



# PERSONAL NAMES, IRANIAN I. PRE-ISLAMIC NAMES: GENERAL

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## PERSONAL NAMES, IRANIAN

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## i. PRE-ISLAMIC NAMES: GENERAL

The system of the formation of personal names (anthroponyms), as it is attested in the Iranian languages from ancient times, to a great extent agrees with that known from most of the other Indo-European languages, so that the Indo-European character of the Iranian languages is plainly reflected also in anthroponymy. Those correspondences relate to both morphology and



vocabulary, insofar as the morphological principles of the formation of names (see below) are the same and a common stock of lexemes can be discovered that are used in personal names. Such similarities and common features become particularly apparent when a comparison is made with the Old Indo-Aryan and especially the Vedic facts, because the much richer tradition of texts and the singular archaism of the Vedic language make it possible to recognize the characteristic traits of this system more clearly and make them more easily comprehensible than is the case for Iran. The main reason for this is the fact that authentic direct evidence of personal names in Iranian-language sources of the Old Iranian period is confined to the names attested in the Avesta (see below, ii) and in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions in the Old Persian language (OPers.; see below, iii).

*Indo-European onomastic tradition.* Among personal names, as inherited from Proto-Indo-European, there are to be distinguished with regard to their form and morphology primarily (A) full names and (B) names derived from them by shortening. Full names of type A are all those names that were formed neither by the shortening of originally longer forms nor by the expanding of shorter forms by means of suffixes. Depending on whether the full name contains one or two lexemes, there is a further distinction to be made: (A.i) single-stem (full) names and, as an especially characteristic and archaic type, (A.ii) two-stem compound names. The single-stem names of type A.i that are not the result of a shortening process are single-stem forms from the very beginning and often, as derisive nicknames, ridicule some negatively salient physical or personal characteristic. The formations of type A.ii are usually nominal compounds of the same kind and of all the different sorts that are found among common nouns too, i.e., possessive compounds (*bahuvrīhis*), determinative compounds, governing compounds, etc. In addition to these normal compounds there are, as a special type, names (type A.ii.4) that are characterized by an inversion of the elements of the basic compound form. Here the two elements of the underlying basic name, i.e., the name of the onomastic model, are taken over simply in a mechanical way and are transposed intentionally in order to avoid confusion with that model. The name OIr. *\*Dāta-miθra-*, for instance, has been chosen for the reason that the elements *\*Miθra-* (theonym) and *\*dāta-* ‘given’ of the model OIr. *\*Miθra-dāta-* ‘given by *Mithra*’ should indeed be preserved, but at the same time should be slightly altered, too. *Pace* Boccali (p. 19), we need not reckon with Aramaic influence here, since the same phenomenon is not infrequently found in other Indo-European languages (mainly in Greek and in the Old Germanic languages), and on the other hand Semitic influence



is not unambiguously visible elsewhere in Old Iranian anthroponomastics.

Among the names shortened from two-stem (compound) full names of type A.ii, we have to distinguish between mere short names (B.i) and the hypocoristic names (B.ii); the latter are characterized by the fact that a hypocoristic suffix is added to the remaining part of the initial basic name after its shortening. This shortening process itself has not necessarily to follow the original morpheme boundaries, but can occur at any place and can show further formal changes (e.g., simplification of consonantal groups or an optional expressive gemination of the last consonant); therefore it is nothing but an arbitrary mutilation of the body of the basic compound name. The only effective restriction is that one of the two lexemes of the original form must be preserved in full and without any shortening. Depending on the extent to which the first and the second element of the original compound are preserved, whether completely or only in part or not at all, a further distinction is made here, too, between single-stem and two-stem short names or hypocoristics: There are single-stem (B.i.1) and two-stem short names (B.i.2) as well as single-stem (B.ii.1) and two-stem hypocoristics (B.ii.2).

*Typology of Iranian anthroponyms.* All these different types of personal names inherited from Proto-Indo-European may be illustrated here for the Old Iranian languages by some appropriate examples (for a fuller documentation see below, sections ii and iii):

A.i. (single-stem full names): OPers. *uxra-* “Mr. Red”;

A.ii. (two-stem full names):

A.ii. 1 (possessive compounds): OPers. *Vištāspa-* (from *\*višta-* + *\*aspa-*) “Possessing horses untied (for racing)”;

A.ii.2 (determinative compounds): YAv. *Pairi-štūra-* (from *\*pari-* + *\*stūra-*) “Being strong all around,” OIr. *\*Miθra-dāta-* (attested in Gk. *Mithradátēs*, Aram. *mtrdt*, etc.) “Given by Mithra (as genius of the 16th day)”;

