

BENEDIKT PESCHL

# Avestan

Phonology – Part 1: Problems in the tradition, segmental phonology



**MUYA** —  
**The Multimedia Yasna Project**

# Roadmap

- Setting the problem
- Ways to restore
- Phonological inventory
- Allophones

## Restoring Av. to its original shape

- Prerequisite for establishing an inventory of the phonemes of Avestan (here the focus is on OAv.): restoration of the transmitted text to its presumed original shape at the time of its composition
- Reversion of phonetic and redactional changes subsequently applied to the text
- Based on our conception of Proto-Iranian and Proto-Indo-Iranian, as established through the comparison of Avestan with Old Persian and Vedic

## Yasna 29.10

*yūžām aēibiiō ahurā aōgō dātā ašā xšaθramcā  
auuaṭ vohū mananḥā yā hušaitiš rāmḡmcā dāṭ  
azāmcīṭ ahiiā mazdā θβḡm mājīhī paōuruuīm vaēdam*

“You (pl.), o Ahura, give strength to them, and that power through *Aša* (true order), by which one will establish good dwellings and peace through good thinking.

I in particular, oh *Mazdā*, have realized you to be the first provider of this.”

## Removing allophonic alternations

- $\bar{a} \sim q / \_ N$

*rām̄qm̄cā*      peace.ACC.PL=and      /rām̄m̄=ca/

- $a \sim ə / \_ N$

*vaēdam*      provider(?).ACC.SG      /ʋaɪdam/

- $\underset{̣}{u} \sim \beta / \theta \_$

*θβqm*      you.SG.ACC      /θʋām/

## Restoring quantity of word-final vowels

- *dātā*                      give.AOR.INJ.2PL                      /dāta/  
cf. Vedic 2.pl. ending *-ta*
- *mā́hī*                      think.AOR.INJ.1SG.MID                      /manhi/  
cf. Vedic 1.sg middle ending *-i*

## Removing *i*-epenthesis

- *i*-epenthesis is the result of a palatalization of certain consonants by following /ī, i, i̯/, which later resulted in the rise of new diphthongs

- Example:

*gaidī*                      come.AOR.IMP.2SG                      /gadi/

- From Y 29.10:

*aēibiiō*                      they.DAT.PL                      /ai̯bi̯ah/

*hušaitiš*                      good.dwelling.ACC.PL                      /hušitīš/

## Removing further post-OAv. sound-changes

■ /aha/ > aṇha:    *manaṇhā*                      thought.INS.SG            /manahā/

■ /V́rt/ > Vṣ̌:        *aṣ̌ā*    truth/order.INS.SG    /artā/

cf. Old Persian *arta-*

■ Umlaut *a* > *o*:    *vohū*    good.INS.SG            /v̥ahū/

cf. Old Persian /vahu-/, spelled *vau-*

■ *-ah* > *-ō*:        *aōgō*    strength.ACC.SG        /aūgah/



## Restoring laryngeal hiat

- Cf. metre (should be 7 + 9 syllables):

*auuaṭ vohū manahā yā hušaitīš rām̄m̄cā **dāt*** not OK

*/auaṭ uahū manahā iā hušitīš rāmām=ca **daʔat/*** OK

- *dāṭ* give.AOR.SUBJ.3SG /daʔat/
- Etymologically expected. Root *dā* < \**daH* + subjunctive morpheme *-a-*

## Yasna 29.10 restored

*yūžām aēibiiō ahurā aōgō dātā ašā xšaθramcā  
auuat̄ vohū manahā yā hušaitiš rāmṣmcā dāt̄  
azāmcit̄ ahiiā mazdā θβṣm mēhī paōuruuīm vaēdam*

īūžam aībīah ahura auḡah dāta artā xšaθram=ca  
auat uahū manahā īā hušitīš rāmām=ca daʔat  
azam=cit ahīa mazdā θuām manhi paruīiam uaidam





## The Old Avestan consonants: allophones

- |   |            |                 |         |               |
|---|------------|-----------------|---------|---------------|
| ▪ | [β] ~ /u̥/ | [θβām] /θu̥ām/  | <θβqm>  | you.ACC       |
| ▪ | [δ] ~ /θ/  | [uxδa-] /uxθa-/ | <uxδa-> | utterance     |
| ▪ | [ɣ] ~ /g/  | [auɣža] /auḡza/ | <auɣžā> | speak.PRS-2SG |
  
- |   |            |                        |             |             |
|---|------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| ▪ | [ər] ~ /r/ | [amərtāt-] /a-mr-tāt-/ | <aməratāt-> | immortality |
|---|------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|
  
- According to some, the glides ([i̥], [u̥]), too, may be regarded as allophones of the vowels /i/, /u/, when not forming a syllable nucleus