



Armenian stem classes and the Western-Middle Iranian oblique plural case

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ABSTRACT

So far, no definitive explanation has been given for the fact that Iranian loanwords in Classical Armenian are very often assigned to a morphological class reflecting the corresponding Old Iranian declension. This has rightly been regarded as problematic because the loanwords entered Armenian in the Middle Iranian period, when Western Iranian dialects had already lost final syllables. In this article, it is argued that the correspondence between Armenian and Iranian stem vowels could be inferred from the oblique plural case, which probably preserved traces of the Old Iranian declension still in the 1st century AD.

KEYWORDS: Armenian, Iranian, loanwords, stem classes.

1. Introduction

Since the very first steps of the research on Iranian borrowings in Armenian, scholars noticed that in a considerable number of cases the Armenian declension in which Iranian loanwords are integrated seems to reflect the corresponding O(ld) Ir(anian) stem vowel.

So, for example, Arm. *dew*, *diwac* ‘demon’, *ašxarh*, *°ac* ‘land’, *tačar*, *°ac* ‘palace’ correspond respectively to OIr. **daiva-* (OP *daiva-*, Av. *daēuua-*), **xšaθra-* (Av. *xšaθra-*) and **tacara-* (OP *tacara*); Arm. *axt*, *°ic* ‘sickness’, *baxt*, *°ic* ‘fortune’ and *hamboyr*, *hambowric* ‘kiss’ correspond respectively to OIr. **axti-* (Av. *axti-*), **baxti-* (Ved. *bhakti-*) and **hambaudi-* (Av. *baodī-* ‘smell’); Arm. *gah*, *°owc* ‘throne, place’, *xrat*, *°owc* ‘judgement, advice’ and *mog*, *°owc* ‘wise man, Magian’

correspond respectively to OIr. **gāðu-* (OP *gāðu-*), **xratu-* (Av., OP *xratu-*) and **magu-* (OP *magu-*)¹.

Although exceptions to these correspondences are not uncommon (e.g. Arm. *ganj*, *owc* ‘treasure’ vs. OIr. **ganza-*)², all scholars agree that the coincidences are so many that they cannot be attributed to chance, and therefore require a proper explanation. The problem immediately stands out as a quite knotty one, since it involves several unknown factors such as the dating of the oldest Iranian borrowings into Armenian and the chronology of the loss of ancient final syllables both in Armenian and in W(estern)M(iddle)Ir(anian) dialects. Depending on which of these phenomena is chosen as a reference point, quite different explanations of the above-mentioned correspondences can be formulated. So, for example, Marquart (1911) – mostly ignoring the overtly MIr. phonology of the loanwords – assumed that the preservation of final vowels could only be attributed to an OIr. language, and consequently dated the borrowings to the Achaemenid period (6th-4th century BC). On the other hand, Meillet (1936), much more aware of the latest acquisitions concerning the historical phonology and dialectology of MIr. languages, knew that the source of most of the Iranian loanwords in Armenian must have been Parthian, which came into contact with the Armenians in the Arsacid period (1st-3rd century AD). Accordingly, he concluded that the correspondences between Iranian and Armenian stem classes should be regarded as evidence of the preservation of final syllables still at that time both in Parthian and in Armenian. Only afterwards, due to independent developments, Armenian (including Iranian loanwords) and Parthian would have lost their final syllables reaching the historically attested stage. Since Meillet’s view was the most widely accepted in the literature³, it is worth quoting it in full:

¹ Cf. MEILLET (1900: 258ff.), MARQUART (1911: 292), MEILLET (1911-1912: 17). Recently, a rich collection of examples has been offered by OLSEN (2005).

² Cf. again OLSEN (2005) for a complete list and see below for a discussion.

³ Cf. JENSEN (1959: 19), HUYSE (2003: 53-54) and BELARDI (2006: 34), essentially repeating Meillet’s formulation, and PERIKHANIAN (1966: 21-22 fn. 7), OLSEN (1999: 858-861; 2005) and KORN (2013), who share Meillet’s overall reasoning but propose to identify a different source dialect preserving the OIr. final syllables (respectively ‘Middle Median’, an Eastern Iranian dialect and Late Old Persian). On Olsen and Korn’s view see further below.

