

On the term βίσταξ in a gloss by Hesychius*

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Questo studio prende in esame la voce greca βίσταξ e il corrispondente medio-iranico *bitaxš*, termine che, nel corso dell'ultimo secolo di studi, ha ricevuto grandissima attenzione da parte degli iranisti.

Il termine iranico è insolitamente ben documentato tanto nelle iscrizioni che nei testi in pahlavi librario. Nei tanti ragionamenti sulla carica iranica non si è riflettuto a sufficienza sul preziosissimo ancorché breve *testimonium* costituito da un lemma di Esichio.

Un'attenta ispezione del passo esichiano nel codice H consente di leggere, senza alcuno stravolgimento del testo tramandato, βίσταξ, ὁ β' [scil. δεύτερος] βασιλέως παρὰ Πέρσας, “b., il secondo re presso i Persiani.” Il lemma esichiano è, molto semplicemente, la trasposizione di una paretimologia del termine medio-iranico *bitaxš*, comprensibile unicamente se si muove da competenze linguistiche specificamente partiche. La forma in questione può infatti essere ricondotta ad un antico composto **bitya-xšaya-* “margravio; governatore in rappresentanza del re” trasformatosi inizialmente in *bitiaxš*, una forma che subì in alcune aree marginali una reinterpretazione tale da accostarla al part. **pātixšāh* “sovrano.” Successivamente, in seguito alla scomparsa di /i/ o /j/ nella seconda sillaba, nel II secolo EC appaiono le forme documentate a partire dal III sec. EC, non prive di oscillazioni, *bitaxš/pitaxš*.

This paper is devoted to the the Greek word βίσταξ and the corresponding Middle Iranian word *bitaxš*, a term that has received a great deal of attention from specialists in Persian studies over the last century.

The Iranian term is unusually well documented in both inscriptions and Book Pahlavi texts. The term *bitaxš* certainly indicated a very high dignitary of the Parthian court, later penetrated in the ranks of the Sāsānid court. Insufficient thought has been given, in the many discussions on this Iranian office, to the extremely precious, albeit brief, *testimonium* contained in a lemma of Hesychius.

A careful inspection of the Hesychius passage in ms H allows us to read, without any distortion of the transmitted text, “βίσταξ, ὁ β' [scil. δεύτερος] βασιλέως παρὰ Πέρσας,” “b., the second king among the Persians.” Hesychius' lemma is, quite simply, the transposition of an etymological reinterpretation of the Middle Iranian term *bitaxš*, which can only be understood in the presence of specifically Parthian metalinguistic expertise. Indeed the Parthian form can be traced back to the ancient compound **bitya-xšaya-* “margrave; governor representing the king”; it was initially transformed into *bitiaxš*, a form that was reinterpreted in some marginal areas in such a way that it was combined with Parthian **pātixšāh* “ruler.” Later, at the end of

* This paper is dedicated to Rüdiger Schmitt who had, with his seminal works, a profound influence on various fields of historical linguistics, including Iranian and Armenian studies. To his careful attention to lexicography and etymology we owe many of the important works which, as will be seen in this paper, do not cease to provide useful inspiration to those who follow in his footsteps. I am grateful to Maria Carmela Benvenuto for having revised the text and bibliographical references. Any responsibility or error obviously lies and remains with the author.