A.ii.3 (governing compounds): OPers. *Dāraya-vauš* “Holding firm the good”;

A.ii.4 (inverted forms): OIr. *\*Dāta-miθra-* (attested in El. *Da-ad-da-mi-ut-ra*, Aram. *dtmtr*, etc.), which can be explained only as described above by assuming an inversion of OIr. *\*Miθra-dāta-* (see above, A.ii.2);



B.i.1 (single-stem short names): YAv. *Uštra-* (seemingly meaning “Mr. Camel”) shortened from some compound name with second element *-uštra-* such as OAv., YAv. *Zaraθ-uštra-* “Possessing old (better: aging) camels”;

B.i.2 (two-stem short names): OIr. *\*Dāta-m-a-* (attested in El. *Da-(ad/ud-)da-ma*, Gk. *Datámēs*, etc.) shortened from some compound name like OIr. *\*Dāta-miθra-* (see above, A.ii.4) with initial *m-* of the second element preserved;

B.ii.1 (single-stem hypocoristics): OPers. *Āç-ina-* shortened from some compound name with first element OPers. *āç-* (from Ir. *\*āθr-*) “fire” and suffixed with *-ina-*;

B.ii.2 (two-stem hypocoristics): OIr. *\*Ṛta-x-aya-* (attested in El. *Ir-da-ka-ya*, Gk. *Artachaiēs*, etc.) shortened from some compound name like OIr. *\*Ṛta-xratu-* or OPers. *Ṛta-xšaça-* “Whose rule is through the Truth” ([Artaxerxes](#)) with initial *x-* of the second element being preserved.

The differentiation between the various types of anthroponyms is often in dispute, especially in names containing one lexeme only. In particular it is not always easy to distinguish precisely between single-stem full names (type A.i) and single-stem short names (type B.i.1), since there are no reliable criteria for deciding whether some form has been shortened from an originally longer one, although in itself it can clearly be interpreted without difficulty and therefore is easily understood.

Full lists of personal names arranged according to such a typological classification are not available for Iranian onomastics in general, nor for any particular corpus, except for the Parthian names attested in the Nisa ostraca (see Schmitt, 1998). Of some help are, however, the morphological lists of the second elements of compound names and of the hypocoristic or other derivational suffixes compiled by Justi, *Namenbuch* (pp. 483–520 and 521–26 respectively; cf. Schmitt, *Writings*, pp. 115–34). Ferdinand Justi’s *Namenbuch* itself, however, which served many generations of scholars, in the meantime has become rather outdated. But the *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* initiated by Manfred Mayrhofer and realized by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, which some day should replace Justi’s work, has not yet progressed far, apart from a few volumes and fascicles.

*Indo-Iranian onomastic tradition.* The hereditary character of Iranian anthroponymy is manifested most strikingly by equations with Old Indo-



