



BAGA II. IN OLD AND MIDDLE IRANIAN

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The old IE. term for the heavenly gods, the cognate of OInd. *devá-*, Lat. *deus*, etc., was generally devalued in Iranian to “false or evil god” and ultimately “demon” (Av. *daēva-*, Old Pers. *daiva-*, Mid. Pers. *dēw*, etc.). In the sense “god,” this word was replaced either by *yazata-* “(a being) worthy of worship” (Av. *yazata-*, Mid. Pers. *yaz(a)d*, NPers. *īzad*, etc.) or by *baga-*.

It is not likely that OIr. *baga-* derives from a word meaning “god” in IE., despite the occurrence of *bogŭ* “god” in the Slavonic languages (probably as a result of Iranian influence). Etymologically, *baga-* “god” belongs to the verbal root *bag* “to distribute, allot” and may be equated with OInd. *bhága-*, a divine epithet probably meaning “dispenser; generous one,” beside which there exists also a second noun *bhága-* “distribution, allotted portion” equivalent to Av. *baya-* “portion, lot,” Slavonic **bogŭ* in derivatives such as *ubogŭ* “poor” (from “*portionless”). It is this latter word which is personified in the Rigveda as the minor deity Bhaga (one of the Ādityas, a group headed by Varuṇa and Mitra). (See P. Thieme in B. Schlerath, ed., *Zarathustra*, Darmstadt, 1970, p. 401.)

Av. *baga-* occurs only once in the *Gāthās*, in a much-debated passage (Y. 32.8) where it possibly means “portion” or “distribution.” In the later Avestan texts



baya- occurs occasionally as a title of divinities (Ahura Mazdā, Māh, Mithra), but it is debatable whether it should still be understood in the earlier sense of “dispenser” (cf. OInd. *bhága-*) or already as “god.” The development of the latter meaning is securely attested in Old Persian, where *baga-*, translated by words meaning “god” in Babylonian and Elamite, is the only generic term for the divinities worshipped by the Achaemenids.

There is no certain trace of *baga-* in the Mid. Ir. Saka dialects, where forms derived from *yazata-* (Khot. *gyasta-*, Tumshuqese *jezda-*) are used instead, while Islamic Choresmian has adopted Ar. *ʾllh* for “God” (but cf. Chor. (ʾ)βγ(y)k “doll” from **baga-ka-*). All other attested Mid. Ir. languages retain forms derived from *baga-* in the sense “god”: Mid. Pers. *bay* (plur. *bayān*, *baʾān*), Parth. *bay*, Bactr. *bago*, Sogd. βγ-. All these forms are used as honorific titles, not only of gods but also of kings and other men of high rank, in which case the translation “lord” is usually appropriate, e.g., Bactr. *i bago šao Kanēški* “the lord king Kanishka.” In Zoroastrian Pahl. *im bay* “this lord” and *ōy bay* “that lord” mean “His (present) Majesty” and “His late Majesty” respectively. A peculiar use of the plur. form to refer to the monarch is found in the Sasanian inscriptions (and perhaps in the Sogd. “Ancient letters,” see W. B. Henning, “Soghdisch βγ”n-,” *ZDMG* 90, 1936, pp. 197-99), e.g., Inscr. Parth. *LKM ʾLHYN* (*išmāh bayān*) “Your Majesty.” A derivation of the Turk. lordly title *bäg*, later *bey*, from Iranian is superficially attractive but quite uncertain (see G. Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* II, Wiesbaden, 1965, pp. 402-06).

It is probable that *baga-* “god” sometimes designates a specific deity as “the god” *parexcellence*. Various attempts have been made to identify “the god” so referred to, as Ahura Mazdā, as Mithra, or as an Iranian equivalent of the Vedic Varuṇa (see M. Boyce, “Varuna the Baga,” further identifying Varuṇa with the Av. Apām Napāt [q.v.]), but no basis has ever been stated for the assumption that *baga-* “the god” in a personal name such as **Baga-dāta-* “given by (the) god” must refer to the same divinity at all periods and in all parts of the Iranian world. However, strong evidence that Baga was sometimes used as a by-name of Mithra is provided by calendrical data first exploited by J. Marquart (Markwart), *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte von Eran* I, Göttingen, 1896, pp. 63-65; II, Leipzig, 1905, pp. 129, 132-34 (see also V. A. Livshits, “The Khwarezmian Calendar and the Eras of Ancient Chorasmia,” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 16, 1968, pp. 444-46, for Chor. data). Thus, the seventh month of the year is named after Mithra in Mid. Pers. *Mihr māh*,



Arm. *Mehekan*, early Chor. *mtr*, but after Baga in Old Pers. **Bāgayādiya* (attested in El. transcription) and *Bāgayādi(š)* (q.v.), Sogd. *βγk'n(c)* (cf. the similar formations used to name the ninth month: Mid. Pers. *Ādur māh*, Arm. *Mehekan*, early Chor. *ʿtrw*, Old Pers. *Āçiyādiya* (q.v.) and **Āçiyādi(š)*). Likewise, the sixteenth day of the month is known as *Mihr rōz* in Mid. Pers., *mtr* in early Chor., *myš* in the Sogd. calendar given by Bīrūnī, etc., but as *fyγ* (for **βγγ*) in Bīrūnī's Chor. calendar, *βγγ-rwc* in a Sogd. document from Mount Mug, *bgy* in a Chor. inscription.

A different interpretation of these facts was proposed by W. B. Henning, “A Sogdian God,” *BSOAS* 28, 1965, pp. 242-54. Chiefly on the basis of an etymology of Sogd. *βγ'ny-pš-kt'kw* “wedding” as “making of a Baga-union” and a reference to *βγγ*, apparently as a god distinct from *my'r* “Mithra,” in a Sogd. marriage contract, he identifies Baga with the Vedic Bhaga: both in India and in Iran, B(h)aga would be a god with a “special interest in marriage” and closely associated (but not identical) with Mit(h)ra. This theory has been supported with onomastic data by P. Gignoux, “Le dieu Baga en Iran,” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 25, 1977 (1980), pp. 119-27, but it has also been strongly challenged, see especially A. Dietz, “Baga and Miθra in Sogdiana,” in *Études mithriaques*, *Acta Iranica* 17, Tehran and Liège, 1978, pp. 111-14, and S. Zimmer, “Iran. *baga*—ein Gottesname?” *MSS* 43, 1984, pp. 187-215, and cannot be regarded as proven.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The article by S. Zimmer just cited includes a useful discussion of most problems concerning *baga-*, while the Old and Mid. Ir. usage is surveyed by M. Boyce, “Varuna the Baga,” in *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne*, *Acta Iranica* 21, Leiden, 1981, pp. 59-73, esp. 61-65.

On the relationship between OIr. *baga-* and OInd. *bhāga-*, Slavonic *bogŭ* see M. Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen* II, Heidelberg, 1963, pp. 457-59.

Regarding H. W. Bailey's suggested reading and interpretation of Khot.



*vvūvayau as a royal title derived from *baga-yauna– (e.g., in *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan*, Col. Lect. Ser. 1, Delmar, 1982, p. 11) see R. E. Emmerick in *Studies in the Vocabulary of Khotanese II*, ed. R. E. Emmerick and P.O. Skjærvø, Vienna, 1987, pp. 132-34.