

The historical derivation of Gothic *aba* ‘husband’

1. Meaning

Gothic *aba* translates Greek ἀνήρ ‘male person; husband’, and is in almost every case paired with *qēns* or *qinō*, both meaning ‘woman, wife’.

2. Germanic cognates

2.1 The most common meaning of Old Norse *afi* is ‘grandfather’, and comes from **awan-*, cf. Gothic *awō* ‘grandmother’. A less common meaning is ‘male relative in direct line; male relative with hereditary status’, and this should correspond to Gothic *aba*.

2.2 *aba* corresponds formally to a male name **Aban-* in West Germanic (OE *Afa*, OS *Avo*, OHG *Abo*).

3. Morphology

	Sg	Pl		Sg	Pl
Nom	<i>ab-a</i>	<i>ab-ans</i>	Nom	<i>att-a</i>	<i>att-ans</i>
Acc	<i>ab-an</i>	–	Acc	<i>att-an</i>	<i>att-ans</i>
Dat	<i>ab-in</i>	<i>ab-nam</i>	Dat	<i>att-in</i>	<i>att-am</i>
Gen	<i>ab-ins</i>	<i>ab-nē</i>	Gen	<i>att-ins</i>	<i>att-anē</i>
Voc	–	–	Voc	<i>att-a</i>	<i>att-ans</i>

The *n*-stem suffix shows up as *-n-* in the dat./gen.pl.

Parallels:

	<i>auhsa</i> *‘ox’		<i>manna</i> ‘man’ (with generalized <i>-nn-</i>)	
	Sg	Pl	Sg	Pl
Nom	–	–	(<i>manna</i>)	<i>man-s</i>
Acc	<i>auhs-an</i>	<i>auhs-nun̥s</i>	(<i>mannan</i>)	(<i>mans</i>)
Dat	<i>auhs-īn̥</i>	–	<i>man-n</i>	(<i>mannam</i>)
Gen	–	<i>auhs-nē</i>	<i>man-s</i>	<i>man-nē</i>
Voc	–	–	(<i>manna</i>)	–

4. Germanic *n*-stem

4.1 Some Germanic *n*-stems with **-n-* in the weak cases have been generalized differently in the daughter languages, either by replacing **-n-* with full grade forms, or treating **-n-* as a part of the stem and re-adding an *n*-stem suffix or another vocalic suffix (**-a-* or **-u-*):

**CeC-an-/*CeC-n- → 1. CeC-an- or 2. CeCn- + suffix -an-/-a-/-u-.*¹

- a) PG **ber-an-/ber-n-* ‘bear’ → 1. OHG *bero*, Old Swedish PN *Bjæri*, 2. ON *Bjarni*, *bjorn*.
- b) PG **ar-an-/ar-n-* ‘eagle’ → 1. ON *ari*, OHG *aro*, 2. OE *earn*, ON *orn*, OHG *arn*.
- c) PG **sef-an-/seb-n-* ‘mind’ → 1. ON *sefi*, 2. ON *sjafni*.
- d) PG **hers-an-/herz-n-* ‘head, skull’ → 1. ON *hjarsi* ‘crown of the head’, 2. ON *hjarni* ‘brain’.
- e) PG **urz-en-/urz-n-* ‘the male’ → 1. ON *orri* ‘heathcock’, 2. Old Swedish *orni* ‘boar’.

4.2 By the same process as in 4.1, the root final consonant could assimilate to the following **-n-* to form a geminate. To this geminate, the *n*-stem suffix could be re-added:

**CeC-an-/*CeC-n- > /*CeCC- → 1. CeC-an- and 2. CeCC-an-.*²

¹ Examples from Hreinn Benediktsson (1968) ‘On the inflection of the *n*-stems in Indo-European’ in *Norsk tidsskrift for sprogvidenskap* 22, p. 11.

- a) **bul-an-/*bul-n-* > **bull-* ‘bull’ → 1. ON *boli*, 2. ME *bulle*, MLG *bulle*, German *Bulle*.
- b) **knab-an-/*knab-n-* > **knapp-* ‘boy’ → 1. OHG *knabo*, OE *cnafa*, 2. OHG *knappo*, OE *cnapa*.

