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Citation

Schoubben, N. (2023). The Iranian sound change *w- > *ɣw- in the Indo-Iranian borderlands and a new etymology for Gāndhārī and Sanskrit guśura(ka)-. *Iran & The Caucasus*, 27(3), 285-298.
doi:10.1163/1573384X-02703004

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



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The Iranian Sound Change $*w- > *ɣw-$ in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands and a New Etymology for Gāndhārī and Sanskrit *guśura(ka)-*

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Received 29 July 2021 | Accepted 14 October 2021 |

Published online 14 August 2023

Abstract

It is generally accepted that the etymology of the Gāndhārī and Sanskrit official title *guśura(ka)-* has to be sought within the Iranian sphere, but the details remain debatable. In this article, I first give an overview of recently discovered evidence for an early sound change of $*w- > *ɣw-$ in some Iranian dialects from the Indo-Iranian borderlands. On this basis, I then propose to derive *guśura(ka)-* from a dialect form such as $*ɣwazurg / *ɣwuzurg / *ɣuzurg < *wazrka-$ ‘strong’. Two by-products of this article are a new Bactrian etymology for the Gāndhārī personal name *Ḡaṇavhryaka* and some notes on the etymology of the Gāndhārī title *sturaka-**.

Keywords

Gāndhārī – Sanskrit – Bactrian – loanwords – Iranian dialectology – Kuṣāṇa Empire

1 Introductory Remarks

The Niya documents and some inscriptions in Gāndhārī and Sanskrit are our primary evidence for an official title *guśura(ka)-*.¹ While it is generally accepted

1 In what follows, “CKI” stands for “Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions”, “CKD” for “Corpus of

that *guśura(ka)*- is in origin an Iranian title, its exact etymology is still open to debate. The main aim of this article is to put forward a novel hypothesis on the origin of this title.

This brief article is structured as follows. I introduce the available material on *guśura(ka)*- in § 2 and critically evaluate older etymologies for this title in § 3. In § 4, I present evidence in favour of a dialectal fortification of *w-* to *ɣw-* in Iranian dialects from the Indo-Iranian borderlands. As part of this discussion, I also propose a new Bactrian etymology for the Gāndhārī personal name *Ganavhryaka*. Finally, I use the evidence of these dialect forms to present a new etymology for *guśura(ka)*- in § 5. The conclusions are wrapped up in § 6.

2 A Brief Overview of the Available Material

Several scholars (Lüders 1940: 544–546;² Thomas 1935: 76–78; Burrow 1935: 781 f.; 1937: 87 f.; Bailey 1947: 149 f.; idem 1950: 391–393; Falk 2004: 149 f.; 2010: 75 = 2013: 362 f., 246) have already discussed the official title *guśura(ka)*-, so I will only note a few relevant points. A first issue concerns the orthographic variation of this title. As far as Niya Prakrit is concerned, the base form is invariably *guśura*-,³ whereas the instr. pl. *guśurakehi* in the Gāndhārī Senavarma inscription (CKI 249) presupposes the existence of a variant *guśuraka*-.⁴ I will argue below that this longer variant stays closer to the donor form. Sanskrit epigraphical sources likewise attest a variety of orthographies: *guśūra*-, *gośūra*-, *gauśūra*- and *gaśūra*- (cf. Falk 2004: 149 = 2013: 362).⁴

Secondly, the spread of this official title in Central and South Asia is remarkable. Most attestations come from the Tarim Basin, where there is an attestation in a Sanskrit document from Kuča: gen. pl. *gauśuramahātmanām* ‘of the

Kharoṣṭhī Documents”, and “CKM” for “Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī Manuscripts”. Cf. Baums/Glass 2002–.

2 As Lüders (1940) is a slightly updated version of a publication dating back to 1922, I have put it first in the chronology.

3 Attestations: CKD 187, 216, 295, 320, 328, 401, 415, 478 (2x), 584 (2x), 654, 696 (5x), 702, 703, 842 (*guśurane*), 884 (3x; once *guśuro*), 899. Partially conjectured instances are likewise included. In Kuča Prakrit, we find *gośora* (CKD 837, 3x), as the difference between the vowels *-u-* and *-o-* has largely been obliterated in the type of Kharoṣṭhī script used for this dialect. It is further possible that *go* (CKD 831, 2x) is an abbreviation for *gośora* (so Ingo Strauch *apud* Ching 2013: 66). In the Helagupta inscription in South Asian Gāndhārī (CKI 564), a gen. pl. *guśurana* is attested.

