Avestan x’arənah-: the etymology and concept

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0. The etymology and concept of Avestan x’arənah- and its Iranian cognates have always been subject of debate.¹ The problems have been reviewed several times² and are well-known.

1. Let us start with a short outline of the major constructions involving Av. x’arənah-. The meaning of x’arənah- we will discuss later, but for the moment, I shall gloss x’arənah- by ’fortune’, without pretending that this is the best rendering.

1.1. The most frequent formula with x’arənah- is the octosyllabic line ahe (mana / ٲղծ) raiia x’arənahhaca ’on account of his (my/their) wealth and fortune’, which occurs hundreds of times in the Yashts. A typical example is

Yt 3.18 (et passim)

ahe raiia x’arənahhaca տոմ զայաի սուրունուատ լայնն
‘On account of his wealth and fortune, I will worship him with audible veneration.’

‘Wealth and fortune’ are attributes of a god, who can bestow them on a devotee. In Yt 10.108, for instance, Mithra asks (translation Gershevitch 1959: 127):

kahmāi raēśca x’arənasca  kahmāi tanuuō druuatātəm  azom baxšāni x’šiianmō
‘On whom may I bestow riches and fortune, on whom health of the body?’

‘Wealth and fortune’ appear together in other formulae, too, cf. raēśca x’arənasca (Y 68.11, 21, Yt 10.108), raiamca x’arənahhmaca (Y 60.4), raēuanta- x’arənahхаґ- (passim).

1.2. Another juxtaposition is formed by x’arənah- and sauuah- ’power’, cf. sauuasca x’arənasca (Y 60.2); x’arənahhō sauuahhō mazdaātahe (Y 1.14, 3.16, 4.19; Yt 17.0, 62); x’arənō mazdaātəm... sauuō mazdaātəm... (Y 2.14, 17.14), etc.

1.3. Our knowledge about x’arənah- primarily comes from the Yašts. In Yt 19, two types of x’arənah- are distinguished: kauuæm x’arənah- ’the fortune of the Kavi-dynasty’ and ax’arətəm

¹Due to circumstances, I was unable to prepare a full-fledged article for this volume. Here I present the unaltered text of my Innsbruck paper, to which I have only added some footnotes and the bibliography.
x‘arənah\(^3\). The kauəɛm x‘arənah- belongs to the gods. By its power they may create and preserve the world. It further accompanied the ancient kings and heroes and gave them extraordinary powers. The ax‘arətom x‘arənah-, on the other hand, is described as an object of desire for divinities and heroes, who permanently struggle for it. Ahura Mazdā even prescribes to every mortal to fight for the ax‘arətom x‘arənah-.

In Yt 18, the Aryan x‘arənah- (airiianəm x‘arənah-) is honoured. It was created by Ahura Mazdā, is full of milk and pastures, and overcomes the Daēvas and the non-Aryan countries.

2. The major problem we encounter when dealing with the etymology of this word, is its anlaut. Whereas Avestan x‘arənah-, Pahl. xwarrah, and MoPers. xorre point to initial *x\(^-\)-, the other languages show initial *f-\(^\), cf. OP *farnah- in PN (Vi\(^6\)dafarnah\(-\)), MP (Man., Parthian) prh, frh /farrah, farroh/ ‘fortune, glory’, Sogd. (Buddh.) prn, (Man.) frn, (Chr.) fn /farn/ ‘glory, high rank’, Bactrian φαρ(ρ)ο on Kushān coins, Khot. phārra- ‘splendour, rank (of Buddha)’, MoPers. farr(e), Oss. farn/färna ‘happiness, wealth, well-being’.

For a long time it was held that the initial f- is due to a specific Median sound-law Plr. *x\(^-\)- > Med. f-. The theory assumed that farnah- was borrowed by Old Persian from Median, and then disseminated all over the Iranian territory in the period of the Achaemenid empire. In 1983, however, P.O. Skjærvø convincingly showed that the "Median" theory is untenable. His conclusions can be summarized as follows:

1). It is impossible to prove that farnah- is an originally Median word and that there was an exclusively Median development *x\(^-\) > f-.
2). Forms with f- are attested on the whole Iranian territory, whereas x\(^-\) is confined to Avestan. Pahl. xwarrah and MoP xorre can be considered loanwords from Avestan.
3). There is no evidence that farnah- was so important in the Achaemenid empire that this term was borrowed into all Iranian dialects of that time and replaced the local variants.