These examples show that there was a much wider use of the zero-grade **-n-* in the *n*-stem in Proto-Germanic than attested in the daughter languages.

5. The PIE *n*-stem

This came in three types: 1. Primary 2. Individualizing (‘*Cato*-type’) 3. Possessive (‘Hoffmann-type’). All had two accent/ablaut-classes, amphikinetic and hysterokinetic.

- a) Primary amphikinetic: Vedic *ātmá*, loc.sg. *tmán* ‘soul’, Latin *carō*, *carnis* ‘meat’.
- b) Primary hysterokinetic: Greek ἀρήν, ἀρνός ‘lamb’, Vedic *ukṣá*, *ukṣnáḥ* ‘ox’.
- c) *Cato*-type amphikinetic: Latin *catus* ‘sharp’ → *Catō*, *-ōnis* ‘the sharp one’.
- d) *Cato*-type hysterokinetic: Greek ἄριστος ‘best’ → Ἀριστήν, -ῆνος ‘the best one’.
- e) Hoffmann-type amphikinetic (athematic): Vedic *áyu-* ‘life’ → *yúvā*, *yúnaḥ* ‘having life’.
- f) Hoffmann-type hysterokinetic (athematic): **koni-* ‘freshness’ → *kanyā*, *kanī-* ‘virgin, girl’.
- g) Hoffmann-type amphikinetic (thematic): Latin *nāsus* ‘nose’ → *Nāsō*, *-ōnis* ‘having a (big) nose’.
- h) Hoffmann-type hysterokinetic (thematic): Greek φαλλός ‘penis’ → Φαλλήν, -ῆνος, an epithet of Dionysus.

6. Germanic continuation of the PIE *n*-stems

Based on the reconstructable endings of the Germanic *n*-stem, only types a, b and c can be established for Proto-Germanic.

² Examples from Rosemarie Lühr (1988) *Expressivität und Lautgesetz im Germanischen*, p. 202, 274f.

- 6.1 Type a (primary amphikinetic) shown by Proto-Norse nom.sg. <-o>, OHG *-o* < **-ō*, OE, Gothic, PN acc.sg. *-an* < **-on-ŋ*, OE nom.pl. *-an*, Gothic *-ans* < **-on-es*, and by word correspondences such as Germanic **arō*, **arniz*, Hittite *haras*, *haranas* < **h₂érō*, *h₂ernés* ‘eagle’.
- 6.2 Type b (primary hysterokinetic) shown by Proto-Norse nom.sg. <-a> and possibly Gothic *-a* < **-ǣ(n)* and by word correspondences such as Germanic **uksē(n)*, **uksniz*, Vedic *ukṣá*, *ukṣnáḥ* < **h₂uksén*, **h₂uksnés* ‘ox’. The weak cases would be the same as type a, i.e. with **-n*.
- 6.3 Type c (amphikinetic thematic *Cato*-type) shown by the heavy use of *-an-* in all weak cases in North and West Germanic, and by the individualizing derivation being the prime function of the *n*-stem in Germanic, also giving Germanic its so-called ‘weak’ adjective.

7. Germanic origin of *aba*

- 7.1 Type c is generally claimed to have acquired suffix ablaut in analogy with type a and b,³ but the evidence turns out to be scanty. Traditional prime examples are **hasan-/hazan-* ‘hare’ and **beran-/bern-* ‘bear’. **hasan-/hazan-* belongs to type c, being individualized from **kasō-* ‘grey’, but the Germanic *n*-stem exhibits only accent mobility, no suffix ablaut. **beran-/bern-* is said to be individualized from the adjective seen in Baltic **b^hēro-* ‘brown’ (Lithuanian *bėras*), but the Baltic adjective and the Germanic *n*-stem (and numerous other IE formations) are better taken as derivations of an athematic **b^her-*, which would make **beran-/bern-* belong to type a. Since *aba* shows ablaut in the suffix (*ab-n-*), it cannot have belonged to this type.
- 7.2 From its hysterokinetic ablaut type b would have a zero-graded root, which *aba* does not show.
- 7.3 Type a would have a full grade in the root, and show *-n-* in the weak cases. Both these traits correspond to Gothic *aba/abn-*, so it seems to have belonged to group a, the primary amphikinetic *n*-stem.

