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On the Iranian Honorific Title *bag*, *bay*, *bay* ‘lord, prince’

A possible derivation of the Turkish lordly title *bäg*, later *bey*, from Iranian is, especially for Iranologists, superficially attractive.¹ There are many reasons for this possible loan: **1.** semantic correspondence, **2.** presence of many Persian loanwords, proper names and titles in Turkish; **3.** lack of convincing etymology in Turkish.²

It is true that in the Classical Persian period, Turkish (turkicized?) *beg*(*ī*) (also: *bak*) ‘a lord, prince’³ entered Persian lexicon together with compound names, as a title put after the names of lords, servants and petty officials, e.g.: *atā-bak*⁴ ‘lord father (a title given to the governors of Shiraz); a guardian, preceptor, teacher, the prime minister or vizir; honorary title of an amir; name of a Persian dynasty originating from Sa’d bin Zangi’ [Steingass 12];

¹ Cf. Sims-Williams, N. *Baga. II. In Old and Middle Iranian*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Yarshater, E., 1982ff., London/Boston/Henley (www.iranica.com), p. 404.

² Cf. Doerfer, G., *Türkische ind mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen*, II, Wiesbaden 1965, pp. 402–6.

³ **beg** – dominus (*sāhib va xodāvand*). Inde **begā-begī** dominus s. princeps principum (*xodāvand va amir-amirān*) in app. [Vullers 302]; **beqa** i.q. *beqam* ‘domina, matrona’ [Vullers 303].

⁴ **atā-bak** – vox turc. ex *atā* pater et *bak* pro *beg* dominus comp., ut significet pater dominus, vel. sec. pater magnus (*pedar-bozorg*), quo nomine olim ii, quibus educatio et instructio principum Selgukidarum curae erat, proprie appellabantur; cf. Mirchond’s *Gesch. der Selguken* pg. 73, not 29; 2) custos, instructor, magister (*neqāhdārande va adab āmuzande*); 3) minister supremus, princeps; 4) cognomen dynastiae regum Persidis, quae a Sa’d bin Zangi originem ducit; 5) ut *atā-xvāḡe* simil., titulus honorarius Emirorum [Vullers 70].

*axta-beg*⁵ ‘grand equerry, master of the horse’ [Haim 24]; *uluq-beg* ‘great prince; name of a king of Parthia and India, grandson of Timur Lang’ [Steingass 94], *andar-beg* ‘(admitted) amongst the great, also amongst the higher order of demons’ [Steingass 108]; *dād-beg* ‘an administrator of justice’ [Steingass 494], *daryā-beg* ‘an admiral’ [Steingass 517], etc. This word was also loaned into Hindustani, *beg* ‘lord, master (Mughal title)’, *begam* ‘lady of rank; queen; princes’ [Kuczkiewicz-Fraś 119].

The question is how and when could this word possibly have entered the Turkic lexicon? The aim of this paper is neither to solve this question (nor to show the potential paths of borrowing), but provide some arguments, i.e. mainly linguistic and textual data from all Iranian languages, where the word is attested. We hope that this material will be taken into consideration by Turkologists.

I. Old Iranian **baga-* (~ 6th–4th B.C.)

The Old Iranian agent noun *baga*⁶ ‘distributor, dispenser; the generous one’ (< *bag-*: *baj-*: *baxš-* ‘to give, distribute, allot; receive portions’ < Pr.Ar. **bhag-* : *bhaj-*, cf. OInd. *bhaj-*, *bhága-*, Greek *-φαγος* ‘eater’, OCS *bogŭ* ‘god’ < PIE **bhag-* [Pokorny 107, Rastorgueva-Edel’man II: 48–49] was adopted as a name for ‘god’.

1. **Avestan** *baga-* occurs in the *Gathas*, in a passage (Yasna 32.8), where it possibly means ‘lot, portion, distribution, good fortune’. In *Avesta* much preferred word for ‘god, divinity’ was *yazata-* ‘worshipful’ (cf. Middle Iranian Saka dialects: Khotan *gyasta-*, Tumšuj *jezda-*). In the later Avestan texts *baga-* occurs as a title of divinities (Ahura Mazda, Māh, Mithra):⁷ *aurvañtəm θwā dāmidātəm bayō tatašat hvāpā* (Yasna 10.10) ‘Swift and wise hath the well-skilled **Deity** created thee’;⁸ *... tañčišətəm bayānām asti* (Yasht 10.141) ‘... he is the most intelligent of the **gods**’.⁹

⁵ *axta-beg* n.c. *summus stabuli magister, stabularius* H. Mong. I, 108; cf. *axta-ǰī*, *axtā-ǰī* [Vullers 72].

