OLD IRISH BÉ 'WOMAN'  

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There are two reflexes of the PIE word for woman in Old Irish. The first, directly cognate with Gk. γυνή (Boeot. Basó), Go. gina, OCS žena, OPr. gena, Arm. kin, Toch. B kana, and perhaps Ved. jani-, is the irregular feminine noun ben, gen. mná, dat.–acc. mnai (archaic also bein), pl. nom.–acc. mná, gen. ban, dat. mnáb. Indo-Europeanists and Celtists need no introduction to the Old Irish declensional forms, which supply the decisive proof, if any were needed, that the corresponding PIE lexeme was not an ordinary eh₂-stem ('ā-stem') like the majority of derived feminines, but an ablauting proterokinetic h₂-stem with nom. sg. *g'ën-h₂ and gen. sg. *g'ën-eh₂-s.

Separate from this word, though obviously related, is the invariant neuter (later feminine) bé (n.–ih). Unlike ben, which is freely employed in all contexts where the meaning 'woman' or 'wife' is required, bé is a term of very restricted use, occurring mainly in poetic and legal language (cf. Bé Find (also Bé Bindi) 'White Woman' (name of the mother of Fréoich), bé bithmaith 'ever-excellent woman' (epithet of St Bridget), bé c(h)arna 'harlot', etc.). Since Meid 1966 (pp 271–2) and even earlier, it has been usual to refer bé to a PIE root noun, further evidence for which is sometimes adduced from the Hittite word for woman, nom. sg. SAL-(an–)a, gen. SAL-(na)–a, acc. SAL-(na)–an. Various paradigms, some with ablaut, have been proposed for this word in the protolanguage. Szemerényi (1963, 48), without explicit reference to Irish, envisages an original *g'ën/*g'енаos; Meid (loc. cit.) and Hamp (1979) assume a neuter *g'ën/*g'ена-s; Schindler (1972, 33) sets up an animar *g'ën/*g'ена-s, with *g'ён later replaced by *g'η (> *g'éen) in the nom. sg. under the influence of the neuter n-stems (cf. ainm 'name' < *-men < -*mηg, gen. anm(a)e < *-menes). The fullest and most recent discussion of bé is by Haréarson (1987, 115–37), who agrees with Schindler's PIE

*Here and below I follow the terminology of Eichner 1973, save that I use 'amphikinetic' for Eichner's 'holokinetic'. Outside Old Irish, it is just possible that the original alternation between *g'ën-h₂- and *g'ён-h₂-, is preserved in Ved. jani- vs. gán(h₂)- 'husband of a divine wife' (cf. GAv. gána- 'woman'), although jani- could also be a true i-stem with derivational ties to GAv. jani- 'woman' and Go. genis id. The Greek forms independently suggest an ablauting paradigm, inasmuch as γυνη and βαζω point respectively to preforms *g'éen-h₂- and *g'ён-h₂-, the latter with the 'Lindeman Law' treatment of the weak stem (cf. Lindeman 1965).

Aative bein is sometimes claimed for this word, e.g. by Hamp in the work cited below. Since bé < *g'éen is also the archaic accusative of ben, however, I see no reason not to regard its dative use as analogical, just as mnai, the inherited dative form, also serves as the ordinary accusative from the ninth century onwards.

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reconstruction but sees the transformation of *gʰ̣en/*gʰ̣en-s to a neuter n-stem as a late, perhaps purely Goidelic development.