The "Median" theory being discarded, what then is the reason for the difference in anlaut? Skjærvø sees two possible answers:

A. Since farnah- is the most frequent form, it may also be the original one. In other words, Av. x‘arənah- may be an adaptation of *farnah- < *pʰarnas- (?) to the Avestan phonological system, which had no initial f- before a vowel.\(^4\)

B. The development Plr. *huəranah- > farnah- is due to dissimilation hu – h > f – h (or h – h > f – h, followed by fuəa- > fa-). Avestan has escaped this dissimilation because the initial *hu- had become x\(^-\) early enough.

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\(^3\)The meaning of ax‘arətom is disputed. In my opinion, the adjective ax‘arəta- means 'ungiven, undistributed' and is a loan from "Scythian" *afarta- < Proto-Iranian *a-parta- (probably reflected in Ossetic ñevərd/ñevard ‘put apart, saved, preserved’, ñevən/ñevərn ‘to place apart, to save’) with substitution of -f- by -x\(^-\)- (for the mechanism see §2.1 and §5). This is of no consequence for the present discussion, however.

\(^4\)The only example in Bartholomae’s dictionary is the hapax Yt 19.3 ñənkauuō ‘top of the mountain’, but this word must probably be corrected to ‘frānkauuō, cf. Hintze 1994: 79.
Skjærø considers the second option more probable, but the whole scenario seems very unlikely to me (cf. also the criticism by Lecoq 1987). A dissimilation of the type *hуarnah- > fарнаh- can be a sporadic development at best, especially if we take into account that the newly arisen fа- is a unique sequence in most of the Iranian dialects. Therefore, we can safely rule out the possibility that this dissimilation could have occurred independently in Median, Persian, Sogdian, Khotanese, etc. The only other possibility would then be to assume that this development took place in Common Iranian when the speakers of Avestan had already left, but this is not very probable either: there is not a shred of evidence that Avestan separated from Common Iranian before other dialects.

2.1. Let us now take a closer look at Skjærø’s solution A, which, in my view, is essentially correct. First of all, the original form *fарнаh- accounts better for the distribution: forms with f- are attested on the whole Iranian territory, whereas x- is confined to Avestan. As indicated by Skjærø, the initial x- of Av. x’arənəh- can be explained by substitution of fа- by x’a-. This kind of substitution is not uncommon in loan words. For instance, in South Russian dialects, f(-) in loan words is regularly reflected as x-w, cf. x’w’абр’ика ‘factory’ (Standard Russ. фабрика), x’anár’ ‘lantern’ (Standard Russ. фонарь, a borrowing from Gr. φανάριον), etc. (cf. Kuznecov 1960: 79; Avanesov 1949: 124).

2.2. Secondly, there is an important linguistic argument against a Proto-Iranian reconstruction *hуarnah-, which, as far as I know, has never been mentioned in the literature. Avestan compounds with second members in x’- normally appear with -̃si(x’)- after i, u, r, which is the result of the RUKI-rule, cf. hušx’afa (Y 57.17) 3sg. pf. ̃x’ап- ‘to sleep’; paitiš.x’ana- (N 26) ‘disturbing noise’; pariš.x’axta- (Y 11.7) ‘surrounded on all sides’; paitiš(x’ara)- (V 3.14, 8.43,44, 9.16,40) ‘jaws’; aiajphо.paitiş.x’arоna- (Yt 10.70) ‘with iron jaws’; aиби.x’арəθа- (V 6.32,38,41) ‘suitable for consumption’; anaибі.x’аrəθа- (V 6.31,34-5,37) ‘unsuitable for consumption’; mainиuš.x’arəθа- (Y 55.2); Yt 10.125 ‘reared on supernatural food’ (Gershevitch 1959: 135); pasuš.x’арəθа- n. (V 19.41 Gl.) ‘food for the cattle’.

