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**GEORG MORGENSTIERNE:  
THE FATHER OF MODERN IRANIAN LANGUAGE STUDIES  
AND HIS HERITAGE  
(NOTES ON A NEW ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF PASHTO)**

Georg Morgenstierne: *A New Etymological Vocabulary of Pashto* (NEVP), compiled and edited by J. Elfenbein, D. N. MacKenzie and N. Sims-Williams, *Beiträge zur Iranistik*, Bd. 23, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 2003, 140 pp., ISBN 3-89500-346-6.

Georg Morgenstierne spent a considerable part of his active life on studying Pashto and collecting materials about Indo-Iranian dialects spoken in Afghanistan and North-Western India.<sup>1</sup> In 1924 he took part in a linguistic mission to Afghanistan and Peshawar arranged by the Norwegian Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture. Two years later he continued his studies among Pathan sailors in London and members of the Afghan legation in Berlin (see: EVP Introduction pp. 5-6). His great effort resulted in compiling the first etymological dictionary of Pashto: *An Etymological Vocabulary of Pashto* (EVP), published in 1927 by the *Skrifter Utgitt av Norske Videnskaps-Akademi Oslo* (II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse No. 3, Utgitt for Fridtjof Nasens Fond). This rather modest work (only 120 pages) was dedicated to Prof. W. Geiger, the author of pioneering monograph *Etymologie und Lautlehre des Afghanischen* (*Abhandlungen der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 20, 1893, pp. 167-222), in which he gave a firm foundation for the study of Pashto etymology and phonetics. Georg Morgenstierne was aware of the fact that his work could not be regarded as perfect. He wrote in the introduction:

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Morgenstierne published many pioneering works of paramount importance for Western Iranian language studies. To mention only some of them: *Report on a Linguistic Mission to Afghanistan* (Oslo 1926); *Indo-Iranian Frontier Languages*, Vol. 1: *Parachi and Ormuri* (Oslo 1929), Vol. 2: *Iranian Pamir Languages: Yidgha-Munji, Sanglechi-Ishkashmi and Wakhi* (Oslo 1938); *Report on a Linguistic Mission to North-Western India* (Oslo 1932); *Irano-Dardica* (Wiesbaden 1973); *Etymological Vocabulary of the Shughni Group* (Wiesbaden 1974).

As is natural, in many cases I propose explanations which differ from, or modify those given by Geiger. In some instances the new material at our disposal allows me to do this with great confidence, in many other cases the explanation remains uncertain. (...) There remains, however, a very great number of words, (...) of which I am not able to offer satisfactory etymologies. (...) In many – perhaps too many – such cases I have proposed a tentative etymology. (...) Many of these etymologies are certainly faulty; but I thought it would be more useful to propose something which may suggest better ideas to other scholars, than to confine myself to explanations which seem obviously correct. (EVP pp. 6-7)

But keeping in mind Samuel Johnson's famous maxim that "Dictionaries are like watches, the worst is better than none and the best cannot be expected to go quite true", he immediately set about assembling material for a second, enlarged and improved version. Georg Morgenstierne was as a very scrupulous and diligent scholar and soon became the leading authority in Pashto matters. Unfortunately, the task he had assumed took him more than 30 years and at the end he did not manage to finish it. Towards the end of his life he asked Neil MacKenzie to assist him. This collaborative work began in the early 1970s and came to a halt 8 years later, when Morgenstierne passed away. Due to some ill-fated circumstances the project was abandoned several times. MacKenzie was not willing to continue it alone and, what is more, "He was fond of describing etymological studies as a kind of disease" (sic!) as we read in the Foreword. Fortunately in 2001 J. Elfenbein from University of Mainz, who had already collaborated with D. MacKenzie in 1988-1990, determined to resume work on it and thanks to his and N. Sims-Williams united efforts the dictionary was eventually announced to the public.