4 The *-u-* mostly gets a length mark in Sanskrit, but not always; see just below. For a tentative explanation of the length mark as due to folk etymology, cf. § 5. In this article, I use *guśura(ka)*- as a shorthand to refer to the title under discussion.

gauśura officials', itself parallel to Niya Prakrit *guśuramahatva* (CKD 216, 295, 415; cf. Lüders 1940: 544–546). The same title is once also found as far south as Sāñcī in a Gupta-period inscription, where we encounter it in the spelling *gośūra-* (Fleet 1888: 280). The oldest evidence comes from the Senavarma and the Helagupta inscriptions in Gāndhārī (CKI 249, 564), both of which roughly date to the first century of our era (von Hinüber 2003: 7; Falk 2014: 4; Salomon 2020: 4). It seems therefore likely that this title originated at the NW border of the South Asian subcontinent and spread over a large area of Central and South Asia during the time of the Kuṣāṇa empire.⁵

This brings us thirdly and finally, to the duties of a *guśura(ka)-*. As likewise noted by Burrow (1937: 87), the Niya documents make it clear that a *guśura-* had *inter alia* judicial functions. In addition, there are also strong indications that a *guśura-* was closely connected to the army. One piece of evidence for this conclusion is found in Niya document CKD 478, where two *guśuras* are referred to as *seniye* 'army-people'.⁶ This passage is comparable to a section in the Senavarma inscription (CKI 249 8g–9b), where the *guśurakas* and the closely connected *sturakas* are evidently military functionaries.⁷ More generally, *guśura(ka)-* may also have been an honorific title of the nobility.

With these things in mind, the etymologies previously suggested for *guśura(ka)-* can be critically evaluated in the following section.

3 A Critical Evaluation of Earlier Proposals on the Etymology

Both etymologies which have so far been proposed for *guśura(ka)-* are from the hand of Thomas Burrow.⁸ For both to work, Burrow surmises that *guśura(ka)-*

5 Note also that the Senavarma inscription mentions the Kuṣāṇa king Kujula Kadphises. For the sake of completeness, I mention that Bailey (1950: 391–393) wants to recognize the same word in the name *Gauśurya*, a variant of *Gauśara* in the Tibetan translation of the *Gostanavyākaraṇa* (Emmerick 1967: 68f.; 95).

6 *īṣa kṣuṃṇaṃmi khvaniyade seniye ayitaṃti guśura Kuṣaṇaṣena Caruveta spēṭha Vidhura cvalayīṃna Puṃṇavaṃta cozbo Naṃtipala Palugeyaṣa ca* "in this reign, **the army people** came from the capital—the *guśura* Kuṣaṇaṣena, Caruveta, the *spēṭha* Vidhura, the *cvalayīṃna* Puṃṇavaṃta, the *cozbo* Naṃtipala, and Palugeya". (tr. Burrow 1940: 93; emphasis mine).

7 *maharajarayatirayakuyulakataph[ṣp]aputro Sadaṣkaṇo devaputro sadha anakaṇa Suhasomeṇa aṣmaṇakareṇa sayugasavalavah< *e>ṇa sadha guśurakehi sturakehi ca puyita* "Sadaṣkaṇa, son of the great king, chief king of kings Kujula Kadphises, son of the gods, together with the *anankaios* Suhasoma, the *aṣmaṇakara*, **with his yoke animals and with his army and carriages, together with the *guśurakas* and the *sturakas***, is honored". (tr. Baums 2012: 232; emphasis mine). *sturakehi* will be discussed in more detail in § 5.