La chute des finales, qui a été plus complète que celle des autres voyelles, est elle-même postérieure aux anciens emprunts à l'iranien; en effet les thèmes nominaux iraniens en *-a-*, *-i-*, *-u-* donnent, dans ces vieux emprunts, des thèmes arméniens en *-a-* (ou en *-o-*), *-i-*, *-u-* [...]: au moment où ont été faits les emprunts, les mots pehlevi n'avaient donc pas encore perdu leur finale, et c'est en arménien que les finales sont tombées en même temps qu'elles tombaient aussi sur sol iranien; l'absence d'une finale *u* dans *xrat* en pehlevi et en arménien résulte de deux développements parallèles et indépendants. (Meillet, 1936: 23)

2. *Remarks on relative chronology*

Despite being very influential, Meillet's theory cannot be correct, as was brilliantly shown by Bolognesi (1954: 123-131). In this article, which has been given too little attention by the scholarly public⁴, the author demonstrates by means of relative chronology that the loss of final syllables in Armenian (the so-called *Auslautgesetz*) must have preceded the oldest Iranian borrowings. Consequently, the Iranian loanwords must have entered Armenian when they had already lost their final syllables. Let us only quote the most compelling among Bolognesi's arguments:

- The phenomena of metathesis in obstruent + *r* clusters (cf. Schmitt, 2007²: 72-73) and vowel prothesis before *r* (cf. Schmitt, 2007²: 77 and Lazzeroni, 1958) must predate the Iranian loanwords and follow the Armenian *Auslautgesetz*, according to the following chronology:
 - a. loss of final syllables except in monosyllables;
 - b. beginning of vowel prothesis before *r*;
 - c. metathesis of obstruent + *r* clusters in internal and initial position (e.g. PIE **b^hrātēr* > Pr.-Arm. **erbayr* > Arm. *etbayr*);
 - d. oldest layer of Iranian loanwords, showing vowel prothesis before *r* (e.g. Arm. *eramak* "herd", MP *ramag*) but no metathesis (Arm. *brinj* "rice", Parth. *brinz*);
 - e. end of vowel prothesis before *r*.

⁴ The only scholar who recognized the correctness of Bolognesi's arguments is R. SCHMITT (1983: 98-101; 2007²: 32-33).

Point (a) cannot be exchanged with point (b), because otherwise a monosyllable such as PIE **trins* “three” (Acc.Pl.) would have first become Pr.-Arm. **eris* and then Arm. ***ers* rather than the attested *eris* (cf. already Grammont, 1908: 235-236). In addition, point (c) cannot predate point (b), because an initial group *rC-* would have hardly developed without the support of a prothetic vowel (cf. Grammont, 1908: 234-238, followed by Schmitt, 2007²: 78).

- The change of **-w-* to *-g-* in initial and internal position but not in final position only affects native Armenian words (cf. Kim, 2021: 375-378). This means that when the oldest Iranian borrowings entered Armenian, both the loss of final vowels and the change of **-w-* to *-g-* had already happened. The chronology of these phenomena must have been the following:
 - a. loss of final vowels in Armenian except in monosyllables: PIE **g^wou-* > Arm. *kov* “cow” (cf. Martirosyan, 2010: 372); PIE **g^wou-ijo-* > Pr.-Arm. **kowi* “butter”; PIE **h₂reyi-* > Arm. *arew* “sun”, Gen.Sg. PIE **h₂reyi-os* > Pr.-Arm. **arewi* (cf. Martirosyan, 2010: 135-138)⁵;
 - b. change of **-w-* to *-g-* in initial and internal position: PIE **uorǵo-* > Pr.-Arm. **worc* > Arm. *gorc* “work”; Pr.-Arm. **kowi* > Arm. *kogi*; Pr.-Arm. **arewi* > Arm. **aregi*⁶; no change in *kov*, *arew* etc.;
 - c. oldest layer of Iranian borrowings, preserving *-w-* in all positions: Arm. *vkay* “witness” < Ir. **vikāvyā-* (Parth. *wigāh*, MP *gugāy*, see Tremblay, 2003: 132-133); *hrawēr* “invitation” < Ir. **fravāida-*⁷; Arm. *dew* < Ir. **daiva* (see above).

