Remarks on the expression of passive agent in Old Iranian Languages

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The paper is devoted to the analysis of the different strategies to express the agent in passive constructions in the Old Iranian Languages (Old Persian and Avestan) in order to understand
a) under what conditions passive agents are marked with a case marker and which one is preferred for adposition;
b) whether there is a correlation between the type of verbal marking of the passive, synthetic vs. periphrastic, and agent encoding.
The Ancient Iranian languages seem to function differently.
Any examination of the expression of Agent with the passive in Old Persian is quite problematic due to the scarcity of occurrences. The encoding of the Agent with inflectional passive verbs is generally believed to occur through the prepositional phrase with *hacā* and the ablative, while genitive is preferred as case marking with the past participle. In this paper it will be shown that the passive agent is expressed generally by a genitive with both synthetic and periphrastic passives and the use of *hacā* with ablative is restricted to ditransitive verbs.
In Avestan, as in Ancient Indian, many cases can be used to express the agent in a passive construction but with the following restriction: the dative is found exclusively in a context involving nuances of possibility or necessity, the genitive occurs only with past participles in *-ta-* (although in some cases it cannot be morphologically distinguished from an ablative or a dative), but the most common case for denoting the agent in a passive construction is clearly the instrumental.
The comparison of the Old Indic situation with the one in Old Iranian clearly shows that the use of cases is already more restricted in Old Iranian, and within Old Iranian more so in Old Persian than in Avestan. Thus, we can see a clear hierarchy of grammaticalization of the use of cases to express the agent in passive constructions: Old Indic shows the most archaic situation closest to Proto-Indo-European, while Avestan already reduces the number of possible constructions. Old Persian shows the most restricted choice of cases to express the agent in passive constructions, thus being the most 'progressive' language of the three.

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