8 I leave aside the vague comparisons with the (Orkhon) Turkic title *kül čur* (so, very hesitantly,

is borrowed from an Iranian source where **wi-* had developed to **gu-*, as e.g. in New Persian *gudār* ‘crossing, passing’ < **witāra-*. According to Burrow, at least one of the Iranian-speaking groups in Gandhāra had undergone a similar change already at the beginning of our era. For this sound law, he refers to the name of the first Indo-Parthian king Gondophares (Gāndhārī *Guduvhara*; *Gudaphar(n)a*), which is commonly derived from **winda-farnah-* ‘he who finds glory’. One can compare the trilingual Sasanian inscription ŠKZ 26 (3rd c. A.D.), where Parthian *Wyndprn* corresponds to Middle Persian *Gwndply* and Greek Γυνδιφερ (cf. e.g. Schmitt 2016: 241). While the chronological gap makes it clear that these names in ŠKZ 26 cannot refer to the Indo-Parthian king with this name, they at least corroborate the traditional etymological analysis of Gondophares. Nevertheless, it would still be preferable to have more evidence for this strengthening of **w-*. We will return to this question in § 4 and, for now, regard it as a possibility to reckon with.

Early in his career (1935: 781f.; 1937: 87f.), Burrow proposed to relate *gušura(ka)-* to Middle Persian *wcyl /wizīr/* ‘argument, decision’ and especially New Persian *wazīr* ‘counsellor, vizier’. According to Burrow, an agentive meaning ‘decider’ would also be seen in Avestan *vīčīra-*, generally translated as ‘he who decides’ and which Burrow considers cognate with the Persian words. However, the absence of a meaning ‘decider’ for Middle Persian *wcyl /wizīr/* is noteworthy,⁹ and the appurtenance of Avestan *vīčīra-* to the Persian words is also no longer universally accepted (cf. Nyberg 1974: 210f.; Ciancaglini 2008: 166). Besides, Burrow needs to make the unparalleled assumption that the vowel *-i-* in the second syllable would have been assimilated to the *-u-* in the first syllable. Hence, while Burrow’s first etymology is not impossible in itself, it would seem best not to accept *wazīr* as an etymological *comparandum* for *gušura(ka)-* without further ado (*pace* e.g. Allon 2019: 24).

Lüders 1940: 546) and the Bactrian royal name Κοζο(υ)λο (so e.g. Konow 1916: 819), as these have not been taken up by subsequent scholarship on *gušura(ka)-*.

- 9 To explain the non-agentive meaning ‘decision’, Nyberg (1974: 210f.) has argued that Armenian *včīr* ‘sentence, judgment, decree, decision’ would instead point to a pre-form **wi-čīna-* ‘that which is decided’ for *wcyl /wizīr/*. However, while it is true that Armenian ⟨*ř*⟩ can come from Iranian **-m-* (e.g. *vardawar* ‘a festival’ ← **warda-bar(a)na-* ‘rose-bringing’; see Russell 1992), Sasha Lubotsky (p.c.) kindly noted that **wi-čīna-* would have to be a secondary form, as the palatalized form of the root is unexpected before **-ř-*. For similar reasons, Sanskrit *cīṛṇa-* ‘observed’, Nyberg’s *comparandum*, should also be a late form. Its lateness is confirmed by *cīṛṇa-* being attested only from the *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* onwards, a Late Vedic text with many non-standard linguistic features (Salomon 1981). As a result, Nyberg’s etymology should be treated with caution.

Ten years later, Burrow came up with a new etymology for *gušura(ka)*-, published as a personal communication by Bailey (1947: 149 f.; 1950: 391–393); in this hypothesis, *gušura(ka)*- would ultimately derive from the Old Iranian title **wisah puθra*- ‘son of the house > prince, nobleman’, known from e.g. Avestan *visō.puθra*-; Middle Persian / Parthian *vispuhr* and the Aramaic calque *br byt*’. This title generally referred to members of the royal family, such as brothers and cousins of the king (cf. e.g. Henning 1964; Colditz 2000: 328 ff.). One wonders, however, whether this meaning is so suitable for *gušura(ka)*-, as in the Niya documents, our most extensive source for this title, there seems to be no clear evidence for any close connection between the *gušuras* and the royal court.¹⁰ As regards the phonology, von Hinüber (2003: 29 f.) makes the fair criticism that the assumed loss of **p*- would be surprising.¹¹ Hence, also Burrow’s second etymology proves difficult to verify (*pace* e.g. Tremblay 2005: 430).