Aryan names, which show that the names in question obviously are inherited at least from the Indo-Iranian proto-language. Such examples of formally corresponding names are fairly common, and with names of all the various types listed above, so that the common Indo-Iranian anthroponymical system and even common Indo-Iranian customs of name-giving can be reconstructed with some certainty. The following equations of this kind may be quoted: type A.i: OPers. *uxra-* “Mr. Red” = OInd. *śukra-* (cf. Av. *suxra-*, Ved. *śukrá-*, *śuklá-*); OPers. *Kuru-* = OInd. *Kuru-* probably “Humiliating (the enemy in verbal contest)”; Av. *Yima-* = Ved. *Yamá-* (cf. OAv. *yá'ma-* = Ved. *yamá-* “twin”); several theriophoric names like YAv. *Saēna-* = OInd. *Śyena-* “Mr. Eagle, Hawk” (cf. Av. *saēna-* = Ved. *śyená-* some bird of prey); YAv. *Varāza-* = OInd. *Varāha-* “Mr. Boar” (cf. Av. *varāza-* = Ved. *varāhá-* “boar”); YAv. *Varšni-* “Mr. Ram” = OInd. *Vṛṣṇi-* (cf. Av. *varšni-* = Ved. *vṛṣṇí-* “male, ram”); — type A.ii.1: YAv. *Ērəzrāspa-* = Ved. *Rjṛāśva-* “Possessing fleet horses” (cf. Ved. *rjṛá-* + *áśva-*); YAv. *Kərəsāspa-* = OInd. *Kṛśāśva-* “Possessing slender horses”; Av. *\*Siiāuuāspa-* (as basis of patronymic *Siiāuuāspi-*) = Ved. *Śyāvāśva-* “Possessing dark horses” (with patronymic *Śyāvāśvi-*, too); YAv. *Vohu-raocah-* “Possessing good brilliance (or: possessing brilliance by his goods)” almost = Ved. *Vásurociṣ-*; YAv. *Tauruuāēti-* “With a victorious way of walking” = Ved. *\*Turvétī-*, which by analogy was changed to *Turvī'ti-*; OIr. *\*Hu-sravah-* “Possessing good reputation” (in YAv. *Hao-srauuah-*) and OPers. *\*U-çavah-* (in El. *U'-iš-šu-ma*) = Ved. *Su-śrávas-* (cf. also Gk. *Eu-kléēs*); — type A.ii.2: YAv. *Dūraē-srūta-* “Far-famed” = OInd. *Dūre-śruta-*; YAv. *Vī-srūta-* “Far-famed” = OInd. *Vī-śruta-* (cf. Ved. *vī-śruta-*); — type B.i.1: YAv. *Zairita-* = OInd. *Harita-* (from Av. *zairita-* = Ved. *hārita-* “yellow, dun-colored”; cf. OInd. *Haritāśva-* “Possessing dun horses”). — As shown already by Av. *Siiāuuāspi-* = OInd. *Śyāvāśvi-*, correspondences of this kind are found also with patronymics. Thus original patronymic formations, which have lost their primary meaning (as must have occurred quite early), are present in the individual name YAv. *Māiiuuā-* = Ved. *Māyavā-* and, according to Schmitt (1985) even in Mid. Pers. *Zariyān* = Ved. *Hārayāṇa-* derived from a short name OIr. *\*Zari-*, which for its part is based on Av. *zairi-* = Ved. *hāri-* “yellow, dun-colored; dun horse.”

The genetic connection of those two-stem compound names with phenomena of the poetic language, whether compound poetic epithets or formulas of poetical diction, is evident in various Indo-European languages and could even be proven for the Indo-European protolanguage. To the context of the Indo-Iranian poetical tradition belong, e.g., the following Iranian names agreeing with Old Indian common nouns: OPers. *Dādrši-* = Ved. *dā'dhrṣi-* “daring,



brave”; YAv. *Ašāuuarḥu-* = Ved. *šrtāvasu-* “possessing truth as his good (or sim.)”; YAv. *Xšuuīβrāspa-* (with first element \**xšuuīβra-*) = Ved. *kṣiprāśva-* “possessing quick horses”; YAv. *Yuxtāspa-* (cf. *yuxta.aspa-*) = Ved. *yuktāśva-* “possessing harnessed horses”; YAv. *Nərə-manah-* [rather doubtful, however] = Ved. *nṛ-māṇas-* “possessing the courage of a man” (cf. Gk. *Andro-ménēs*). Likewise a poetical context is given for names agreeing with Old Indian expressions (without having been blended into one): OPers. *Dāraya-vauš* “Holding firm the good” ~ Ved. *vāsūni dhar*; OPers. *Vištāspa-*, Av. *Vištāspa-* “Possessing horses untied (for racing)” ~ Ved. *viṣita- áśva-*; YAv. *Huuarə-čīθra-* (determinative compound with comparative meaning) ~ Ved. *svār ṇá citrám* “splendid like the sun”; YAv. *Paršaṭ.gu-* ~ Ved. *Pr’ṣant-gáv-* “spotted bullock”; YAv. *Vohuu-asti-* ~ Ved. *átithi- vásu-* “the good guest”; YAv. *Aša.nəmah-* “Showing reverence to the Truth” ~ ved. *ṛtāsyanámasā*, etc., YAv. *Aša-sarəda-* “Belonging to the company of Truth” ~ Ved. *śárdha- ṛtāsya*; YAv. *Aša-uuazdah-* “Providing Truth with prosperity (or sim.)” ~ Ved. *vedhāṛtāsya*, etc.; YAv. *Vīdaṭ.gu-* “Being blessed with cows” ~ Ved. *go-vid-, gáv- ved* (cf. Av. *gəm vīd*), etc.; YAv. *Vīdi-srauuah-* ~ Ved. *śrávas- ved* “to win fame”; YAv. *Vīspa-tauruši-, Vīspa.tauruuarī-* (both fem.) ~ Ved. *Vṛśva-túr-* “overcoming all,” etc., especially Ved. *viśvā dvéšāṃsi tari* = Av. *vīspā ṭbaēšā tauruuaiia-* “to overcome all obstacles.”