As one might expect in such cases, comparison between the old work and its re-edition is unavoidable. The same or not the same? Improved or infected? NEVP is compiled according to the principle Georg Morgenstierne had introduced in his work: "It remains in all essentials Morgenstierne's work, in content as well as in style and presentation" (Foreword p. vi). It consists of Foreword (pp. v-viii): where history and preconditions for compiling the Dictionary (no principles for data selection), sources of data (Dialects) and phonemic transcription are presented, List of Abbreviations (pp. 1-4), References (pp. 5-6), the main part: entries arranged according to Latin alphabet (pp. 7-106), and Index (pp. 107-140). Apparently we got the same book, even with the same design and arrangement. Although when we take a closer look we see that there is no correspondence between old and new entries. The books differ from each other not only on number of entries: EVP has 1104, while NEVP 1212. But it does

not mean that NEVP has retained all entries and added about one hundred new ones. Unfortunately, it omitted many words labelled by Morgenstierne as 'doubtful' or 'uncertain', and this omission has been 'rewarded' by new words, mainly proper names, toponyms and hydronyms (most of them are loan words from Persian): *Androb* 'name of a village in the Zhob valley' (9), *Urgun/Wargun* 'Urgun in Katawaz' (10/89), *Ispilan* 'Isfahan' (11), *Čanaka-(dherī)* 'place-name' (20), *Gomal* 'name of a river' (27), *Ĝob* 'the Zhob river in Balochistan' (29), *Helmand* 'river in south Afghanistan' (35), *Kurama* 'the river Kurram' (39), *Matun* 'a town in Khost' (53), *Paṅto* 'the Pashto language' (67), *Xāš-rūd* 'name of a river flowing into the Hamun-i Hilmand' (96), and such startling loan words like *injin* (< Eng.) 'motor, engine, locomotive' (9), which of course can be mentioned in etymological dictionaries, but only when they present phonetic features of interest, or are borrowed from older forms of the language. The real problem for the user of both EVP and NEVP is that no information whether an entry is new, old or improved, is given. There is also no reference as to the pages in EVP. The words which remain have even received a different explanation in English, which might suggest a semantic change: e.g. *bāhū* 'an ornament for the arm or ankles' (EVP 14) > 'bracelet, anklet' (NEVP 14), but this apparent narrowing is nothing more than a pointless stylistic change. One must acknowledge that some etymologies (e.g. *ōbrāi* – *obrāy*, *wobrāy*; *āčawul* – *ačaw-*) have been satisfactorily improved. However, for some obscure and unfathomable reasons many words with fairly conclusive etymologies given in the EVP are lost in NEVP (e.g. *ūda*, *angūr*, *bāe*, *brēžan*, *būrai*, *bāša*, *buštēdal*, etc).

My next reproach does not consider the new transcription (consonants in the foreword are described, vowels omitted), which is better, but the planning of the entries. They are arranged according to the Latin alphabet, and this is rather strange when we deal with a dictionary of any Iranian language using Arabic script (layout retained from EVP). The editors explain:

For ancient languages, and few modern languages with a well-established orthographic tradition (e.g. Ossetic, Persian), a strict alphabetical order is followed. For all other languages, the same system is used as for Pashto, vowels being taken into account only as a secondary criterion. Except for Greek (and Bactrian) and Sanskrit, for which the traditional orders are used, the arrangement is based on the Roman alphabet. (Index p. 107)

It is true that Pashto has no established orthographic tradition, but there is no logical reason for arranging Pashto words according to the Roman alphabet.

Unfortunately, the book is not addressed to a broad audience that might be interested not only in Iranian, but other Indo-Aryan or Indo-European languages: “Generally I have restricted the comparisons to words found in Indo-Iranian, or to roots represented in these languages” (EVP 7). Lexical articles of the Dictionary only occasionally include information on the most archaic reconstructed Proto-Iranian prototype, its history and its reflexes in Iranian languages – old and modern. Thus one may say that the Dictionary does not introduce the Pashto etymological fund into the Indo-European etymological system as its sub-system. Instead of real etymology (i.e. morphology, cognates in other Iranian languages and dialects, tracing to Indo-Aryan or even PIE root) we find only comparisons (not numerous), which are perhaps enough for Iranologists, but not for other linguists, who may be interested in using the dictionary.