In brief, it seems fair to conclude, with Falk (2004: 150 = 2013: 363), that the title *gušura(ka)*- “is still not fully understood”. Therefore, a new attempt to etymologize *gušura(ka)*- will form the topic of § 5, but it will first be necessary to provide an overview of more recently discovered evidence for an early fortification of **w*- to **ʔw*- in the Indo-Iranian borderlands in § 4.

4 Bactrian and Gāndhārī Evidence for a Dialectal Sound Change **w*- > **ʔw*-

In this section, I return to the evidence for fortition of an initial **w*- in possible Iranian donor languages in Gāndhārī because new data for this sound change has recently come to light in both Bactrian and Gāndhārī. One piece of evidence from Bactrian is the personal name γοραμβάδο /*γurambādə*/, which likely is a dialect form derived from **wṛθragna-pāta*- ‘protected by *Wṛθragna*’

10 This is in contrast with another official title from the Niya documents, i.e., the *kāla*, because people carrying this title are occasionally (CKD 307, 331 (2x), 622, 634) referred to as a *maharāyaputra* ‘son of the great king’ (cf. Burrow 1937: 82).

11 Note also that Burrow’s idea implies that *Šiṇā gušpūr* and Burushaski *gušpuhr*, both ‘prince’, are borrowed from a different Iranian source, which does not seem too probable. In his 1947 article, Bailey gives the following development for *gušura*:- **wisah puθra*- > **wisē puθra*- > **gusšvura*- > **gusiura*- > *gušura*-, but it is difficult to parallel all of these changes together. Similarly, the newly discovered Bactrian οισβοροζινιο ‘under the care of the prince’ and οισβορογ ‘prince’ (Sims-Williams 2007: 247; idem 2010: 109 f.) do not appear to be compatible with *gušura(ka)*-, even when assuming dialectal strengthening to **ʔw*-.

(Sims-Williams 2010: 56 f.; idem 2020: 147); in standard Bactrian, by contrast, we expect *ορλαγνοβαδο /urlaγnəbādə/ (or /urlaγnəvādə/) out of the same preform. Also important is the word γολο /γulə/ from the Bactrian document Uv, which appears to be a dialect variant of (ο)ολο /wulə/ ‘wife’ < *wadū- (Sims-Williams/de la Vaissière 2011 [2015]: 46 f.).¹² In addition, these dialect forms match well with the fact that in Ormuri and Parāčī, two New Iranian languages from the same region, Old Iranian *w- is also strengthened to γu-.¹³ This fortition probably happened through an intermediary *γw- and a good example is *wṛka- ‘wolf’ > *γwuryə > γury (cf. Morgenstierne 1929: 33). γοραμβαδο is attested in documents dg and eb, both of which were written in Kadagstan and date to circa 450–465 A.D. (Sims-Williams/de Blois 2018: 83). Consequently, they provide us with a *terminus ante quem* for this strengthening in the fifth century of our era.

Recently published evidence from Gāndhārī suggests that this dialectal fortition happened still earlier. The Helagupta inscription (CKI 564), from the second half of the first century (Falk 2014: 4; Salomon 2020: 4), contains a name *Gvaraza*, which Falk (2014: 10; 2020–2021: 133) plausibly connects to the Bactrian name Οαράζο /Οοράζο /warāzə/ ‘boar’ < *warāza- and its cognates in other Iranian languages (cf. Sims-Williams 2010: 111). Put differently, *Gvaraza* points thus to a dialect form *γwarāzə in Bactrian or a closely related language.

Further evidence comes from the Gāndhārī representation of the Bactrian royal name Οημο /wēmə/, possibly ‘rock’ < *waima- (cf. Sims-Williams 2010: 107, 110 f.). This name is spelled in various ways in Gāndhārī and other Indic sources (cf. Falk 2009 = 2013: 184–195), and two of the Gāndhārī attestations deserve to be discussed here in more detail. Building further on Falk’s work, Allon (2019: 24 f.) reads in CKI 1073¹⁴ *Grema Takhtuasa*, a gen. sg. of a supposed *Grema Takhtu(a)**, corresponding to Bactrian Οημο Ταχτοο. Besides, Allon reads *Grema Kataph*(*(s)asa/(s)aša) in CKM 297,¹⁵ a gen. sg. of *Grema Kataphsa**, to

12 It should be clear from the above that I prefer Sims-Williams’ interpretation of document Uv over de la Vaissière’s alternative interpretation added as an appendix to the same article (2011 [2015]: 49–51). De la Vaissière cautiously suggests deriving γολο from Turkic *kul* ‘servant’ or Sanskrit *kula* ‘family’, but then one would expect **xολο in Bactrian. For the names ending in -γολο, intervocalic voicing can have happened, but this is not possible for the noun γολο.