The functioning of those processes is most clearly seen in cases like the following anthroponyms, for which all the constituents are attested: YAv. *Auruuaṭ.aspa-* derived from the compound Av. *auruuauṭ.aspa-* “possessing swift horses,” based on the phrase Av. *auruuauṭ- aspa-* “swift horse” (= Ved. *áśva- árvant-*, which testifies to the inherited character of this expression); YAv. *Tižii-aršti-* based on the compound Av. *tiži.aršti-* “possessing a sharp-edged spear,” which for its part combines in an entirely regular way the phrase *tiyra- aršti-* “sharp-edged spear.”

*Motives of name-giving.* The most concrete motive for choosing some particular name (primarily some two-stem full name) is without doubt to emphasize family ties. Most common is the custom of choosing a name that has already appeared in some previous generation of the father’s (or the mother’s) family. As a result, personal names become a distinguishing mark for the family concerned. There is a wide choice of various means of expressing those family ties and the family tradition: (i) by naming the grandson after the grandfather (cf. the sequence of Kuruš—Kambū/ūjiya—Kuruš—Kambū/ūjiya in the Achaemenid family); (ii) by



passing on one of the two elements of the father's full name to the next generation, i.e., by repeating it in the son's name (or the sons' names), thus causing a sound association by alliteration and/or rhyme (cf., e.g., YAv. *Vanhu-dāta-*, son of *Xva-dāta-*); or (iii) the same phenomenon on a synchronic level, so to speak—by repeating one of the two elements within the names of brothers (cf., e.g., YAv. *Vohu.nəmah-*, brother of *Vohuuazdah-*). Apart from the family tradition, another model for such replica name-giving is furnished by figures of history, mythology, fable, etc., bearing famous names, who meant something to the name-giving parents. An example from eastern Iran and probably the Achaemenid period is found in the remark of [Chares](#) of Mitylene (F 5), that many local dynasts had called their daughters by the name *Odátis* after the main character of the fairytale love story of *Odátis* and *Zariádrēs*.

Such traditional giving of names should advise us to be cautious about drawing any conclusions from names, e.g., conclusions regarding religion from theophoric names (see particularly Schmitt, *Writings*, 2000, pp. 135–49). For in general the principle is valid, that the choice of a certain name is motivated by its etymological meaning only in case where replica name-giving dependent on some kind of tradition can definitely be excluded or, to put it another way, where the primary use as a name or the new creation of the name can be proven.

As a result of these traditional motives of name-giving, onomastic formations are found which contain elements of diachronically or diatopically divergent origin, i.e., hybrid forms with archaic or dialectal features side by side with ordinary ones: e.g., the name *Ciçan-taxma-* “Excellent by his origin” (with OPers. *ciça-* “origin” and non-Pers. *taxma-* “excellent, brave, courageous”) shows this mixed form in the royal inscriptions, whereas both the genuine Median (*\*Čiθran-taxma-*) and Old Persian forms (*\*Ciçan-tahma-*) are reflected in El. *Zi-ut-ra-an-tak-ma* and *Tí-iš-ša-an-tam-ma* respectively. Through examples like this it becomes abundantly clear that the vocabulary available for name-giving (which can be called the “onomastic vocabulary”) differs substantially from the normal vocabulary used in common nouns. Therefore one cannot necessarily infer the ethnic relationship of some people from the dialectological origin of their names, since the two may not accord with one another: In the name of *Vištāspa*, e.g., who as Darius' father undoubtedly was of Persian origin, the word for “horse” is found in non-Persian form, as (Med.) *aspa-*; on the other hand the name of the rebel *Āçina* (who expressly is called “an Elamite” in DB IV 10) bears a hypocoristic name based on genuine OPers.



*āç-* “fire.”

We may point in passing to personal names referring to the calendar (see Schmitt, 2000b), such as, e.g., YAv. *Ātərə-dāta-* “Given by the Fire-god (as the genius of the 9th day)” or YAv. *Spəntō-dāta-* “Given by redeeming [*Ārmaiti*] (as the genius of the 5th day).” A short remark of a more general character must suffice also for women’s names: According to the inherited system they were different from men’s names, not in content, but only in form, and only in a (secondary) change of the masculine form to feminine (e.g., by conversion of a stem in *-a-* to a feminine stem in *-ā-* or *-ī-*). The Avestan evidence includes, e.g., *Hu-čīθrā-*, fem. from *-čīθra-*, masc.; *ritī-*, fem. from *rita-*, masc.; *Huuōuuī-*, fem. from *Huuōuuā-*, masc.; *Zairič-ī-*, fem. from *Zairiiaṇč-*, masc.; incidentally women’s names are attested for the Achaemenid period only in the collateral tradition.

