The Iranian words for ‘witness’ and the morphophonology of roots in *°ā(y)-

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While Avestan vikaiia- and Middle Persian (MP) Pahlavi gwk’y, Manichaean gwg’y ‘witness’ apparently continue Common Iranian *wi-kāya- (cf. also Armenian vkay), the New Persian (NP) word ści gwah as well as MP Pahlavi wyk’s and Parthian wyg’h presuppose early Middle West Iranian *wikāh with h instead of y. That this h goes back to *θ is now proven by *wi-kāθ(a)wan- in Bactrian ᵀῐƚすこと, and we thus arrive at a peculiar variation between *-kāya- and *-kāθa- as the second member of these synonymous and obviously related compounds.

The same variation is also found in at least two other compounds, cf. MP Pahl. cšm’h ‘notorious’ vs. Pahl. cšmk’y, cšmk’d-, Man. cšmg’h; MP Pahl. tšk’s, tš’s’ vs. tšk’d- ‘respectful’. In addition, similar compounds in *-kāθa- without attested variation are also found, e.g. *a-kāθa- ‘aware, knowing’ > MP Pahl. ‘k’s, Man. ’g’, NP ści aģah, loan-word Armenian akah; *ni-kāθa- ‘look, observation’ > MP Pahl. nk’s, Parthian ng’h, NP ści nīgah; *niš-kāθa- ‘contempt’ only in Armenian nškah-. Avestan kāθa- may also be of interest if it belongs here which will be discussed.

Nyberg (1974: 12f., 53f., 85f., 139) had already reconstructed *-kāθa- and derived this stem from the root of Sanskrit cāya- ‘to be aware’, assuming variation with a derivative *kāy-a-. However, this root was reconstructed as Proto-Indo-European (PIE) *kʷeij- by Mayrhofer (1992: 531 and in LIV² (p. 377f.) and it would then be difficult to explain the Iranian root shape *kā-. Now Weiss 2016 has shown that there is good evidence for a root shape PIE *kʷeij-, Proto-Iranian *kaHi-, and so we are apparently dealing with a „long diphthong” root showing variants with or without a final *i/y. The behaviour of such roots in (Indo-)Iranian will be investigated more closely, and it is shown that the distribution *-kāy-a- ~ *-kāθa- is probably regular.

References