As it was already mentioned, Morgenstierne was honest in marking the EVP entries as: ‘doubtful’ or ‘uncertain’. There are about 221 such words. The present author proposes the following explanations for some of them:

**jēl** ‘ignorant’ – etym. unknown. – Cf. Skt *a-cetas-* ‘imprudent’ etc? (EVP 31), omitted in NEVP. Obviously a loan word from Persian, cf. Pers. (< Ar.) *jāhel* ‘ignorant’, *jahl* ‘ignorance’ etc. According to Pashto-Russian Dictionary *jēl* is a colloquial form of *jahl*, *jāhil* (PRS<sup>2</sup> 288, 306).

**kablai** ‘fawn’ – etym. unknown (EVP 32); **kablaiy** ‘young gazelle, fawn’ – Prob. LW < IA, cf. T 2750 *kapila-* ‘brown’ (e.g. Gujarati *koḷū* ‘reddish-brown’, *koḷī* ‘cow’, rather than < Ir *\*kaputa-ka-* (NEVP 38). This etymology, which looks acceptable (cf. Middle Persian *kabīg* ‘monkey’), still implicates further discussion. The word in question, i.e. Pashto *kablaiy* is also used in other meanings: ‘детёныш джейрана (gazelle’s kid); тулуп (sheepskin coat); кулик (sandpiper)’ attested in PRS 661, and therefore should not be explain without drawing a comparison to other Iranian and other Indo-European words denoting young<sup>3</sup> or brown animals and showing the root *kab-/qab-*: e.g. Pers. *kaval* < *\*kabal* ‘a baggage horse; leather of a large coarse sheepskin’ (Steingass 1063), Oss. *k’äbyla*, *k’äbila* ‘puppy’, *qybyl* ‘piglet, young’, *qäbül* ‘kid, young’ (Abaev I 621-2), Kurdish *qaban* ‘wild boar’ (cf. Russ. *кабан* ‘boar’, *кобель* ‘dog’, *кобыла* ‘mare’, Eng. *cub* ‘the young of certain quadrupeds’).

**kašai** ‘watch-man’ – etymology unknown (EVP 34); **kašay** ‘farmer irrigating or watching over the fields’, Waz. *kāšay* ‘watchman, chowkidar’ – Poss. *\*kaš-tra-ka*, *\*kaš-tar-*, cf. *kas-*: *kat-* ‘to look at, see’ (NEVP 41); the word either became specialized in meaning ‘watchman’ > ‘farmer’ (as it is suggested by NEVP) or derives from another root attested in Pers. *kištan* ‘to till, furrow,

<sup>2</sup> *Pushtu-russkiy slovar’*, M. G. Aslanov, N. A. Dvoryankov (eds.), Moskva 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also New Persian *kudak* ‘young, small baby’ < MP *kawādak* < *\*kvataka-/kbataka-*.

sow' < 'the one, who tills, furrows; farmer'; cf. Pashto *kiġt*, *kəġt* 'sowing (land)', *kəxay* 'the one who takes care of his sowing field; farmer' (cf. PRS 681-2).

*kažəl*, *kažəm* 'to dislike' – etym. unknown (EVP 35); *koğ-/kağ-* 'to disdain, regard as a bad omen', poss. denom. < *koğ*, *kağ*<sup>o</sup> as 'to look askance at' (NEVP 38). This is an evident loan word from Persian (< Ar.) *qazz* 'refusing, disliking; being distressed; one who abstains from everything impure or base', cf. *qozz* 'aversion to anything impure' (Steingass 968).