This approach, which we may call the 'root noun' theory, is not entirely satisfactory. In general, suffixed noun/root noun doublets like the putative *gʰ̣en-h₂: *gʰ̣en-were a rarity in Proto-Indo-European. The parent language had no noun roots *gʰ̣es- 'hand', *pheh₂- 'fire', or *der- 'tree' beside the familiar suffixed *gʰ̣es-(o)r, *pēh₂-y, and *dōr-u; cases like Hitt. wed- 'water' beside suffixed *uwd- are altogether atypical.1 Even on the assumption that a h₂-stem and a root noun meaning 'woman' once existed side by side, it is hard to believe that Old Irish, a language of the early Middle Ages, would have been able to keep the two stems distinct, despite their near homophony and virtual synonymy, for a period of over four thousand years.2 The Schindler-Haroarson version of the root noun paradigm, though perfectly reasonable from an IE point of view, raises a more specific question as well: if the continuant of the nom. sg. *gʰ̣on (> late PIE *gʰ̣en-o) in fact escaped replacement by the continuant of *gʰ̣en-h₂, why was it ultimately treated so differently from the similarly formed *kúd(n) 'dog', which gave OIr. că?

Hittite, for its part, offers only the shakiest support for the reconstruction of a root noun. The nom. sg. SAL- (an- )za, with its sigmatic ending, is obviously secondary, and its immediate antecedents cannot be uniquely determined.3 A weak case form like the gen. sg. SAL-na-aš could, it is true, go back to a virtual *gʰ̣en-os; but there are other, less dramatic alternatives, such as the possibility that it reflects a preform *gʰ̣en-h₂-os (> *kwannanš)?, with analogical generalization of the strong stem *gʰ̣en-h₂. The Luvian word for woman, represented by Cun. Luv. wana-and wanatti- and by Hier. Luv. FEMINA-nati- (cf. Starke 1980), is itself problematic, but clearly does nothing to strengthen the case for a pre-Anatolian *gʰ̣en beside *gʰ̣en-h₂.

In fact, the hypothesis of a PIE root noun meaning 'woman' is completely superfluous; as we shall see, both OIr. bé and Hitt. SAL- (an- )za can be adequately, and indeed elegantly, explained on the basis of the familiar protorokteric stem *gʰ̣en-h₂/*gʰ̣en-h₂. The key to a correct understanding of bé and SAL- (an- )za is the nom. sg. *gʰ̣en-h₂. It is usually taken for granted that this form would first have developed to *gʰ̣en in the European branches of the family, and that *gʰ̣en- or *gʰ̣enh (the latter with substitution of *-ā for *-a) was the direct source of ben and most of its extra-Celtic counterparts. This assumption, however, is no longer tenable. As noted by Nussbaum (1986, 129f.) with reference to Szemerényi (1979, 155), there is good reason to believe that the final laryngeal in PIE sequences of the type *-VRH# was not vocalized in the IE daughter languages, but was lost within the parent language with compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel. Herein lies the explanation for the *-VR# sequences so characteristic of PIE neuter collectives: in origin, forms like Gk. ὔδοον 'water', GAv. aïrār 'days', OCS ime 'name' (< *-ēn) and Gk. harmotion 'hearts' (< *-ōn + secondary *-ō in *-ā) have the same etymological *-h₂ as ordinary thematic neuter plurals of the type *jug-eh₂ 'yokes' (= Ved. yugā, Gk. χυγα). The change of *-VR# to *-VR# in collectives corresponds exactly to the treatment of *-VR# sequences before original final *s in the nom. sg. of animate nouns. Here too the result is an apparent lengthened grade, as, e.g., in *ph₂-tēr < *-ter-s 'father' (Gk. πατέρι), *h₂-kē-mō(n) < *mon-s 'stone' (Ved. āśma, Gk. ἄμμων), *dēgh-h₂-m < *om-s 'earth' (Hitt. ʾēkāna, Gk. ἄθα), etc.