13 For some considerations on the connection between Bactrian and some New Iranian languages of the region (but not Ormuri and Parāčī), cf. now Kreidl (2021).

14 This inscription used to be called the “*grāmarakṣaka* seal”. However, as this name is based on an obsolete reading of the inscribed text, it should best be avoided.

15 This text is a monastic ledger from the first half of the second century (see Allon 2019: 6–9).

be compared with Bactrian Οημο Καδφισο. However, it is phonetically unlikely that an initial *w- became *ɣr- rather than the expected *ɣw-. Therefore, I prefer Stefan Baums's palaeographically equally plausible readings *Gemataktuasa* (CKI 1073) and *Gematikaph* (*sasa) (CKM 297) (see Baums/Glass 2002–). ⟨g⟩ indicates a fricative [ɣ] in Kharoṣṭhī script and is thus, like ⟨gv⟩ in *Gvaraza*, a likely rendering of a foreign cluster *ɣw-.¹⁶

Alternatively, Falk (2020–2021: 131–134) wonders whether the strengthening could have happened within Gāndhārī in the same way as Germanic borrowings into Romance got their initial *w- strengthened to *gw-, e.g. in French *guêpe* ‘wasp’. However, as Falk’s proposal does not take the Bactrian examples of this type of strengthening into account,¹⁷ it seems more likely that this phonetic process had already happened in the donor language(s).

Another potential piece of evidence from Gāndhārī showing *w- to *ɣw- has remained unnoticed so far. The Gāndhārī inscription CKI 150 contains a personal name *Ḡaṇavhryaka*. Because the element *-vhryaka* unambiguously points to a derivative of **friya*- ‘dear’,¹⁸ the Iranian origin of this name has never been doubted, yet the exact analysis of the element *Ḡaṇa-* is still unclear. Konow (1929: 150) tentatively suggested that it would be a noun meaning ‘fight’ derived from the Iranian verbal root *√*gan* ‘to strike’, but he is unable to cite parallels for this analysis. Instead, I would propose that *Ḡaṇavhryaka* renders a Bactrian name *Γοανοφρῠιαχο /ɣwanəfriyakə/ as a dialect form of *Οανοφρῠιαχο /wanəfriyakə/. Both Οανο < *wana- ‘victorious’ and Φρῠιαχο < **friya*- ‘dear’ with hypocoristic -χο, are attested as personal names in Bactrian (Sims-Williams 2010: 98f., 144), and we could have here a mechanical combination of these two names. If this etymology of *Ḡaṇavhryaka* proves to be correct, this would thus be another example of *ɣw- being substituted with g- [ɣ].

16 When looking at the available pictures, one could alternatively perhaps read *Gvema-* in both instances, but Baums’s reading *Gema-* still seems preferable. For the name *Ḡaṇavhryaka*, discussed below, ***Gvaṇavhryaka* seems totally excluded.

17 In contrast to Gāndhārī, initial w- is an integral part of Bactrian’s phonological system, being written as ⟨o⟩.

18 Cf. e.g. CKI 841 *Vhri*[*yamna*] and CKM 406 *Vhriyanae* (gen. f. sg.) to be compared with the well-known Iranian patronymic **Friyāna-*, seen e.g. in Avestan *Friiāna-* (cf. Scherrer-Schaub/Salomon/Baums 2012: 165).

5 A New Etymology for Gāndhārī and Sanskrit *guśura(ka)-*

My alternative etymological analysis of *guśura(ka)-* takes its starting point from a passage in the Senavarma inscription (CKI 249 8g–9b) cited in § 2, fn. 7.¹⁹ Here, the instr. pl. *guśurakehi* occurs together with the instr. pl. *sturakehi* and both words refer to people of a military rank (cf. § 2). The same word is possibly found as Gāndhārī *usturaga*, in Graffiti 5,7 from the Alam Bridge (CKI 417; cf. Falk 2010: 75 = 2013: 246).