*mīna* 'love', *mayan*, pl. *mayən* 'in love, a lover' – etym. unknown. Cf. Av. *mayā-* 'pleasure, bliss', *mayah-* 'coition' etc? (EVP 44). In NEVP one can find a convincing etymology of *mina* < \**mainā-*, cf. Av. *maiiah* – 'pleasure, satisfaction' (NEVP 50). However, it is worth stressing that in Iranian languages there are also other cognates of this Avestan word, which denote pleasure and enjoyment: Sogd. *my'kcyh* 'happy', Middle Persian *māyīšn* 'copulation', Kh-S *ggumai* 'at will' < \**vi-māya* 'to experience pleasure' (cf. the present author's paper on the Iranian terms for 'love': How do Iranians love?, *SEC* 7/2002, pp. 79-84). The Editors of NEVP derive *mayən* 'loving, lover' form \*\**mayana* and conclude that: "comparison with Skt *smayana* 'smile' seems unlikely". It does, indeed (who has ever made such a comparison?), since this word should be rather compared with Skt *ménā* 'Kebse, Konkubine' (EWA II 379).

*pəš* 'blacksmith' (EVP 60); word omitted in NEVP. This word can be possibly explained in relation to Persian words denoting specialized professionals: *piš-gar* 'an artificer', *piše-gār* 'artisan' (cf. *piše* 'art, skill, work, craft, profession'). From the other side promising etymological relation with the subject of the blacksmith's work can be found in MP *pišīz* 'copper or nickel coinage'.

*rəbār* 'a go-between, match-maker' – etym. unknown. (EVP 63); omitted in NEVP. This very interesting word, also attested as: *ruybār*, *rəbār* (PRS 459, 458) I would derive from: \**ray-bar* < \**rada-bar* 'the one who makes arrangement', here with specialized meaning 'match-maker'. It is most likely connected with Av. *rāda-* 'Fürsorger', *rād-* 'zum guten ende führen, zustande kommen' and Middle Persian *rāy-ēn-ag* 'arranger', *rāy-išn* 'arrangement' (Skt *rādh-* 'Gelingen haben, Erfolg haben', Got. *ga-redan* 'Vorsorge treffen', Germ. *Rat*, *Ratgeber* 'adviser, counsellor'; KEWA III 54, EWA II 448, WP 1.75). A startling semantic parallel can be noticed in two Polish related verbs: *radzić* 'to advise' and *raić* 'to act as go-between', and what is more attention-grabbing in Pol. *rajfur* 'go-between, procurer' (its phonetic form being influenced by Yiddish *rajferke* 'procuress').

*bram* 'power, strength' – etym. unknown. (EVP 15); omitted in NEVP. The word is related to Av. *barəzəman* 'height', *bərazant* 'big, strong, high'

(Middle Persian *buland*, Oss. *bärzond*), Skt *brhant* ‘big, strong’ (cf. OInd *barh-* ‘kräftigen, groß machen’; EWA II 232, KEWA II 454).