The late PIE nom. sg. of *gʰ̣en-h₂/*gʰ̣en-h₂, then, was *gʰ̣en. To the extent that the daughter languages point to preforms of the type *gʰ̣en or *gʰ̣en-s, these are invariably due to analogy with other forms within the paradigm. Thus, Balto-Slavic, Germanic and dialectal Greek created a non-ablauting hybrid stem *gʰ̣enā- (later extended to *gʰ̣enā-n in Germanic) by blending the weak stem *gʰ̣enā- with the *gʰ̣en- of strong cases like the acc. *gʰ̣enām < *gʰ̣en-h₂-m. The Common Tocharian nom. sg. *sānā (> A ʾām, B ʾāna) reflects a virtual *gʰ̣enā, which was evidently back-formed from the acc. sg. *gʰ̣enām on the model of the derived feminines in *-ā, acc. sg. *-jām (i₃-stems, the 'devi'-type of Indo-Iranian; cf. B lānisa 'queen', tālānisa (fem.) 'miserable'), etc. Similarly, the *s of Ved. jānīḥ makes it likely that this form, if not simply an old i-stem (see note 1), was created as a pendant to the acc. sg. jānīm < *gʰ̣en-h₂-m. This must have been the origin of OIr. bein as well: after the Common Celtic shortening of long vowels before final nasals, the inherited acc. sg. *gʰ̣enām (> OIr. bein) would have come to resemble the acc. sg. of a normal ā-stem (type *teuā: *teuām < *-ām, OIr. tuath: tuatha 'tribe'), and a new nom. sg. *gʰ̣enā was substituted for the anomalous reflex of *gʰ̣en.8

The only systematic exceptions are cases like *yɛt-: *yɛt-er- 'years', *h₂ek-: *h₂ek-es- 'eye', *kr(e)uh₂-: *kr(e)uh₂- 'yoke', etc., which bear witness to a formerly productive pattern of deriving neuter s-stems from root nouns.

1It goes without saying, of course, that *gʰ̣en-h₂ may have been derived from a root noun at some remote stage of pre-Proto-Indo-European, although there is certainly no reason to think that all suffixed nouns originated in this way. What is important is that *gʰ̣en-h₂, already meant 'woman' in the parent language: the idea that it was a collective or an abstract in late Proto-Indo-European, and thus contrasted semantically with the hypothetical root noun, finds no support in the actual data.

2Indeed, given our still very imperfect knowledge of the conditions under which laryngeals were vocalized in Anatolian, the possibility cannot even be excluded that a secondarily sigmatized preform *gʰ̣en-h₂-s would have given SAL- (an- )za directly.

3Of Szemerényi 1970, 109. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Jasanoff 1988, note 3), independent evidence for lengthening before original final *s is furnished by the ending of the 3 pl. perfect. This morpheme appears in the zero-grade as *-sr (cf. GAv. -srāi and Ved. -ah); the corresponding full-grade, however, is not the expected *-er but *-ēr, with loss of *-s and lengthening (cf. Lat. -ēr (< *-ēr), probably also Hitt. -er). The absence of *-s in Yav. -ārā, ara (< *-t) is due to the influence of *-ā.