In his *editio princeps* of the Senavarma inscription, Bailey (1980: 27f.) suggested two different etymologies for *sturaka-**. One option is that *sturaka-** is borrowed from an outcome of Old Iranian **stūra-ka-* ‘big, strong’, cognates of which are Avestan *stūra-*, Middle Persian *sturg*, and Bactrian (α)στοργο / στορογο / (ə)stūrgə/ (Sims-Williams 2007: 266). The other option is to compare *sturaka-** with, amongst others, Middle Persian *stūr* ‘trustee, representative’, Bactrian (α)στοργο / στορογο* / (ə)stūrgə/ ‘slave, vassal’, presupposed by the adjective αβηστορογοπαδδιστο ‘without the obligations of a vassal’ (Sims-Williams 2007: 184) and Armenian *strowk* ‘slave, vassal’. If this were the case, *sturaka-** could then refer to a vassal lending military support, for which Bailey (1986: 3f.) compares the Achaemenid *bandaka-* ‘slave, vassal’.²⁰ Both etymologies fit the currently available evidence, so it is difficult to make a reasoned choice between the two.

In either case, it is difficult to know for certain from which Iranian language *sturaka-** was borrowed. However, Bactrian would be one plausible option, given that Senavarma reigned over the borderland between Afghanistan and Pakistan, probably at least partially Bactrian-speaking at the time. In addition, Sudaškana, the son of the reigning Bactrian king Kujula Kadphises, is one of the two persons in charge of these *sturakas* and *guśurakas*. At the linguistic level, one will then have to assume that the cluster *-rg-* was broken up by a svarabhakti vowel, i.e. *-rəg-*, either already in Bactrian itself (cf. perhaps the spelling στορογο) or when the word was borrowed.²¹

19 This inscription, together with Helagupta’s one, counts among the oldest evidence for this title, so it is a good place to start (cf. § 2). It is also because of this early date that, despite being a hapax, I attach considerable weight to the alternative form *guśuraka-**.

20 As an alternative etymology, Falk (2004: 12 fn. 14 = 2013: 363 fn. 14) has compared *sturaka-** to Niya Prakrit *stora-* ‘large animal’ ← Bactrian (α)στωρο / (ə)stōrə/ or a cognate thereof (Sims-Williams 2007: 266; Schoubben 2022b: 345f.). Falk presumably assumes that *sturaka-** would refer to a ‘groom’, but the Iranian word for ‘groom’ is **staura-pāna-* (cf. Middle Persian *stōrbān*) instead of **staura-ka-*. In a later article (2010: 75 = 2013: 246), Falk adopted the connection with Bactrian (α)στοργο / στορογο instead.

21 A typological parallel for this is found in spoken Dutch, where in a word like *werk* ‘work’ the cluster *-rk-* can be broken up by adding a subphonemic *svrabhakti*-vowel. Note in

As regards *gušura(ka)*-, I suggest to compare the derivatives of Old Iranian **wazrka*- ‘big’ (cf. Schmitt 2014: 278; Brust 2018: 305): Old Persian *wazrka*-;²² Middle Persian / Parthian *wuzurg* (*wazarg* / *wuzarg*);²³ Pāzand *guzurg* (*guzarg*); New Persian *buzurg* etc. The same word is also found in Bactrian as *οαζαρκο* / *οαζορκο*. However, by the lack of attestations from the Kušāṇa-period, it is difficult to say whether *οαζαρκο* / *οαζορκο* is inherited from Old Iranian or a later borrowing from Middle Persian.²⁴ Sogdian *wzʔrk* (Buddhist) / *wzrg* (Manichaean) is, in any case, most likely a later loanword from Western Iranian (cf. Sims-Williams/Durkin-Meisterernst 2012: 212). As a fundamental social term in the Iranian world (see Colditz 2000: 241 ff.), it is no surprise that this word was also adopted into languages in contact with Iranian, e.g. in Armenian, which has the word as *vzowrk*.