Apart from three compounded verbs, unchanged x’ is only found in compounds with x’арənəh-: ātёро-x’arənəh- (Yt 13.102) PN, аиби-x’арəнəh- (Yt 13.117) PN; аиби.x’арəнəh- (Yt

5 Also accepted by Gnoli 1990 and 1996.

6 There are many other parallels for substitution of f by x’/hv in loan words. After the presentation of my paper, Stefán Schumacher mentioned to me Middle Welsh Chwefror ‘February’, a borrowing of Latin Februārius (cf. also Schrijver 1995: 160). In Finnish we find sohva ‘sofa’, kirihvi ‘giraffe’, etc. In Lithuanian, which had no phoneme /h/, f was substituted by kv, e.g. kvalbonas ‘flounce’, borrowed from Polish fалбана, cf. also German Fаlbel (Mayrhofer, per litt.).

7 For more details on -̃š/-̃šx’ in Avestan compounds I refer the reader to Lubotsky forthcoming [= Lubotsky 1999].
15.48) 'full of x'arənəh'-; *pouru.x'arənəh- (Yt 18.1; V 19.3; Ny 3.11, 5.6; S 1.9, 2.9; Vyt 7, 24 *paouru.x'arənəh-)' with much x'arənəh'-; *viṇḍi-x'arənəh- (Yt 15.45) 'with the found x'arənəh'.

Also in the position after -ə, the initial x' of x'arənəh- remains unchanged (uṣṭa.-x'arənəḥ-, vīspō.x'arənəḥ-, barō.x'arənəḥ-, haomō.x'arənəḥ-), whereas, for instance, the initial x' of x'ərəna- 'eating' often appears as -ṇh- (āṇh'harəna- 'dish, bowl', ḥaṇ'harəna- 'cheek').

This state of affairs shows that the initial x' of Avestan x'arənəḥ- can hardly reflect Proto-Iranian *huy-< PIE *su-.

2.3. Skjærvø has probably rejected *farnah- as a proto-form because the PIn reconstruction *pʰarnah- does not lead any further, but, as a matter of fact, there is no need to reconstruct this Proto-Iranian form. As already assumed by Bartholomae and many others, *farnah- is likely to be a dialectal word. The whole problem must accordingly be seen in a different light: if *farnah- is a form of an Iranian dialect, which Proto-Iranian word can it reflect? In the following I shall argue that *farnah- goes back to PIn. *parnah-. The proof is Skt. pārṇas-, which is not only the same morphological formation, but, as we shall presently see, has the same range of meanings.

3. Skt. pārṇas- n. is traditionally glossed 'fullness, abundance' and derived from the PIE root *pelH₁- 'to fill' (cf. Mayrhofer, EWAia s.v.). For Skt. pārṇas- we can reconstruct PIE *pelH₁-nos-, the expected Iranian reflex of which is *parnah- with loss of the laryngeal in inlaut. We shall return to the problem of the Iranian initial f- a little later. Let us first look at the actual occurrences of Ved. pārṇas-. This word is attested only in the RV (the other occurrences being RV-ic repetitions or variants). It occurs eleven times as a simplex and twice in the compound goparṇas-. Finally, there is one attestation of the adjective or neuter parṇasa-.