⁶ Cf. g. *baga-*, j. *baya-* ‘Anteil, Los; bes. günstiges Los, Glück; vom Glück in der Ehe, Eheglück (nur Komp.)’ Vd. 2, Y. 32.8, F. 16, Yt. 16.15; im jAw. ‘Herr, Gott’: Y. 10.10, Yt. 7.5, Yt. 10.141, Y. 70.1 [Bartholomae 921]

⁷ “It is arguable whether it should still be understood in the earlier sense of ‘dispenser’ or already as ‘god’” N. Sims-Williams, *Baga*. II..., p. 404.

⁸ Mills, L.H., *Sacred Books of the East*, American Edition, 1898.

⁹ Darmesteter, J., *Sacred Books of the East*, American Edition, 1898.

2. **Old Persian.** The development of the latter meaning is securely attested in Old Persian where *baga-*, translated by words meaning ‘god’ in Babylonian (Akkadian *ilu*) and Elamite, is the only generic term for the divinities (primarily for Ahura Mazda and less frequently for Mithra¹⁰) worshipped by the Achaemenids: *baga vazraka Auramazdā* ‘the great **god** AM’ (passim), *Auramazdā ... hya maḏišta bagānām* ‘AM ... who (is) the greatest of **gods**’ (Darius 4.1; Xerxes 6.1). In OP *baga-* is found also in many compound names: *Bagābigna-* (a Persian, father of Hydarnes) < *baga-* + *ā-bigna* ptc. in *-na-* of an unidentified root; *Bagabuxša-* (an ally of Darius against Gaumata) ‘God-freed’ < *baga-* + deriv. of root *baug-* ‘free’, *Bāgayādi-* ‘God-worship month’ *baga-*, with vriddhi, + *yad-* ‘worship’ [Kent 199, Mayrhofer 18–19].
3. **Median** **baga-* in compound names: **baga-yāza-* ‘God-worship (month)’ (Elamic source), **baga-spāda-* ‘the army of God’ (Akkadian source) [Rastorgueva-Edel’man 49].
4. **Scythian** **baga-*: Βάγης [Bages] shortened form of a name, possibly *Baga-dāta* ‘God-given’ [Abaev 283].

II. Middle Iranian **bag*, *bay*, *bay* (4th B.C. – 9/10th C.E.)

Almost all attested Middle Iranian languages retain forms derived from *baga-* in the sense ‘god’ and ‘lord’. These forms are used as honorific titles, not only of gods but also of kings, nobles, and other men of high rank.

1. Middle Persian

- a) **bag** [bg, bk’; inscr. bgy, Pers. /‘RHY’/, Parth. /‘LH’/]; pl. cas. obl. **bagān** [‘RHY’-n, bg’n] as a pl. majestatis: *ōišān bagān šahpuhr^y* (the Persepolis inscription in Pahlavi 2: 8); without the king’s name (the Persepolis inscription in Pahlavi 1: 4); *šmāh bagān* (addressing the king; passim); as a real pl. ‘lords’ (of princess, noblemen, etc.) [Nyberg II: 42].

In the later Zoroastrian books Pahlavi and Pazand *bag* became *bay* and occurred associated with *yazata-* in the phrase *yazdān bayān* ‘gods’.

- ‘god’ [bk’, a quotation from the above cited Yasna 10.10]; pl. cas. obl. *bagān* [bg’n] (opp. to *dēvān*); *garān bagān kōf* ‘the mountain of the mountain gods’

¹⁰ In fact only in later inscriptions, e.g. Artaxerxes III text from Persepolis: *Mām Auramazdā utā Miθra bāga pātuv* ‘Me may AM and the god Mithra protect’ [Kent 156].