4Subsequent to the creation of the nom. sg. *gʰ̣enā, the pre-Toch. weak stem *gʰ̣enā (i.e., *gʰ̣en- × *gʰ̣en) was extended to the acc. sg. also, whence Toch. B obl. sânā.
Let us now follow the fortunes of *g'ën, first within Proto-Indo-European itself, then in Anatolian and Celtic. According to the general view, the *-n of the nom. sg. of animate n-stems was lost within the parent language, thus producing the distinctive inflectional pattern of Ved. āsma, gen. āsmanah, OIr. cú, gen. con, and Lat. homō 'man', gen. humanis. As Haroarson remarks, however (1987, 119ff), several IE languages appear to show the loss of *-n after *-ō but not after *-ē. He cites as examples the contrast between Lat. homō and liēn 'spleen' and that between Hitt. hāras 'eagle' (*<-*-ō + s) and šum(m)anza 'cord' (*<-ēn + s; cf. Gk. ἤπειρον 'membrane'), apparently unaware that the same observation, together with the same analysis of šum(m)anza, was made earlier by Melchert (1983, 9f.). Haroarson, however, goes further than Melchert, for while the latter expressly refrains from projecting the pattern *-ō: *-ēn back into the parent language, Haroarson attaches the label 'uridg.' to his preforms *h₁ér-ō (> hāras) and *suh₁-mēn (> šum(m)anza). Since the point is an important one, and since Haroarson's formulation is less than fully explicit. It may be useful to state my own views on the matter. The PIE rule of final n-loss, I believe, in fact applied only after *-ō: the absence of *-n in homō and hāras[5], and its presence in liēn and šum(m)anza[20], faithfully reflect a genuine late PIE difference between amphikinetic *-ō and hysterokinetic *-ēn. Latin and Hittite are by no means the only languages that preserve this pattern. Animate n-stems in Old Irish may end in (leniting) -(a)e, -er-o or -er- which point to *-ō (cf. cú 'dog', toimiu 'opinion', brithem 'judge'), or in (geminating) -(a)e, which goes back to *-ens, i.e. *-ēn + s (cf. menmae 'mind'). Slavic has masculine n-stems in -g(≤*-ō (type OCS kaṃy 'stone'), with the same ending as Lith. akmūd 'id.'; cf. Jasanoff 1983, 139–42), and neuter n-stems, originally collective, in -e (<-*-ēn (type OCS ime 'name'; cf. also Proto-Slavic kore (masc.) 'root'). Even Indo-Iranian appears to preserve a trace of *-ēn in the Avestan neuter plurals in -qn (cf. GAv. dānmān 'bonds', YAv. nāmnān 'names'), which are difficult to explain by analogy but which can be directly equated with the Slavic ime-type.

Emerging from Proto-Indo-European with its nasal still intact, *g'ēn was inherited into the nascent daughter languages as the nom. sg. within

Rather than link the loss of the *-n directly to the timbre of the preceding vowel, of course, we could relate it to the position of the accent. Since amphikinetic stems were attested on the root syllable in the nom. sg. (*dedēh-omā, etc.) while hysterokinetic stems were suffixed-accented (*phār, etc.), it is possible that there was once a pre-PIE rule

\[ n → n + V → # . \]

Under such an interpretation the absence of *-n in *ēkā 'dog' would be analogical.

As Alan Nussbaum (pers. comm.) reminds me, the existence of an Indo-Iranian class of n-stem neuter plurals in *-ān would make it much easier to understand the analogical processes that led to the creation of the familiar Sanskrit type in *ānī.

a paradigm that also incorporated the normal strong stem *g'ēṇh₂-, the weak stem *g'nāh₂-, the ‘Lindeman’ weak stem *g'nāh₁-, and the ‘weakest’ stem *g'nāh₃-. It is not surprising, given this degree of allomorphy, that the old nominative was eventually replaced in the majority of IE traditions. It survived, however, in Anatolian and Celtic, where it gave rise to the forms that have been misinterpreted as reflexes of a root noun. In Hittite the treatment of *g'ēn was exactly the same as that of *suh₁-mēn: *s was added as an ancillary mark of the nominative on the model of the other animate stem types, and the resulting complex *-ēn-s was converted by regular sound change, or by a combination of sound change and analogy, to -anz-[-ants]. The case forms SAL(-na)-ā, SAL(-na)-an, etc. are read [gwantsanas], [gwantanas] by Haroarson (1987, 122), who convincingly argues for an oblique stem *kwanzan-, parallel to the šum(m)anza- that serves as the oblique stem of šum(m)anza.11