wuzurg (*wazarg* / *wuzarg*) is a frequent element of titles, and there are the *wuzurgān* ‘the great people’, i.e. the nobility in Sasanian times (Colditz 2000: 254 ff.). As Bailey (1985: 6) already noted, there is an interesting parallel to be drawn between *wuzurgān* and *gušura(ka)*-, as people carrying the latter title were probably also part of the nobility (cf. § 2). Depending on which etymological analysis of *sturaka*-* one favours, *gušurakehi sturakehi ca* in the Senavarma inscription could be interpreted as a hendiadys of two near-synonyms or it could refer antithetically to ‘the nobility and the vassals/slaves’. If one would like to extend the comparison between *wuzurgān* and *gušura(ka)*- to the linguistic side too, as I suggest we do, one will have to assume that the seemingly Western Iranian word *wuzurg* travelled to Gandhāra at the beginning of our era. Such a spread would seem quite possible because of the Indo-Parthian rule in Gandhāra at the time.²⁵ In order for the linguistic comparison to work, one would then need to postulate a dialect vari-

addition Sanskrit *stavaraka*- ‘silk garment’, which comes from an East Iranian, possibly Bactrian, cognate **stavragə* of Middle Persian *stabrag*. Interestingly, de Jong (2003: 71) also suggests that the frequent occurrence of *svrabhakti*-vowels in Pāzand may be due to influence from the Gujarāṭi spoken by the scribes of these texts, although other explanations are possible.

22 The Persian is an old loanword with its -z-, but this should not concern us here.

23 See Durkin-Meisterernst (2004: 360) for the vocalizations.

24 Incidentally, in royal titulature (α)στοργο / στορογο and οαζαρκο / οαζορκο can be found interchanging. Compare e.g. doc. ba (Sims-Williams 2007: 52–55): οαραρανο στοργο κοβανοβρο ‘Warahran the great Kushan-shah’ with the Bactrian seal of a Hunnic king (Lerner/Sims-Williams 2011: 72–74; Sims-Williams 2020: 146): βαγο ο(γ)λαργο υονανο βρο οαζαρκο κοβανοβρο σαμαρακανδο αφβιανο ‘... lord U(g)larg, the king of the Huns, the great Kushan-shah, the *afshiyān* of Samarkand.’ The phraseology of the latter goes back to Old Iranian times: cf. Old Persian *xšāyaθiya wazrka*.

25 Compare the notes on Gāndhārī *kṣabura* in Schouppen (2022a) for this.

ant such as **γwazurg* / **γwuzurg* / **γuzurg*, similar to what is later attested in Pāzand *guzurg* (*guzarg*).²⁶

Three assumptions are needed to compare **γwazurg* / **γwuzurg* / **γuzurg* with *gušura(ka)*-. The first two of these are trivial, while the third one is admittedly more speculative, though not unreasonable in itself. First, in the names *Gvaraza* and *Gema* / *Ḡaṇavhryaka*, **γw*- would be rendered with respectively *Gāndhārī gv*- and *g*-. However, both *gv*- and *g*- are not standard initials in *Gāndhārī*,²⁷ and as *gušura(ka)*- is not a personal name, one can expect more adaptation to native *Gāndhārī* / Sanskrit phonetics. As was already noted in § 2, Sanskrit variants of *gušura(ka)*- with initial *go*-, *gau*- and *ga*- have been discovered too, and this variation would be nicely explained as due to different attempts at rendering an un-Indic initial cluster as e.g. **γwa*- in **γwazurg*.²⁸

Second, one again has to reckon with an additional schwa to break up the cluster **-rg*-, in the same way as discussed above for *sturaka*-*.

Third, it seems necessary to assume that when this Iranian title was borrowed into Indo-Aryan, it was folk etymologically connected to *šūra*- ‘warrior, hero’ given the military flavour of the title. One can compare Falk’s ingenious idea (2010: 75 = 2013: 246) that the NW title *bhaṭaraga* ‘master’ finds its origin in a descendant of Old Iranian **frataraka*- which was folk etymologically contaminated with Middle Indo-Aryan *bhaṭṭr*- < *bhartṛ*- ‘chief, lord’. When assuming contamination with *šūra*-, one can, first of all, explain why *gušura(ka)*- is often written with a long *-ū*- in Sanskrit. At the same time, this folk etymology can have contributed to the otherwise somewhat unexpected rendering of Iranian *-z*- with *Gāndhārī* *-ś*-, in intervocalic position perhaps pronounced as a voiced palatal fricative [j] (cf. Baums 2009: 137). Iranian *-z*- is mostly rendered with the Kharoṣṭhī sign 𑀵, nowadays usually transliterated as <z>, but in previous scholarship as <jh>.²⁹ However, there are also cases where *-z*- is ren-