⁵ The reconstruction of the exact PIE declensional pattern to which the antecedents of Arm. *kov* and *arew/areg* belonged is to some extent conjectural, as Martirosyan himself recognizes. However, what is relevant to our discussion is that **-w-* was preserved in Armenian when followed by one single syllable (or no syllable) in the proto-form, i.e. when it became word-final after the action of the *Auslautgesetz*.

⁶ This form is indirectly attested in fixed expressions and compounds such as *areg-akn*, lit. “eye of the sun” and *Areg k’alak* “city of the sun, Ἡλίου πόλις”, cf. again MARTIROSYAN (2010: 135-138).

⁷ Cf. HÜBSCHMANN (1897: 183) and BOLOGNESI (1960: 41), who quotes this form to exemplify some of the phonological traits distinguishing the oldest Iranian borrowings.

Any other order of these three steps would contradict the attested forms: a sequence (b) → (c) → (a) would yield ***kog* instead of *kov* alongside *kogi*; a sequence (c) → (b) → (a) (assuming that the Iranian borrowings entered Armenian preserving their OIr. stem vowel) would yield ***kay*, ***deg* and ***bragēr* etc.⁸.

These arguments seem to me quite compelling, and therefore I do not see any way to avoid Bolognesi's conclusion:

Da quanto abbiamo detto dovrebbe essere chiaro che in armeno la sillaba finale è caduta prima degli imprestiti iranici; e ciò ci porta a stabilire che le parole iraniche sono passate in armeno quando già avevano a loro volta perduto la sillaba finale. (Bolognesi, 1954: 131)

As a consequence, all the attempts to solve the problem under examination postulating the preservation of the OIr. final syllables in the source language (see above fn. 3) cannot be accepted. However, one must admit that the alternative solution proposed by Bolognesi is far less convincing than his *pars destruens*. His idea, shared by Schmitt (1983: 98-101 and 2007²: 32-33), is that the choice of the Armenian stem class for Iranian borrowings was oriented by the comparison with derivatives and compounds in which the stem vowel was preserved. So, the stem vowel of Arm. *goyn* 'colour' (< Ir. **gauna-*) should have been inferred from the comparison with Arm. *gownak* (< Ir. **gaunaka-*), and the same should have happened with the couples Arm. *xrat* ~ *xratowk*, *mog* ~ **mogowpet* (later Arm. *mogpet*) etc. Ingenious as it may be, this position has some «severe drawbacks», as was rightly pointed out by Olsen (2005: 474-475). First, it is hardly conceivable that a so subtle analysis could spontaneously take place in a living language. I do not see why uncultivated speakers should have felt the need to pursue such a comparative

⁸ KIM (2021: 377 fn. 29) states that the change of internal and initial *-w-* to *-g-* must have happened after the apocope of final syllables and «thus after the bulk of Iranian borrowings entered Armenian» – so, an order (c) → (a) → (b) – referring to OLSEN (2005) and KORN (2013) «for evidence from nominal stem classes for survival of final vowels at this stage». This statement clearly disregards BOLOGNESI's (1954) conclusions and contradicts the data, because Ir. loanwords were never affected by the change *-w-* > *-g-* whereas, in this perspective, they should have been treated just like native Arm. words.

survey to select the declension for Iranian loanwords rather than inserting them systematically into the most productive nominal class. In addition, Olsen observed that this explanation would not work for the great number of suffixes borrowed from Iranian (Arm. *-ak* < Ir. **-aka-*; Arm. *-ik* < Ir. **-ika-*; Arm. *-owk* < Ir. **-uka-*; Arm. *-kert* < Ir. **-kṛta-*; Arm. *-stan* < Ir. **-stāna-*) which are almost never further derived or used as first members of compounds in Iranian, and yet are regularly assigned to the *-a-* declension in Armenian, as expected from their OIr. etymology.

In the end, it seems that all the explanations hitherto proposed for the puzzling coincidences between Armenian and OIr. stem classes are either unconvincing or simply impossible, so that it is worth trying to formulate a new solution to this problem.