³ Cf. Lühr 1988:317 and Stefan Schaffner (2001) *Das Vernersche Gesetz und der innerparadigmatische grammatische Wechsel des Urgermanischen im Nominalbereich*, p. 527ff.

8. Etymology of *aba*

8.1 The root of *aba* has long been root-etymologized to **h₃ep-* ‘do, make’ without an explanation of its derivation. A nomen agentis formation straight from the root is problematic as long as the underlying verb does not exist anywhere outside Sabellic,⁴ and deriving agent nouns from verbal roots with a primary *n*-suffix has not been established for PIE.

8.2 There is an acrostatic heteroclitite **h₃óp-r̥/*h₃ép-n-* ‘wealth, riches, possession’ in PIE.⁵ There are good examples to show that *r/n*-stems in PIE had animate possessive amphikinetic *n*-stems made to them through internal derivation:⁶

- **h₃rĕǵ-r̥/h₃rĕǵ-n-* ‘power’ (Old Avestan *rāzarē*) → **h₃rĕǵ-on-/*h₃rĕǵ-n-* ‘having power’ → ‘king’ (Vedic *rājān-/rājñ-*)
- **h₁óuHdʰ-r̥/h₁éuHdʰ-n-* ‘udder’ (Greek οὔθαο) → **tri-h₁éuHdʰ-on-/*-h₁uHdʰ-n-* ‘having three udders’ (Vedic *tri-ūdhán-*)
- **péjH-wr̥/piH-wén-* ‘fat’ (Greek πῖαο) → **péjHw-on-/piHu-n-* ‘having fat’ (Greek πῖον)
- **h₂érh₃-wr̥/*h₂rh₃-wén-* ‘grain’ (Old Irish *arbar*) → **h₂érh₃w-on-/h₂rh₃u-n-* ‘having grain’ → ‘field’ (Armenian *harawownk* ‘)

If we do the same with **h₃óp-r̥/*h₃ép-n-*, we would get an amphikinetic derivative **h₃ép-on-/*h₃ep-n-* ‘having wealth, riches, possessions’, where ‘the one possessing the riches (in the family)’ naturally would designate the pater familias. The PIE base would give Germanic **afan-/abn-*, which after the regular generalization of one of the Verner-variants would precisely give Gothic *aba*

⁴ Sabellic perfect **ōps-*, cf. Helmut Rix (1993) ‘Osk. *úpsannam* – *uupsens* und Zugehöriges’ in Heidermanns/Rix/Seebold (ed.) *Sprachen und Schriften des antiken Mittelmeerraums*, p. 340ff.

⁵ Seen in e.g. Hittite *happar-* ‘trade; payment’, *happina-* ‘rich’, Latin *opulentus* ‘rich’, Vedic *ápnas-* ‘property’.

⁶ Cf. Paul Widmer (2004) *Das Korn des weiten Feldes. Interne Derivation, Derivationskette und Flexionsklassenhierarchie: Aspekte der nominalen Wortbildung im Urindogermanischen*, p. 47, 67ff.

(*abn-*) as well as comply with its meaning ‘husband’ and the ON meaning ‘male relative with hereditary status’.

9. Further support

That **h₃óp-r/*h₃ép-n-* served as the base for Gothic *aba* gains strength from the fact that other Germanic words can be taken as derivations from the same heteroclit.

- 9.1 Germanic **abra-* ‘powerful, strong’ (Gothic *abrs*, ON *afr-*) is best taken as an exocentric derivation from **h₃óp-r*, i.e. **h₃op-r-ó-* ‘having riches, property’ > ‘powerful’.
- 9.2 ON *efni* ‘stuff, material’ < Germanic **af/bnija-* should be taken as a genitival derivation **h₃ep-n-ijō-* ‘that of property, possession’ from **h₃ép-n-*.

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