26 I do not want to imply any direct historical relationship between my reconstructed dialect form and the Pāzand form. Given our imperfect understanding of the linguistic situation in the Indo-Iranian borderlands at the beginning of our era, I keep my discussion deliberately vague, which is why I speak about a “dialect form” rather than trying to identify the donor language more precisely. As noted above (§ 2), there seems to be a connection between the title *gušura(ka)*- and the Kušāṇa empire, but this does not necessitate that the word is originally Bactrian because official titles spread very quickly and can survive the change of dynasties. Compare the attestation of *gosūra*- in an inscription from the later Gupta dynasty.

27 There is, so far, no other example of initial *gv*-, while *-g*- is most often found in intervocalic position as the outcome of lenition of older *-k*- or *-g*- and only rarely in initial position.

28 In addition, a mechanical application of Sanskrit *vr̥ddhi* probably plays its role as well.

29 In my forthcoming dissertation on Niya Prakrit, I intend to include a detailed argumentation in favour of the older transliteration with <jh>.

dered, at least initially, with *-j-*, e.g. in *jenavida* (CKD 506) ← Bactrian ζηνοβιδο /zēnəvidə/ < *zaina-pati- ‘lord of the armour’. If the same substitution was possible in intervocalic position too, *guśura(ka)-* could also come from an earlier form with **-j-* further lenited to *-ś-* within Gāndhārī (for which cf. Burrow 1937: 6f.).

The same folk etymological association with *śūra-* can also be seen as a possible motivation for the existence of *guśura-* next to *guśuraka-**. My etymology assumes that *guśuraka-** is the more archaic form, which would imply that *guśura-* derives from a re-analysis of *guśuraka-** as *guśura-* with an added *-ka-* suffix.³⁰ As it happens, *śūra-* ‘warrior, hero’ is often used as the second part of a compound in Sanskrit (e.g. *raṇaśūra-* ‘hero in war’, *śṛṅgāraśūra-* ‘a hero in love-affairs’), and as the second part of compounded personal names (e.g. *Somaśūra-* or *Samudraśūra-*). By contrast, **-śūraka-* does not seem to be attested, which may be explained by the diminutive and, hence, at times, pejorative function such a *-ka-* suffix can have in (Classical) Sanskrit. This suffix could well have been considered inappropriate for a word meaning ‘hero’, and, *mutatis mutandis*, for a high-ranking military official as *guśura(ka)-*, which, as said above, may have been folk etymologically connected to these compounds in *-śūra-*.

6 Concluding Summary

To wrap up, I have, as an alternative to Burrow’s earlier etymologies (§ 3), presented a novel hypothesis on the linguistic origin of the Sanskrit and Gāndhārī title *guśura(ka)-* (§ 2). More concretely, I have argued in favour of a dialectal Iranian form **γwazurg* / **γwuzurg* / **γuzurg* < **wazrka-* ‘strong’, which could have been folk etymologically associated with *śūra-* ‘warrior, hero’ when the word was borrowed into Indo-Aryan (§ 5). As my proposal depends on an early dialectal strengthening of **w-* to **γw-* in Iranian dialects spoken in the Indo-Iranian borderlands, I have likewise included a more detailed discussion of the relevant evidence in support of this sound law (§ 4).

³⁰ The absence so far of intermediary forms such as **guśuraga* or **guśurae* makes lenition less likely. It seems traditionally assumed that the *-ka-* suffix was added in Indo-Aryan.

Acknowledgments

This paper was financed by the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant project “The Tocharian Trek” (Grant agreement ID: 758855). Michaël Peyrot and Sasha Lubotsky are warmly thanked for their perceptive comments on an earlier draft, while Hrach Martirosyan kindly answered my queries on Armenian *včir*.

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