3. *A different approach to Iranian-Armenian morphological interference*

As a premise to my proposal, I would like to draw attention on the theoretical framework usually adopted in discussing Iranian borrowings in Armenian. As should have appeared from the previous discussion, all scholars dealing with our matter assumed that the Iranian nouns entered Armenian in one single form of their paradigm (WMIr. Dir.Sg. according to most scholars, optionally OIr. or Eastern MIr. Acc.Sg. and neuter Nom./Acc.Sg. according to Olsen, 2005 and Korn, 2013). Admittedly, the selection of a single *Leitkasus* – as it was defined by Frei (1958: 2-3) – is a very common pattern by which morphological adaptation of loanwords takes place⁹. Obviously, in this perspective, the selection of the target stem class could only be based on that single *Leitform* so that denying that OIr. final vowels were still preserved at the time of the borrowing equals to denying the possibility that any information concerning the OIr. declension was available to the Armenian speakers exposed to the Iranian words. However, this is not the only possible scenario. Especially in the context of a very close linguistic contact, implying a high degree of bilingualism – as was surely the case

⁹ Cf. SCHMITT (1973: 12ff.) and GUSMANI (1986²: 45-50).

in Arsacid Armenia¹⁰ –, it is not uncommon that speakers are exposed to borrowed words in all the forms of their paradigm and not in one single *Leitkasus*¹¹. And it is precisely in a somewhat collateral form of the nominal paradigm that lies the possible solution to our problem.

4. *Western Middle-Iranian oblique plural case*

As is well known, the earliest documents of Middle Persian and Parthian still show a two-case morphological system, opposing a direct case to an oblique case¹². In the singular only personal pronouns and nouns of relationship (“father”, “mother” etc.) preserve a trace of the oblique case¹³, whereas in the plural it is always marked. The most common ending for the oblique plural is *-ān*, going back to the OIr. Gen.Pl. **-ānām*, but there are a number of instances in which the residual forms *-īn* and *-ūn* are attested, going back respectively to the OIr. Gen.Pl. of *-i-* and *-u-* stems (**-īnām* and **-ūnām*). These residual endings in some cases are remnants of the OIr. declension of the noun (e.g. MP *zanīn*, Parth. *žanīn* < OIr. **janīnām*, Av. *jaini-* “woman”), but more often are analogically extended to nouns or pronouns which in origin belonged to different inflectional classes¹⁴. Since we

¹⁰ Cf. MEYER (2017: 255-339), MANCINI (2008, citing the most relevant works by G. Bolognesi on the subject and offering personal observations on Armenian-Iranian contact) and BAILEY and SCHMITT (1986).

¹¹ Cf. SCHMITT (1973: 13) and especially GUSMANI (1986²: 57): «In fine, là dove due comunità linguistiche sono in stretto e durevole contatto, che si traduce in un frequente scambio di prestiti, si stabiliscono delle formule di corrispondenza fisse (analoghe a quelle che regolano i rapporti sul piano fonologico) che vengono automaticamente applicate ogni volta che si tratta di assimilare dal punto di vista morfologico un nuovo prestito».

¹² On the WMIr. two-case system cf. MANCINI (2019: 542-545 fnn. 28, 29, 31); DURKIN-MEISTERERST (2014: 197-201); CANTERA (2009); SKJÆRVØ (2009: 205); MANCINI (1992); SUNDERMANN (1989a: 130); SUNDERMANN (1989b: 154-155); SKJÆRVØ (1983); RASTORGUEVA and MOLČANOVA (1981: 188-189); SIMS-WILLIAMS (1981: 165-171); NYBERG (1974: 278); and lastly BARTHOLOMAE (1923: 9ff.), largely outdated but still useful.

¹³ E.g. Parth. *az* “I” vs. *man* “me”; WMIr. *pid* “father” Dir.Sg. vs. *pidar* Obl.Sg., see the literature in the previous footnote.

¹⁴ See the literature in fn. 12. The plural forms with an ending *-īn* were already mentioned by MEILLET (1911-1912: 17) in relation to the problem under examination, although, as we saw above, he did not take them into account in his later works on the subject.

are dealing with a small group of examples, it is worth quoting them in full (1-2)¹⁵:

(1) Obl.Pl. ending *-īn*:

- *ādurīn* “fires” (IPa <’tryn>): opposed to IMP *ādurān* (<’twr’ny>), originally a *-r-* stem **ātar/ātṛ-*.
- *Arminīn* “Armenians” (IPa <’rmny’n>): opposed to IMP *Arminān* (<’lmn’n>). A less likely reading is *Arminyān*, which would have probably been written <’rmny’n> (cf. <’ry’n> *Aryān* “Aryans”).
- *āwādīn* “generations” (Ps <’wb’tyn>), uncertain etymology¹⁶.
- *brādarīn* “brothers” (Ps <AHYtlyn>), originally a *-r-* stem **brātar-*.
- *dušmenīn* “enemies” (IPa <dwšmnyn>, MPa <dwšm(y)nyn>): originally a *-u-* stem **dušmanyu-* (Av. *dušmainiiu-*), see also below *dušmenūn*.
- *frawardīn*, name of a day and a month of the Zoroastrian calendar (IMP, IPa <prwrtyn>, IMP <plwltyn>, BP <plwltyn’>): the preservation of the OIr. Gen.Pl. **frawṛtīnām* (Av. *frawuwašīnqm*) is probably due to the fact that the word was perceived as a self-standing religious term rather than an inflected form of *fraward*.
- *frazandīn* “children” (IMP <plcndyn>, MPa <frzyndyn>): continuing the OIr. *-i-* declension (cf. Av. *frazainti-*), see also below *frazandūn*.

¹⁵ An (almost) complete collection of the attested forms can be found in DURKIN-MEISTERERNST (2014: 199-201). In the subsequent list the following abbreviations are used: I(nscriptional)M(iddle)P(ersian); (Pahlavi)Ps(alter); B(ook)P(ahlavi); M(anichean)M(iddle)P(ersian); I(nscriptional)Pa(rthian); M(anichean)Pa(rthian). Unless otherwise indicated, the words are quoted according to DURKIN-MEISTERERNST (2004) for Manichean texts, GIGNOUX (1972) for Sasanian inscriptions, MACKENZIE (1971) for Book Pahlavi, and SKJÆRVØ (1983: 163-176) for the Pahlavi Psalter.

¹⁶ Cf. SHAKI (1988: 95-96) who discusses previous literature and proposes a comparison with an OP form **uvādā-* “genealogy” traditionally restored in DB IV, 90-91. Despite being quite charming, this solution is hardly satisfying, because the sequence <[...]v-a-d-a> in DB IV, 90 could be read and restored otherwise (see FATTORI, *forthc.*), and even if the restoration were correct, the expected MP outcome would have been something like **xwāy* (Ir. **hv-* > OP *uv-* but MP *xw-* as in OP *uvaipašiya-*, MP *xwēbaš* and OP *-d-* > MP *-y-* as in OP *rādi*, MP *rāy*).

- *harwīn* “all” (<hrwyn> common in MPa, very rare in MMP; BP <hlwyn'>): originally a *-a-* stem (Av. *hauruuā-*).
- *harwispīn* “all” (BP <hlwspyn'>): originally a *-a-* stem (Av. Gen.Pl. *vīspanām*).
- *hawīn* “they” (MPa <hwyn>, IPa <LHwyn>): analogical formation from the singular *hō* (< OIr. Nom.Sg. **hau*, OP *hau*, OAv. *huuō*, YAv. *hāu*)¹⁷. The original Gen.Pl. **avaišām* (OP *avaišām*, Av. *auuaēšām*) is continued by MP *awēšān*.
- *imīn* “these” (MPa, MMP <'ymyn>): analogical formation from the singular *im* (< OIr. **ima-* found in OP Acc.Sg. *imam*, YAv. *iməm*). The original Gen.Pl. was **aišām* (Av. *aēšām*).
- *kadagxwadāwīn* “houselords” (IPa <ktkhwtwyn>): most likely from a *-a-* stem **hvatāvya*-¹⁸.
- *pusarīn* “sons” (IMP <BRryn>, MMP <pwsryn>): originally a *-a-* stem (OP *puša-*, Av. *pušra-*). The *-ar-* suffix is certainly extended from other nouns of relationship such as *pid*, *°arūn* (see below), *brād*, *°arīn* etc.
- *rad(a)nīn* “jewels” (MPa <rdnyn>): loanword from Skt. *ratna-* “jewel”.
- *wxārīn* “sisters” (MPa <wx'ryn>) and *xwārīn* “id.” (MMP <xw'ryn>): originally a *-r-* stem **hvahar-*. The Obl. stem *wxār-/xwār-* to which the ending *-īn* is attached could trace back to the OIr. stem **hvahr-* with pre-desinential zero grade (cf. OAv. Gen.Pl. *dugədrām*, YAv. Gen.Pl. *duγδrām* “of daughters”)¹⁹, whereas in the other nouns of relationship the full-grade stem was analogically extended²⁰.

