

## Sanskrit Nāka-s : Gothic Nēhw-s

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IN his important review of Heinrich Lüder's *Varuṇa* ('Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft' 101, 1951, p. 407 ff.) Paul Thieme defines the names of the parts of the sky in R̥gveda (p. 412) : *rócana-m* means, according to him, the unvisible part, *nā'ka-s* the part that is visible as the firmament; only later on this word ends by indicating the sky in general. In a foot-note (4) Thieme suggests that *nā'ka-* may be formed, like *úpāka-* and *ápāka-*, from a *nā* which exists no more in Sanskrit but is preserved in Slav *na* 'on' (from \**nō*, as shown by its Lithuanian correspondence *nuo*). His further comparison with Greek *nōton* 'back' is surely wrong; but the idea that *nā'ka-* may be formed like *úpāka-* *ápāka-* (cp. further *úpāñc-*, *ápāñc-* etc.; s. also my paper : *Latino provincia*, etc., 'Rendiconti dell' Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere' LXXIV, 1940, p. 148 ff.) is doubtless an illuminating one. Manfred Mayrhofer, *A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary* II, 1963, p. 149 mentions further etymologies that deserve no attention.

Now, if Thieme's etymology is right, then we must consider *nā'ka-* as originally an adjective : *nā'ka-*, like *úpāka-* 'approximate', *ápāka-* 'distant', may have indicated, to judge from Slav *na* and according to the significance of *nā'ka-* 'firmament' as opposed to *rócana-*, what is situated on something or near to something. And one cannot avoid to compare it with Gothic *nēhw-s* (German *nahe*, old English *néah*, Engl. *nigh*), of which Sigmund Feist, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Gotischen Sprache*, 3d ed. 1939, p. 373 rightly says that all extant

comparisons are not reliable. Formally Skt. *nā'ka-* and Goth. *nēhwa-* correspond exactly to each other, as descendants from an Indo-European *\*nēkʷo-*. It is possible that a formation of *\*nō* or better of I.-E. *\*nē*, *ne* in apophony with it, is contained also in Sanskrit *nédīyān nēdiṣṭhas*, Avestan *nazdyō* adv. *nazdišta-* (on which s. Mayrhofer, *op. cit.* p. 179), further in Oscan-Umbrian *nessimo-*, Old Irish *nessam* (cp. my *Lingue dell' Italia antica*, 2d ed. 1964, p. 138), etc.

We might now ask : has this Indo-European adjective *\*nēkʷo-* acquired his meaning 'firmament, sky' at first in R̥gveda? Or is it possible that this meaning did arise already in some Indo-European dialects? It is impossible to answer unhesitatingly this question; anyhow I would like to remember that Tokharian has a word, A *ñkät*, B *ñakte* which means 'god' and could be a derivation by suffix *-to-* from *\*nēkʷo-* : the palatalisation to be seen in *ñ* indicates that after the original *n* there was originally a front vowel, *ē* or *e*. In this case, *ñkät/ñakte* would have meant originally 'celestial, inhabitant of the firmament', as a cast of *\*deiwo-* (Sanskrit *devá-s*, Latin *dīvus deus*, Lithuanian *dievas*, etc.), which is a derivation of *\*dyew-* (Sanskrit *dyáuś* Greek *Zeús*, Latin *diēs* etc.) 'sky, heaven'.