- ‘lord; (his) majesty’, spoken of the supreme god: **Ohurmazd-bag** ‘Ohrmazd, the Lord’; and of kings: **Kāyōs-bag**; **Bag-Pāpak** and **Bag-Artaxšahr**, **Bag-šahpuhr** (*škand-gumānīk Vičār* 10.70), **Bag-Yazd-kart** (*Dēnkard* 21), **Bag-Ohurmazd**, **Bag-Xōsrōi**, **Bag-Narsah** (in the Parthian and Persian inscriptions of the Sasanian king Shapur at Hājjiābād, Naqsh-e Rostam, Persepolis, Tāq-e Bastān, etc.):

PATKAR IM MAZDAYASN **BAQ**¹¹ **ARTAXŠAΘR ŠĀHĪN ŠĀH**
 ARYĀN KĒ ČIHR HAČ YAZATĀN **PUΘR BAQ PĀPAK ŠĀH**
 (Naqsh-e Rostam)

“(This is) an image of the Mazdean, **Lord Ardashir**, king of kings, (of) Aryans, whose appearance (is) from deities (*yazatān*), **the son of Lord Papak**, the king.”

PATKAR IM MAZDAYASN **BAQ ŠĀHPUHR ŠĀHĀN ŠĀH**
 ĒRĀN UT ANĒRĀN KĒ ČIHR HAČ YAZATĀN PUΘR MAZ-
 DAYASN **BAQ ŌHRMAZD ŠĀHĀN ŠĀH ĒRĀN UT ANĒRĀN**
 KĒ ČIHR HAČ YAZATĀN NAP **BAQ NARSAH ŠĀHĀN ŠĀH**
 (Taq-e bastan)

“This is an image of the Mazdean, **Lord Shahpur**, king of kings, (king of) Iran and Non-Iran, whose appearance (is) from deities, son of Mazdean **Lord Ormazd**, king of kings, (king of) Iran and Non-Iran, whose appearance from deities, grandson of **Lord Narses**, king of kings.”

Other attested forms: **pitar-bag** ‘lord father’ in the Persepolis inscription in Pahlavi (cf. Tur. *atā-bak*), **bag (bay) āfrās** ‘petition to the King or a royal person’ [*Frahang ī Pahlavīk* XXX.9], **bagān** [‘RHY’n] ‘gods, lords’ [*Frahang ī Pahlavīk* I.10], **bagīk** ‘lordly, royal’ [*Frahang ī Pahlavīk* II.19].

- b) **bay** [by], pl. **bayān** [b’n, b’n] (SW form of *bag*) [= Pers. *buvand* ‘wealthy, majestic’, cf. also *buvand* ‘proud, arrogant’] [*Frahang ī Pahlavīk* XXX.8], mostly in comp.:
 - **Bay-ādur** (m.) [bg’twr’] – nom à deux divinités, formé des descendants de **Baga* et *ātr-* « Bay (et) ādur » [Gignoux 193];
 - **Bay-ādur-Farrbay** (m.) [b(g)’twrpl(nbg), bgy(’t)wrplnbg] – nom à deux divinités, formé de *Bay* (< **Baga*) et du nom de feu A.F. « Bay (et) le feu Farrbay ». Ce nom justifie mon interprétation de *baga* comme le nom propre du dieu (correspondant au ved. *Bhaga-*) dans les composés du même type, puisque *baga* est ici *répété*, et ne

¹¹ In Aramaic version of this inscription: ALHA, Greek: THEOS.

peut donc être considéré comme l’appellatif, dont il n’y aurait pas d’explication plausible” [Gignoux 194].

- **Bayān-bay** (m.) [bg’nbg] – ce nom semble être une ancienne épithète, comparable à *šāhān šāh*, et servant probablement à qualifier *Ahura Mazdā*, qui est bien « le dieu des dieux », i.e. le dieu suprême (< **bagā-nām бага-*) [Gignoux 195] – cf. NPers. (< Tur.) **begā-begī**.
- **Ohrmazd-bay** [’whrmyzd-by], **Bay-zurwān** [by zrw’n].¹²

Also Turfan Persian had developed *-y-* from *-γ-* in *bay*, pl. *bayān*, adj. *bayānīγ*. This *bay* is found in New Persian *bi-doxt* < *bē-duxt* < **bagā-duxtā* ‘daughter of god’ used for the planet Venus.

2. Parthian

a) **bay** [bg], pl. **bayān** [bg’n]:

- ‘god’: **Ohrmuzd-bay** [’whrmyzd-bg]
- ‘lord’: **mānī-bay** [m’ny bg] ‘Lord Mani’:

ryst, ... hw’xšd m’ry m’ny bg’, tw mn bwj, bg’, tw mn’ bwj, ’whrmyzd-bg’.
rist, ... *huaxšad mār-ā mānī-bay*, *tū man bōž*, **bay-ā**, *tū man-ā bōž*, **Ohrmezd-bay**.