¹⁷ Cf. RASTORGUEVA and MOLČANOVA (1981: 205).

¹⁸ I find a derivation from **hvatāvya-* (cf. BENVENISTE, 1966: 29-30 with further literature) more convincing than **hvatāvan-*, often mentioned as an alternative (see e.g. BARTHOLOMAE, 1920 *passim*), since it would explain better the orthography with final <wy> in IPa and the palatal umlaut in the last syllable of Bactr. *χoαδηo*.

¹⁹ Cf. BARTHOLOMAE (1923: 4-5).

²⁰ MP and Parth. Obl.Sg. *pidar* < **pitarahya* (analogically built on Acc.Sg. **pitaram*) rather than from OIr. Gen.Sg. **pišrah* which would have yielded MP ***pis* (cf. OP Gen.Sg. *piša*) and Parth. ***pihr* (cf. Av. Gen.Sg. *pišrō*), cf. CANTERA (2009: 28-29). On the singular form BP *xwāhar/xwahār* cf. CANTERA (2009: 25 fn. 24).

- *xšahrdārīn* “rulers” (IPa <xštrdryn>): also attested as *xšahrdārān* (IPa <xštrdrn>, cf. IMP *šahryārān* <štrd’r’n>). Originally a *-a-* stem **xšaδradāra-*.
- *žam(a)nīn* “times, hours” (MPa <jmnyn>): it is not clear whether this form should be regarded as a different OIr. formation than <jm’n> *žamān* “time” (as BP *zaman* “hour” opposed to *zamān* “time”, cf. Panaino, 2017: 154) or as its Obl.Pl. case built attaching (non-etymological) *-īn* to an ancient oblique stem. This last option would support the idea that this noun was originally an ablauting *-n-* stem **jaman-* (Acc.Sg. **jamānam*, Gen.Sg. **jamanah* etc.) as suggested by Panaino (2017: 167-172).
- *žanīn* “women” (MPa <jnyn>) and *zanīn* “women” (MMP <zny>): these forms clearly continue the OIr. Gen.Pl. **janīnām* (Av. *jaininām*).

(2) Obl.Pl. ending *-ūn*:

- *ardāyūn* “righteous ones” (Ps <’lt’dwny>): originally a *-n-* stem, cf. OP *rtāvan-*.
- *dušmenūn* “enemies” (MMP, MPa <dwšmnwn>): this form probably continues the OIr. Gen.Pl. **dušmanyūnām* (Av. *duš-mainiunām*).
- *pidarūn* “fathers” (Ps <ptlwny>): originally a *-r-* stem **pitar-*.
- *frazandūn* “children” (Ps <plcndwn>): originally a *-i-* stem, see above.
- *mowūn* “Magi” (IMP <mgwny>): the form continues the OIr. Gen.Pl. **magūnām* (OP *magu-*).

5. *A novel solution to an old problem*

It seems reasonable to assume that the scenario attested in the Sasanian period was the last stage of a long-term process of substitution of the older endings *-īn* and *-ūn* with a general Obl.Pl. ending *-ān*, which was eventually going to displace them completely. This implies that a previous stage existed when the distribution of the endings *-īn* and *-ūn* was more consistent with the OIr. stem classes and less influenced by

analogy. If one considers that the earliest examples quoted above date back to the beginning of the Sasanian period (mid-3rd century AD), i.e. approximately two centuries after the establishment of the Arsacid rule over Armenia (mid-1st century AD)²¹, it does not seem unlikely that at the time of the oldest Iranian borrowings into Armenian the WMIr. Obl.Pl. endings still reflected the OIr. stem vowels to a great extent.

At a closer look, the nominal paradigms in pre-Sasanian WMIr. as they have just been described clearly appear to be very similar to the Armenian ones from a structural point of view. Both have a singular ‘direct’ case form (= Arm. Nom./Acc.Sg.) unmarked with respect to declension and a plural ‘oblique’ case form (= Arm. Gen./Dat./Abl.Pl.) which bears an unambiguous mark of the noun’s inflectional class²², as shown in the following scheme (Table 1).