3.1. Among the eleven occurrences of pārṇas-, we find four times an asyndetic formula rāyā pārṇasa10 at the end of the line, three times referring to Indra and once to Agni. A typical example is 8.97.6a-d (other passages are 1.129.9a; 4.31.12b; 5.10.1c):

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9 Also in Middle Iranian there are, to my knowledge, no certain traces of -š(x')- in compounds with *x'arnah-. Klingenschmitt (1975: 149, fn. 1) assumed that Toch. A compounds puttisparām 'Buddhawürde', ārāntisparām 'Arhatwürde', etc. are borrowed from an Iranian language where these compounds sounded like *putišyarnah-being analogically formed to the old determinative compound *kaṇi-šyarnah- 'Kavi-Würde'. This hypothetical scenario has several weaknesses. First, all East Iranian languages show the reflexes of *farnah- and not *x'arnah-, and the Tocharian simplex A parām, B perne reflects *farnah- rather than *x'arnah-. Klingenschmitt sees the difficulty and assumes that Toch. p- may also reflect Iran. hy-, but his only parallel is Toch. B waipece from Iran. həaipəʔja-, for which he has to resort to the peculiar Tocharian variation p: w. Secondly, compounds of this type are not attested in Middle Iranian. In Sogdian, for instance, the normal expression for 'Buddha's rank' is pwty'kh prn /putyāk farn/, where pwty'kh is a denominal abstract (cf. Sims-Williams 1981: 12f.). It is therefore easier to assume that the unexplained element -is- of the Tocharian compounds goes back to a denominal suffix of the Iranian donor language (*-iʔ?).

10 The asyndetic character of rāyā pārṇasa was recognized for the first time by Wackernagel – Debrunner 1954: 738.
Presumably pārīnas- was already moribund in the RV because the poet of 3.24 mistakenly made pārīnas- masculine when he transposed the formula into the accusative, cf. 3.24.5ab

āgne dā dāśūse rayīm vārvantam pārīnasam

'O Agni, give to the devoted one wealth, consisting of valiant heroes, and pārīnas-!

It seems reasonable to identify the formula rāyā pārīnasā with the Avestan formula (ahe/manaḥgham) raiia x`aranaghaca and its variants. This is without a doubt an example of a Proto-Indo-Iranian formula.

3.2. At the end of a hymn to the Maruts, 1.166.14, we read:

yena dirgham marutaḥ sūsāvāma yuṣmākena pārīnasā turāsāh /
ā yat tatanan vṛjāne jānāsas eḥhīr yajñēbhīs tad abhiṣṭim āṣīam //

'Your pārīnas-, o Maruts, through which we shall stay powerful for a long time, o strong ones, and which (other) people will try to draw into their surrounding, is what I seek to acquire with these sacrifices as a gift.'

First of all, the passage shows that there is a direct connection between the pārīnas- and the power (root sū-), which is reminiscent of the Avestan pair sauusaca x`aranasca, cf. § 1.2.11

Furthermore, we may conclude from the passage that pārīnas- is not simply 'abundance', but also some kind of military superiority, sovereignty. The imagery is essentially the same as that of Avestan ariianom x`aranom 12.

Just as Av. x`aranah-, Vedic pārīnas- is a quality possessed by the gods (especially Indra and his gang, the Maruts), which can be bestowed on the devotees. This also follows from 8.21.7-8ab:

nūtnā ēd indra te vayāṁ uti abhūma nahī nū te adṛivaḥ / vidmā purā pārīnasah //

'We, of the new generation, are dependent on your help, Indra. We have known your pārīnas-, not (only) now, but also before, o master of the pressing stones.'13

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11 Compare also the same combination in 8.97.6, cited above, where Indra is, on the one hand, śavasas pate, and rāyā pārīnasā, on the other.

12 From Yt 10.27 it follows that x`aranah- can also be possessed by the 'bad guys': yō daig[h]oṣ rāxśiįlḅi:[a] para razišṭā bariitī, paiti x`aronā呕吐ravaiitī, apa voraθraynom bariitī (Mīra), who carries off the straightest (paths) of the defiant country, diverts its chances, removes its victoriousness' (Gershevitch). It is clear that one has to fight for the x`aronah- with the enemy. Cf. also Hintze 1994: 27.

