *$g^{wh}en$, viz. *wed^h (see C. Watkins, How to kill... ch. 32), cognate with Greek *o:théo:*, has nothing to do with cutting either. Of course we need not wonder that with metal technology progressing *$g^{wh}en$ could also mean fighting with a sharpened bronze sword, but I do not think that even in Homer it is often used for neatly cutting one's opponent's head off. There are inherited roots for cutting (motionless objects) in the I.-E. languages. So if we wanted to suppose a meaning 'harvesting' instead of 'threshing' for Persephone, we should rather expect, e.g., *persons ker-* [*persom sker-* ;-)].

(2) As for the meaning of *perso-, it could have been 'ear of corn' rather than 'sheaf' originally, namely if Michael Weiss's etymological connexion with Latin *porrum* and Greek *prason* is correct and based, as I suggested in my answer to Michael Weiss, on the common structure of leek and ear (see above, with pictures). But threshing is more often done with sheaves rather than with cut-off ears, so 'sheaf' is a plausible meaning, too, even if it was a secondary one.