	Pre-Sasanian WMIr. (Parthian)		Armenian	
	Dir.Sg.	Obl.Pl.	Nom./Acc.Sg.	Gen./Dat./Abl.Pl.
<i>-a-</i> stems	* <i>dāt</i> “law”	* <i>dātān</i>	<i>am</i> “year”	<i>amac’</i>
<i>-i-</i> stems	* <i>zan</i> “woman”	* <i>zanīn</i>	<i>ban</i> “word”	<i>banic’</i>
<i>-u-</i> stems	* <i>mog</i> “Magian”	* <i>mogūn</i>	<i>cov</i> “sea”	<i>covowc’</i>

Table 1. *Comparison between WMIr. and Arm. vowel stem paradigms.*

Thus, there is no difficulty in assuming that this comparability between nominal paradigms could grant the correspondence between Iranian and Armenian stem classes (WMIr. **mog*, **ūn* → Arm. *mog*, **owc’* etc.), without having to resort to the preservation of the OIr. final syllables or to other complex explanations.

²¹ Cf. SCHMITT (1983: 73-74).

²² Although Armenian had a more complex nominal morphology than WMIr., the Gen./Dat./Abl.Pl. was surely the most representative form with regard to the word’s declension, since the other case endings were either unmarked (Nom./Acc.Sg. -ø, Nom.Pl. -*k’*; Acc./Loc.Pl. -*s* for all vowel stems), ambiguous (Gen./Dat./Loc. -*i* both for *-a-* and *-i-* stems; Abl.Sg. -*ē* for *-a-*, *-i-* and *-ow* stems) or less frequently used (Instr.Sg. and Pl.). This special status of the Gen./Dat./Abl.Pl. is well exemplified by the modern lexicographical practice of providing this case form (rather than the Gen.Sg. as in Greek and Latin) beside the Nom./Acc.Sg. to synthetically indicate a noun’s declension.

In addition, the frequent instances of analogical extension of *-īn* and *-ūn* to nouns originally belonging to other inflectional classes in WMIr. represent a convincing starting point to explain the analogous mismatches attested in Armenian²³. Even if, as was claimed above, it is likely that in pre-Sasanian WMIr. the distribution of the Obl.Pl. endings *-īn* and *-ūn* was more consistent with the OIr. stem vowels, it cannot be excluded that analogy was already operating. Of special significance in this respect are the examples of extension of the ending *-ūn* listed above, since, as was pointed out by Olsen (2005: 477-478), a shift towards the *-u-* declension would be difficult to justify as an inner Armenian development²⁴.

If one accepts the proposed explanation, the preservation of the OIr. stem classes in Armenian does not only cease to be an unsolved problem, but also becomes a significant piece of linguistic evidence. On the one hand, it sheds light on a hitherto underestimated aspect of the Armenian-Iranian linguistic contact, i.e. the role played by the strong similarity of the WMIr. and Armenian morphological systems in favoring lexical borrowing²⁵. On the other hand, it represents a contribution of some weight to the reconstruction of the historical development of Western Iranian morphology from the Old to the Middle Iranian period, which is notoriously very difficult to research on due to lack of direct sources.

²³ This was already realized by MEILLET (1911-1912: 17): «mais déjà ces anciens pluriels n'étaient plus compris [...]. On conçoit donc que les emprunts arméniens n'aient pas tous exactement la forme des thèmes attendus».

²⁴ A possible objection to this is that the only extant examples of non-etymological extension of *-ūn* are found in Middle Persian, whereas the main source of Iranian loanwords in Armenian is Parthian. However, the isolated attestations of *ardāyūn*, *pidarūn* and *frazandūn* in the Pahlavi Psalter are hardly enough to assume that the analogical extension of *-ūn* was a typically Middle Persian feature. The lack of evidence for *-ūn* in Parthian could simply be due to our scanty documentation.

²⁵ Incidentally, one may observe that Armenian and WMIr. are also quite similar with respect to their verbal inflection – especially in the present indicative – and this is probably one of the reasons behind the great inclination shown by Armenian to borrow not only nouns and adjectives but also a significant number of Iranian verbs.

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