13 This rendering seems more adequate than Geldner's 'Wir sind aufs neue deiner Hilfe gewärtig, Indra, denn noch haben wir früher deine volle Größe nicht kennen gelernt, o Herr des Preßsteins.' Cf. especially 8.75.16 vidmā hī te purā vayām āgne pitūr yathāvasah adhā te sunnam imahe 'For we have known your help before, o Agni, as that of a father. Therefore we ask you for your good-will.'
3.3. From 8.77.9 we learn that parīnas- is something through which Indra performs his heroic deeds:

\[ \text{etā cyautmāni te kṛtā vārṣīthāni parīnasā / ṭṛdā vidv ādhārayaḥ} // \]

'These highest deeds of yours, performed with parīnas-, you kept firmly on your heart.’

This point is reminiscent of Yt 19.10, where it is said that x'arənəh- belongs to Ahura Mazdā (asti ahurahe mazdā), so that he creates the world.

3.4. A more profane aspect of parīnas- follows from 1.133.7a:

\[ \text{vanōtī hi sunvān kṣāyam parīnasah} \]

'The presser (of Soma) wins indeed a house of parīnas-.'

The idea that x'arənəh- is present in the house of a devoted man follows, for instance, from Y 60.7 mā yauue imāt mnānōm x’ādārāuatt x’arənəh frazahīt 'May the comfort-bringing x’arənəh- never leave this house’.\(^4\) A similar meaning has been preserved to this very day in Ossetic fərn ‘happiness, peace, prosperity’.

3.5. The remaining two RV-ic passages containing parīnas- and the one containing parīnasā- are less diagnostic\(^5\), so that I shall skip them now.

3.6. Finally, let me shortly mention the compound goparīnas-, which at least in 8.45.24\(^6\) means something like ‘abundance of milk’:

\[ \text{ihā tvā goparīnasā mahē mandantu rádhase / saro gaurō yāthā piba} // \]

'May (the juices) with the abundance of milk intoxicate you here for a great gift! Drink a lake as a bull!'

Compare this compound with Avestan Yt 18.1:

\[ \text{mraōt ahūro mazdā spitamāi zaraḍuṣṭrāi:} \]

\[ \text{azōm daḍam airīiṇām x’arənəh gaomauuaitiūm pouru. vaqβem} \]

4The same image is probably alluded to in a difficult passage Yt 14.41, for which see Kellens 1974: 78ff.: voroθrayna auui imāt mnānəm gaosrābīiō x’aronəh pairi.voroŋauuaiti.... 'Voroθrayna entoure cette maison de x’aronəh en même temps que de richesse en vaches...'

5The passages are:

1.56.2a-b: tām gūrtāyō nemannisah parīnasah samudrām na samcāraṇe sanisyaivāh / 'The praises of (his) parīnas-, seeking for the guidance, (fill) him, like (rivers filling) the ocean, competing in the joint movement.'

8.84.7a-c: kāṣya nūnəm parīnasō dhiyo jinvasi dampate / gośātā yāsya te gīraḥ // 'Whose poetic thoughts concerning parīnas- do you incite now, O master of the house (Agni), so that his praises of you will be cattle-winning?'

9.97.9c-d: parīnasām kṛpute tigmāśiṅgo dīvā hār ir dārṣe naktam ṭrāh // 'He with pointed horns (Soma) becomes parīnas-. In the day-time he looks bay, at night he looks white.'

6The passage 10.62.10a-c is less clear:

\[ \text{uta dāsā parivīše smaddiśti goparīnasā / yādus turvaś ca māmahe} // \]

'And two slaves for serving, equally trained, together with abundance of milk (??), gave (me) Yadu and Turva(sa).’
'Says Ahura Mazdé to Spitama Zarathustra: I have created the Aryan x'arənah, full of milk, full of pastures.'

4. What can be said about the original meaning of parīnas-? As is well known, the Indo-European words with the suffix *-nos- often have the meaning of some property (Wackernagel – Debrunner 1954: 737f.), cf. Skt. āpanas-, Av. afnah- 'property'; Skt. dravīnas-, Av. draonah- 'share, divided property' (Hoffmann 1957: 70f. = 1976: 420f.); Skt. réṃnas- 'wealth', Av. raēxanah- 'heritage'. Therefore, parīnas- may have originally meant 'full property, omni-possession, sovereignty', then also 'abundance'. 'Sovereignty, dominion, control over a territory' seems to be an essential element of Av. x'arənah- and its Iranian cognates. It should be borne in mind that control of a vast territory is absolutely vital for a nomadic society: it has been calculated that in order to raise 6-7 cows or horses one needs 1 square km of pasture in the Eurasian steppes (Kuz’mina 1994: 205).