It was in Celtic that *g'ēn had its most remarkable development. Here there were two relevant early sound changes: the general raising of *ē to *ī seen, e.g., in the word for ‘king’ (OIr. ríg: Lat. rēg-); and the shortening of long vowels before final nasals, as seen, e.g., in the acc. sg. of ď-stems (cf. OIr. tuath < *tōān < *teuām). Strictly speaking, we have no independent evidence for the relative ordering of these rules, since we have no certain instances, other than *g'ēn itself, of the final sequence *-śm or *-ēn in Celtic. But we do know that shortening before nasals was earlier than the Common Celtic change of *ō to *ū in final syllables, since the ending of the gen. pl. (pre-Celtic *-ām) failed to induce raising or u-epenthesis in Old Irish (cf. fer (n-), rather than *fur (n-), ‘uirorum’). Now the change of *ē to *ī, the raising of *ś to *ū in final syllables, and the lowering of ā to ā in other environments (cf. OIr. dān ‘gift’ < *dā-), were all aspects of a single process—the reduction of the PIE system of five long vowels to the simpler ā:ū system of early Common Celtic. There is thus good reason to suppose that these rules were at least roughly contemporaneous, and that the raising of *ē to *ī, like the more restricted raising of *ō to *ū, was a later change than the shortening of *-VN# to *-VN#. This chronology is in fact confirmed by the behaviour of *g'ēn, which developed via *g'ēns to the attested bē.

The reinterpretation of *g'ēṇbē as an invariant neuter was due to the phonetic accident that its final *-ēn happened to coincide with the reflex of *-g in the nom.-acc. sg. of neuter n-stems (cf. ainm < *-men < *-m). Thanks to this identity, the introduction of the analogical nom. sg. *g'ēns did not completely eliminate the older *g'ēn; rather, the latter form became the trigger for the creation of a new gen. sg. *g'ēns (> OIr. bē) and dat. (< loc.) sg. *g'ēn(i) (> OIr. bē) on the model of the neuter
The result was the emergence of two separate paradigms, one (ben, mna, etc.) consisting entirely of inherited forms secondarily equipped with a new nom. sg., and the other based on the inherited nom. sg. bé (< *g'ên < *g'ên-h₂), secondarily provided with the morphological trappings of a neuter n-stem. The relevant history can be summarized in the following table, in which analogically created forms are shown in italics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIE I</th>
<th>PIE II</th>
<th>Pre-OIr. I</th>
<th>Pre-OIr. II</th>
<th>Pre-OIr. III</th>
<th>OIr.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nom.</td>
<td>*g'ên-h₂</td>
<td>*g'ên</td>
<td>*g'ên</td>
<td>*g'ên-h₂</td>
<td>1. *g'ên-h₂</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gen.</td>
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<td>*g'ênch₂</td>
<td>*g'ên</td>
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<td>1. *g'ên</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dat.</td>
<td>*g'ên-ch₂</td>
<td>*g'ênch₂</td>
<td>*g'ên</td>
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<td>1. *g'ên</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acc.</td>
<td>*g'ên-h₂-m</td>
<td>*g'ênh₂-m</td>
<td>*g'ênnam</td>
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<td>Nom.</td>
<td>2. *g'ên</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gen.</td>
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<td>*g'ên</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dat.</td>
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<td>*g'ên(i)</td>
<td>*g'ên(i)</td>
<td>bé</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acc.</td>
<td>*g'ên</td>
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<td>*g'ên</td>
<td>*g'ên</td>
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The analysis presented here is more economical than the root noun theory, which attributes the ben: bé contrast to the supposed existence of a pair of doublets, one a h₂-stem and the other a root noun, in Proto-Indo-European. Rather than simply taking the two Irish words at face value and mechanically projecting them back into the protolanguage, we have explained ben and bé as a pair like NE shade and shadow or Lat. deus and dīus — secondarily differentiated forms abstracted from the morphophonemic variants of a single underlying stem. The suggested derivation of bé from nom. sg. *g'ên-h₂, with wider consequences: it strengthens the case, already substantial, for positing a PIE *-VRH# → *-VR# rule; and it adds to the evidence that *-ēn, unlike *-ēn, retained its final nasal in the parent language. More prosaically, it also reaffirms a conclusion which few scholars have doubted in recent years — that bé, no less than the more transparent ben, is an important and archaic word with an instructive history of its own.

REFERENCES