“Truly, merciful my lord, Oh **Lord Mani**, you save me, Oh **lord**, you save me, **lord** Ohrmazd.”

b) **bay** [by] – SW form of *bay* in a proper name of the Third Messenger **zēnārēs-bay** [zyn’rys by]:

’pwr’m ’w prystg’n, yzd’n, ... nwg xwrxšyd ... zyn’rys by ... *āfurām ō frēstagān, yazdān*, ... *nōg xwarxšēd* ... **zēnārēs bay** ...

“Creation in angels, gods ... ever new sun ... **the Third Messenger**” [Boyce 105].

3. Sogdian

βay [βγ] ‘God, Lord, king, sir, excellency (in Buddhist Sogdian of the Buddha)’ (Budd., Man., Chr.) [Gharib 2543]: *prn’m βγy δ’mδ’nk* “in the name of **God**, the Creator” (the opening words of Mugh Letter 1.I.);¹³ *ZKn βγy ZY ZKn myδr’ nβ’nty* “by the **Lord** Mithra” (Mugh Letter Nov. 4); pl. **βayān** [βγ’n] [Gharib 2545]; **βayāne-piš(ē)** [βγ’ny BRY] (Chr.) ‘husband’ [Gharib 2547]; **rām-rātux-βayi** [r’mr’twxβγy] (Man.) ‘pace-dispensing god (of Manichaean god, Mother of Life)’ [= Pers. *rām-baxš-baq*]

¹² Andreas, F.C., *Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan*, II, ed. Henning, W., Sitzungsberichte d. Preuss. Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl. 1933, VII, pp. 294–363.

¹³ Yakubovich, I., *Mugh 1.I revisited*, *Studia Iranica* 31/2, 2002, pp. 231–53.

[Gharib 8433], *xurmazda-βaγi* [xwrmzt'βγγ] (Man.) 'Manichaean god, First Man' [= Pers. hormozd-baq] [Gharib 10754], *zarwā-βaγe/i* [zrw'βγγ] (Man.) 'god Zurvan, Father of Greatness' [Gharib 11416].

4. Choresmian

(a)*βaγi*k [(')βγγ(y)k] 'doll' < **baga-ka* and *βaγi* [βγγ] – name of the sixteenth day of the month corresponding to [mtr] (Mitra) [Bailey 390].

5. Bactrian

The Kushan-Bactrian (2nd c. C.E.) *βaγo* 'sir, lord' is attested in a famous inscription of Kanishka (Surx-Kotal, north of Kabul): *Ειδο μαλιζο μο Κανηβκο οαννδο βaγολαγγο σιδο-ι βaγο βao ναμο βaγo* "This is the acropolis of Kanishka, the Victorious, **the temple** (*bago-lango* < **baga-dānaka-*), which bears the name of our **lords**, the king" [Mękarska 152]. The same word appears in naming formulae of many letters written in cursive script on leather, cloth or wood, belonging to a period of a century, covering the last years of the Sasanian domination of Bactria (7–8th c.): *βaγo* *χοηo* 'the noble lord' (*χοηo* = Parth. xwd'wn, Pers. *xodāvand*) [= Sogd. βγγw xwt'w/xwβw].¹⁴

6. Khotan-Saka

The Kotan-Saka had preferred *gyastānu gyastū* 'god of gods' from *yazata*, but also had a word *vvūvayau-* < **baga-yauna-* 'of the origin of the *baga*-distributor; i.e. of the royal origin' used as a royal title [Bailey 390].

III. New Iranian

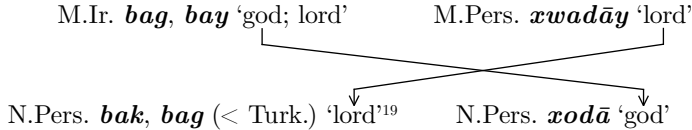
The Middle Iranian *baq* 'god' was generally devaluated in Persian 'idol',¹⁵ entered into composition of names¹⁶ (in fact became a suffix) and ultimately

¹⁴ Cf. Sims-Williams, N., *Bactrian letters from the Sasanian and Hephthalite periods*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 5th Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europaea* held in Ravenna, 6–11 October 2003, I: *Ancient and Middle Iranian Studies*, ed. Panaino, A.; Piras, A., Milano 2006, pp. 701–713.