5. And now the last intriguing question: how to account for the initial f- of Iranian farnah- instead of the expected *p-? Since farnah- is most probably a dialectal Iranian form, we must look for an Iranian language, where *p regularly yields f. I know of only one such language: Ossetic. The date of the Ossetic sound change *p > f has been disputed. The Sarmatian names on Greek inscriptions in Southern Russia (1st c. B.C. – 3rd c. A.D.) show both π and φ:

Πουρθαος (Olbia) / Φουρθαος (Tanais) (< *puθra-, Oss. fyrt/furt);
Πιδος (Berezan’) / Φιδος (Tanais, Panticapaeum) (< *pītā, Oss. fyd/fide).

Abaev (1949: 212f., 1979: 332) interpreted the π/φ alternation diachronically, but, as indicated by Bielmeier (1989: 240), the different reflexes may belong to different dialects: forms with π are attested in the West (Olbia)19, whereas forms with φ are found in the East. Therefore we may assume that the sound change *p > f took place in some of the Scythian dialects early enough to be found in various Iranian names.

The first attestation of the element farnah- in Median onomastics can be dated around 714 B.C. (the reign of Sargon II, 721-705 B.C., Lecoq 1987: 678). We know that at that time Media was invaded by Scythian tribes, and it is only natural to assume that the Median princes and high military officials were of Scythian descent. On the Persepolis reliefs, Median chieftains are

17 Hintze 1994: 26ff. argues that x'arənah- is considered by the authors of the Yashts as something visible. Even if this view be correct – the relevant passages allow of more than one interpretation –, the image of the visible x'arənah- can be ascribed to the influence of the Middle-Eastern idea of visible sovereignty.

18 This rendering is very close to the meaning which was posited for Av. x'arənah- by Bailey 1943 on the basis of careful analysis of the Avestan texts. He gives the following rendering of x'arənah-: "a thing obtained or desired", thence 'a good thing, a desirable thing, possessions, good things" (1943: 2). It is on the basis of this meaning that Bailey tried to etymologize the word, first as *hya-rnah- from the root hyar- 'to grasp', later as *hu-arnah-. His etymologies are not very appealing, but his semantic analysis is excellent.

19 Justi 1895: 94 mentions the name Παφρος found in Olbia, who was the father of Κασσαος, a strategos in Olbia!
dressed like Scythians and wear the same weapons as Scythians (Sakā Tigraxaudā) (Vogelsang 1992: esp. 173ff.).

6. Let us sum up: Iranian farnah- is of Scythian origin, cognate with Vedic parīnas-, as shown by Avestan and Vedic formulae. The original meaning of Indo-Iranian *parHnas- was 'sovereignty, control', then 'abundance'. Avestan x’arənah- is a borrowing from Scythian with substitution of the initial fa- by x’a-.

The genuine Avestan word related to Scythian farnah- and Skt. parīnas- is Av. *parənah-, preserved in the adjective parənahuṇtom (Yt 5.130), meaning something like 'abundant'20.

Bibliography


20 The difficult passage reads upa stərəmači vəroma daître parənahuṇtom viṣpəm hujiitītim irīθəntom xəθətom zazātī. Bartholomae – Wolff leave the last three words untranslated and render the rest as ‘In (seinen) Lagerräumen bringt er nach Belieben in reicher Fülle alles unter, was zum Wohlleben dient.’ Oettinger (1983: 126) translates: ‘In den Lagerräumen bringe ich mir nach Wunsch Fülle bietenden und alles Wohlleben mit sich führenden (Reichtum) unter. Erst den Sterbenden verläßt das Besitztum.’
Avestan \(x\text{'ar\(\text{\`a}n\text{\~n})-\): the etymology and concept