The father’s name is given in Old Persian only periphrastically by *puça-* “son” and the genitive of the name added, as, e.g., in DB I 28 *Kambū/ūjiya*, *Kurauš puça* “Cambyses, Cyrus’s son.” In the Avestan language, however, in addition to such periphrases other constructions are attested: either the mere genitive without a word for “son” or various patronymic adjectives in *-i-*, *-āna-*, *-aiiana-*, etc. (see below, section ii.). The only patronymic formation of the latter kind found in the Old Persian royal inscriptions is the propatronymic form *Haxāmaniš-īya-* “Achaemenid” based on the name of the eponymous founder of this dynasty, *Haxāmaniš*.

*Onomastic evidence from Pre-Achaemenid times.* The earliest evidence of Iranian anthroponyms may be presented in short form; it is of limited extent and consists mainly of the names of several dozen Median city-lords (see Parpola, 1998 ff.) who ruled in the northern Zagros area and whose names are attested in Neo-Assyrian texts (annals, chronicles, reports on military campaigns, letters, etc.) from the time of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) and particularly from the reign of Shamshi-Adad V (823–811 BCE), Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE), and Sargon II (721–705 BCE). The etymological interpretation of those names is hindered by the imprecise cuneiform renderings and often does not go beyond mere supposition. Following the classification given above, these are the most probable cases to be listed: type A.i: *Pa-ar-nu-u-a* = OIr. *\*Farnahuā* (stem in *\*-uant-*) ‘Rich in splendor’; *Ra-zi-iš-tu* = OIr. *\*Razišta-* “Most righteous”; *Up-pa-am-ma-a* = OIr. *\*Upama-* “Uppermost”; — type A.ii.1: *Ag-nu-par-nu* = OIr. *\*Agni-farnah-* “Possessing the splendor of fire (or: through the Fire-god)”; *Ba-ag/ga-par-na*, etc. = OIr. *\*Baga-farnah-* “Possessing the splendor



of (or: through) the gods”; Šá-ta-áš-pa = OIr. \*Satāspa- “Possessing hundreds of horses”; Ši-dir-pa-ar-na/ni = OIr. \*Čiθra-farnah- (q.v.) “Possessing shining splendor”; — type A.ii.2: Ar-ta-si-ra-ri = OIr. \*Rta-srīra- “Marvellous by Truth”; Ba-ag-da-at-ti = OIr. \*Baga-dāta- “Given by the gods”; Ir-ti-ša-ti = OIr. \*Rta-zāta- “Born of Truth”; — type A.ii.3: Áš-pa-ba-ra/ri etc. = OIr. \*Aspa-bāra- “Borne by a horse; rider, horseman”; Sa-tar-pa/ba-nu = OIr. \*Xšaθra-pāna- “Protecting the rule”; — type B.i.1: A-ri-ia = OIr. \*Arya-, based on Ir. \*Arya- “Aryan, Iranian”; — type B.ii.1: Ar-ba-ku = OIr. \*Arba-ka-, based on Ir. \*arba- “little, young”; Bar-zi-i/Bar-zi-ia-a = OIr. \*Brzi-ya-, based on OIr. \*brzi- “high”; Da-a-a-uk-ki/ku = OIr. \*Dahyu-ka-, based on Ir. \*dahyu- “land”; Ka-ra-ak-ka, etc. = OIr. \*Kāra-ka-, based on Ir. \*kāra- “army, people”; Kaš/Ka-áš-ta-ri-ti = (Med.)OPers. Xšaθr-ita-, based on Ir. \*xšaθra- “kingship, kingdom”; Ma-aš-dak-ku, etc. = OIr. \*Mazdā/ā-ka-, based on the theonym (*Ahura*) *Mazdā*; Ma-aš-tuk-ku = OIr. \*Mazd-uka-, formed in a similar way; Me-et-ra-ku = OIr. \*Miθra-ka-, based on the theonym *Miθra*; Za-ar-duk-ka = OIr. \*Zard-uka-, based on Ir. \*zrd- “heart”; — type B.ii.2: Ma-áš-da-a-a-uk-ku = OIr. \*Mazdā-yuka-, two-stem form based on a compound like \*Mazdā-yazna- “Worshiping (*Ahura*) *Mazdā*.”

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