Morgenstierne wrote: “Words of which I can suggest no explanation, but which may be genuine, are generally given, in order to bring them to the notice of scholars who may be able to explain them” (Introduction, p. 7). As we see, the editors of NEVP have solved this problem only to some extent. The present author would like to repeat Morgenstierne’s wish. Here are the words of unknown etymology (EVP) which still remain unexplained (missing in NEVP): *ōba* ‘splint in the leg of a horse’ (9), *ēman* ‘quiet, agreeable’ (10), *īnda* ‘mouthful, gulp’ (11), *arγund* ‘large knuckle-bone used in a game’ (11), *ōwa* ‘blister, pustule’ (13), *ōwī* ‘the mane of a horse’ (13), *ōžrai* ‘stomach of an animal’ (13), *ōžai* ‘necklace’ (13), *āžiyil* ‘to incite, stimulate’ (14), *bōrnə* ‘dredging, dried flour’ (15), *brās* ‘vapour, heat’ (16), *brēšnā* ‘brightness, brilliancy’, *brēšawul* ‘to illuminate’ (15), *brōs*, *brūs* ‘angry, irritated’ (16), *bōž* ‘harsh (sound)’ (16), *cōr* ‘crooked, crump’ (18) – Add. 107 cf. NP *čūl* ‘crooked’, *cwurlai* ‘chisel, gimlet’ (18), *cxēdəl* ‘to creep’ (19), *čiya* ‘noise, outcry’ (19), *čuyai* ‘blinkard’, *čūyai* ‘hump-backed’ (19), *čēšān* ‘young he-goat’ (20), *drūza* ‘stubble’ (22), *γana* ‘thorny branch, bramble’ (25), *γər* ‘leap, jump’ (26), *γur* ‘goiture’ (26), *γōz* ‘fat of the kidneys’ (29), *jabəl* ‘to pound, bruise’ (31), *jaban* ‘ill-bred, brutish; a clown, fool’ (31), *jaγēdəl* ‘to hang, swing’ (31) *kāy* ‘cunning, clever, acute’ (32), *kāra* ‘large, wooden vessel’ (33), *kšul* ‘a kiss’ (34), *kat* ‘heap, pile’ (35), *lōe* ‘big’ (36), *laγē* ‘rough, hoarse’ (36), *lāndai* ‘sheep or bullock fattened in the summer to be slaughtered and dried in the winter’ (37), *langa* ‘puerperal’ (37), *laγa* ‘mist, fog’ (38), *lāra* ‘saliva’ (38), *laγē* ‘trembling-fit, shivers’ (39), *lwēganda* ‘temples’ (40), *lwīna* ‘net, snare’ (40) – cf. KEWA II 175, *lwar* ‘high, lofty’ (40), *lwār* ‘coarse, thick, rough’ (40), *lwēžand* ‘sponger, parasite’ (41), *mūnai* ‘a plug made of rags for stopping the hole of a water tank’ (45), *məryai* ‘temple, front’ (47), *matə* ‘a wild boar’ (48), *ngīšēdəl* ‘to limp’ (51), *nūl* ‘sorrow, grief’ (52), *nandāra* ‘spectacle, sight, show’ (53), *narēdəl* ‘to be razed, demolished’ (53), *naskōr* ‘upside down’ (53), *pal* ‘small ravine’, ‘small river, pond’ (56), *pəl* ‘exempted, absolved, forgiven’ (56), *parγaz* ‘trembling (at commencement of small-pox)’ (58), *parsōb* ‘swelling’, *parsēdəl* ‘to swell, expand’ (59), *pīārma* ‘a kind of brace, rope, strap’ (59), *pāslawul* ‘to give in charge, consign, commit’ (60), *psōr* ‘breadth, latitude’ (60), *pəx* ‘scab’ (62), *raswalai*, *rasōlai* ‘corn, gall’ (64), *skōē* ‘sewing a seam, a stich’ (66), *skālwa*, *škālwa* ‘discourse, mention’ (66), *skān* ‘dark-complexioned’ (66), *spalmaī* ‘swallowwort, milk-bush, Asclepias gigantea’ (68), *spōnai* ‘ring-worm’ (68), *spōr* ‘dry, stale, withered; plain, simple, pure’ (68), *sparxai* ‘skewer, peg, packing needle’ (68), *spēšta* ‘the membraneous covering of the stomach, peritoneum’ (68), *spōxz*, *spōxza* ‘bladder, pubes’ (68), *spažma*, *spēžma*, *sažma* ‘nostril’ (69), *sat* ‘straight, flat, level’ (70), *stay* ‘sordid, avaricious; astringent, binding’ (70),