¹⁵ Cf. *faq*, *foq* 'idol, mistress, handsome man or woman'; which according to the Vuller's explanation: **faq**, **foq** (alia forma vocis **baq**) – 1. (dialecto Ferganensium et Transoxaniae) 'idolum' (= P. *bot*); 2. (met.) 'amasius, amica, amicus, dilectus et formosus, pulcer; **foqestān** – 1. 'templum idolicum', 2. 'gynaecium regium', 3. (met.) 'formosus, pulcer' [Vullers, 684].

¹⁶ **baq** – 2) nom. idoli cuiusdam (*boti*), qua significatione respondet z. *baghō* [...], eadem vox in compositionis apparet, ut *baqdād*, *baqpur* [Vullers 249].

disappeared.¹⁷ Since the Muslim times (new religion, a new name for god), an old Persian word for a suzerain (in a political sense)¹⁸ *xodā* < MP *xwadāy* became to be applied in the meaning of ‘god’. One also should mention here a very interesting correspondence: when Old Iranian *bag* ‘god’ became to be applied as a term for ‘lord’, simultaneously *xwadāy* ‘lord’ (cf. *nōg purrmāh-āy-ā ud wahār ... xwadāy-ā Mānī-ā* “Ever new full moon and spring ... O lord Mani”) became to mean ‘god’:



One should also mention here eastern (used in Transoxania and Fergana) dialectal forms with initial *f*:²⁰ *faq, foq*, which also entered Persian lexicon, replacing *baq, bay*. They are attested in Classical Persian texts in the meaning ‘idol, mistress, handsome man or woman’ [Steingass 934]. Moreover, old compound name *baq-pur* ‘son of god; son of the lord’ [Vullers 149] < **baga-putra-*, a calque of Skr. *deva-putra-*? (cf. Parthian *bay-puhr*, Sogd. *βγpwr*, Kushan-Bactrian *bago-pouro*, Turfan Parthian *bay-puhr*) in New Persian *faq-fur*²¹ (> Armenian *čēn-bakour* ‘Chinese emperor’, Tur. *far-fur*) was used as the general name of the emperors of China (cf. Chinese imperial title *t’ien-tsi* ‘son of heaven’).

According to Bailey: “About A.D. 800 Iranian *bay* is present in Kirkut (Qirγiz) *bai*, written by the Chinese sign *buâi* (Matthews, *Chinese-English Dictionary*, no. 4991, modern *pei*) cited in *JA*, 1950, p. 298. The Kirkut adopted the Turkish language only in the 7th–8th centuries”.²²

¹⁷ The only remnants of the old Iranian *baga* in Persian, besides compound names, e.g. as: *baq-dād* (other forms: *baq-zāz*, *baq-dāz*, *baq-dān*, *baq-din*, *maq-dān*) ‘god-given; the city of Baghdad’, *baq-sur* (*baq-šur*) ‘name of a town between Herat and Sarakhs’, etc. [Steingass 192].

¹⁸ Also ‘god’ but in the Jewish-Christian sense [Nyberg 222].

¹⁹ Beside most common *āqā* ‘lord, master’ also borrowed from Turkish.

²⁰ In Arabic script the initial eastern *β-* [= western *b-*] was expressed by the letter *f* with three dots on it, which in Arabic could be replaced by *f*.

²¹ **faqfur** (cuius forma primitiva est **baqfur** < e *bag* et *pur*) – 1. ‘nomen commune regum Sinensium’, 2. ‘nom. regis dynastiae Ashkanidarum, qui post Alexandrum sexaginta duos annos regavit’, 3. ‘nom. regionis in Sina, ubi nitida fictilia conficiuntur’; 4. ‘terra pretiosa sinensis, vulg. porcellana’; **faqfuri** (suff. -i) 1. ‘ad reges Sinenses pertineus, regius’; 2. ‘usitat. ex porcellana’ [Vullers 685].

²² Bailey, H.W., *Baga*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Yarshater, E., 1982ff., London/Boston/Henley (www.iranica.com), p. 403.

In consequence a derivation of the Turk. *beg*, later *bey* from Iranian is quite possible if we take into consideration not Classical Persian but Eastern languages from Sogdiana and Turfan spoken in the Middle Iranian period.

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