*stana* ‘recession, retirement’ (70), *stāra* ‘diffidence, timidity, misgiving’ (70), *sxā*, *xsā* ‘rotten’ (71), *šōe* ‘coarse, cotton cloth’ (72), *šlānda* ‘frog’ (74), *šarəl*, *šarəm* ‘to drive away’ (76) – cf. KEWA III 332, *šataī* ‘barbed arrow’ (76), *šxwal* ‘noise, uproar, din’ (77), *škēl* ‘tying a horse’s two feet, rope used for that purpose’ (78), *šandəl*, *šandəm* ‘to give’ (78) – cf. KEWA III 390, *šanza* ‘boil, sore’ (78), *šarā*, *šēra* ‘curse, imprecation, abuse’ (78), *šōr* ‘a bee’s, hornet’s, or ant’s nest’ (78), *šax*, *xax* ‘buried’ (79), *tānda* ‘fresh, green’ (81), *tūng* ‘young girl’ (81), *tandwai* ‘gristle, cartilage’ (81), *tōsand* ‘dry’ (84), *taxa* ‘tickling’ (84), *wučwulai*, *učarlai* ‘forehead’ (85), *walē* ‘why’ (86), *wēna*, *waina*, *ōēna* ‘white ant’ (87), *wāna* ‘heap of uncleaned grain’ (88), *wāranai* ‘tusk’ (89), *wrarēdəl* ‘to become lacerated, torn’ (90), *wīr* ‘expanded, spread’ (92), *wirā*, *warā* ‘gratis’ (92), *viōšta* ‘viashta, a Dauri unit of square measure’ (93), *wīš* ‘awake, watchful’ (93), *wašta*, *wušta* ‘joke, jest’ (94), *wiyār* ‘jealousy, envy’ (94), *wuzai* ‘short span (from thumb or finger)’ (94), *wzən* ‘kiln’ (95), *wužgyē* ‘saliva’ (95), *xūla* ‘mouth’ (96), *xarmandai* ‘wee, tiny’ (97), *xšan* ‘bit of bread’ (98), *xšān* ‘chewing the cud’ (98), *xāwra* ‘earth, dust, clay’ (99), *xūyēdəl* ‘to fester, suppurate’ (99), *xīžai* ‘large boulder’ (99), *xēž* ‘scab of a wound’ (99), *xūž* ‘lame, wounded’ (99), *yūm* ‘spade’ (100), *zambəl*, *jaməl* ‘to wink, blink’ (102), *zmōx(t)* ‘astringent, dry to the taste’ (102), *zanəl* ‘to insert, plant, stab’ (102), *zanza* ‘centipede’ (102), *zanai*, *žanai* ‘lad, boy’ (103), *zērai* ‘good news’ (103), *zērma* ‘preparation’ (103), *zārai* ‘the young of any animal’ (103), *zawa* ‘pus, matter’ (103), *zwam* ‘deficient, scanty’ (104), *žāna* ‘coaxing, flattery’ (105), *žawai* ‘individual, person’ (107).

The process of compiling dictionaries, especially etymological ones, takes time and requires both great labour and great enthusiasm. D. N. MacKenzie, J. Elfenbein and N. Sims-Williams – the ‘harmless drudges’<sup>4</sup> – entered upon a task of improving the old version and building further on the foundation laid by G. Morgenstierne. Of course, many new entries have been introduced, some of the old ones have been offered new etymologies, but many, perhaps too many, have been omitted. Moreover, one could ask what prevented the editors from referring to the books and dictionaries published in the West, Russia and Iran which are crucial for etymological studies on Iranian languages. Here I would mention only the fundamental work of Manfred Mayrhofer *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen* (Heidelberg 1986ff.), I. M. Stebline-Kamenskyy’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Wakhi Language* (St. Petersburg 1999), or B. Gharib’s *Sogdian Dictionary: Sogdian-Persian-English* (Tehran 1995). The editors could make a significant step forward in etymological studies on the language which is of the greatest importance for the study of Iranian linguistics. NEVP could be the first in the Iranian linguistics systematized fund of Pashto

<sup>4</sup> A friendly expression used by S. Johnson for lexicographers.

etymologies, but it seems that the lack of time or enthusiasm prevented it. Twenty five years have passed since the death of the great scholar, who had bequeathed his work to his collaborators. And at last we got the book, which should be a homage paid to him. Is it really? There still is a hope that Morgenstierne did not die intestate.

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