The historical derivation of Gothic aba ‘husband’

1. Meaning
Gothic *aba* translates Greek ἄνδρα ‘male person; husband’, and is in almost every case paired with *qēns* or *qinō*, both meaning ‘woman, wife’.

2. Germanic cognates
2.1 The most common meaning of Old Norse *áf* is ‘grandfather’, and comes from *awner-*, cf. Gothic *awō* ‘grandmother’. A less common meaning is ‘male relative in direct line; male relative with hereditary status’, and this should correspond to Gothic *aba*.
2.2 *aba* corresponds formally to a male name *Aban-* in West Germanic (OE *Afa*, OS *Avo*, OHG *Abo*).

3. Morphology

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<th>Sg</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nom</td>
<td><em>ab-</em></td>
<td><em>ab-ans</em></td>
<td><em>att-</em></td>
<td><em>att-ans</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acc</td>
<td><em>ab-an</em></td>
<td>–</td>
<td><em>att-an</em></td>
<td><em>att-ans</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dat</td>
<td><em>ab-in</em></td>
<td><em>ab-nem</em></td>
<td><em>att-in</em></td>
<td><em>att-am</em></td>
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<td>Gen</td>
<td><em>ab-ins</em></td>
<td><em>ab-nē</em></td>
<td><em>att-ins</em></td>
<td><em>att-anē</em></td>
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<td>Voc</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td><em>att-a</em></td>
<td><em>att-ans</em></td>
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The *n*-stem suffix shows up as -n- in the dat./gen.pl.
Parallels:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c}
& \text{auhsa}^* \text{\textquoteleft} \text{oix\textquoteright} & \text{manna} \text{\textquoteleft} \text{man\textquoteright} (\text{with generalized \text{-nn-}}) \\
\hline
& \text{Sg} & \text{Pl} & \text{Sg} & \text{Pl} \\
\text{Nom} & - & - & (\text{manna}) & \text{man-s} \\
\text{Acc} & \text{auhs-an} & \text{auhs-ṇ̄ns} & (\text{manna}) & (\text{mans}) \\
\text{Dat} & \text{auhs-ṇ̄} & - & \text{man-n} & (\text{mannam}) \\
\text{Gen} & - & \text{auhs-nē} & \text{man-s} & \text{man-nē} \\
\text{Voc} & - & - & (\text{manna}) & - \\
\end{array}
\]

4. Germanic \text{n-stem}

4.1 Some Germanic \text{n-stems} with \text{*-n-} in the weak cases have been generalized differently in the daughter languages, either by replacing \text{*-n-} with full grade forms, or treating \text{*-n-} as a part of the stem and re-adding an \text{n-stem} suffix or another vocalic suffix (\text{*-a-} or \text{*-u-}):

\text{*CeC-an-/*CeC-n-} → 1. \text{CeC-an-} or 2. \text{CeCn-} + suffix \text{-an/-a-/u-}.^1

a) PG \text{*ber-an-/ber-n-} ‘bear’ → 1. OHG \text{hero}, Old Swedish PN \text{Björi}, 2. ON \text{Bjarni, björn}.
b) PG \text{*ar-an-/ar-n-} ‘eagle’ → 1. ON \text{ari}, OHG \text{aro}, 2. OE \text{earn}, ON \text{ørn}, OHG \text{arn}.
c) PG \text{*sef-an-/seb-n-} ‘mind’ → 1. ON \text{sefi}, 2. ON \text{sjafni}.
d) PG \text{*hers-an-/herz-n-} ‘head, skull’ → 1. ON \text{hjarsi} ‘crown of the head’, 2. ON \text{hjarni} ‘brain’.
e) PG \text{*urz-en-/urz-n-} ‘the male’ → 1. ON \text{orri} ‘heathcock’, 2. Old Swedish \text{orni} ‘boar’.

4.2 By the same process as in 4.1, the root final consonant could assimilate to the following \text{*-n-} to form a geminate. To this geminate, the \text{n-stem} suffix could be re-added:

\text{*CeC-an-/*CeC-n-} > *\text{CeCC-} → 1. \text{CeC-an-} and 2. \text{CeCC-an-}.^2

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^1 Examples from Hreinn Benediktsson (1968) ‘On the inflection of the \text{n-stems} in Indo-European’ in \text{Norsk tidsskrift for sprogvitenskap} 22, p. 11.
5. **The PIE *n*-stem**

This came in three types: 1. Primary 2. Individualizing (‘Cato-type’) 3. Possessive (‘Hoffmann-type’). All had two accent/ablaut-classes, amphikinetic and hysterokinetic.

a) Primary amphikinetic: Vedic ātmá, loc.sg. tmán ‘soul’, Latin caró, cārnis ‘meat’.

b) Primary hysterokinetic: Greek ἀγή, ἀγώνς ‘lamb’, Vedic ukśā, ukṣnāh ‘ox’.

c) Cato-type amphikinetic: Latin cātus ‘sharp’ → Catô, -ōnīs ‘the sharp one’.

d) Cato-type hysterokinetic: Greek ἀγιστός ‘best’ → Ἀγιστήν, -ήνος ‘the best one’.


f) Hoffmann-type hysterokinetic (athematic): *koni- ‘freshness’ → kanyā, kāni- ‘virgin, girl’.

g) Hoffmann-type amphikinetic (thematic): Latin nāsus ‘nose’ → Nāsō, -ōnīs ‘having a (big) nose’.

h) Hoffmann-type hysterokinetic (thematic): Greek φαλλός ‘penis’ → Φαλλήν, -ήνος, an epithet of Dionysus.

6. **Germanic continuation of the PIE *n*-stems**

Based on the reconstructable endings of the Germanic *n*-stem, only types a, b and c can be established for Proto-Germanic.

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6.1 Type a (primary amphikinetic) shown by Proto-Norse nom.sg. <-o>, OHG -o < *-ō, OE, Gothic, PN acc.sg. -an < *-on-m, OE nom.pl. -an, Gothic -ans < *-on-es, and by word correspondences such as Germanic *arō, *arniz, Hittite haras, haranas < *h₂érō, h₂ernēs ‘eagle’.

6.2 Type b (primary hysterokinetic) shown by Proto-Norse nom.sg. <-a> and possibly Gothic -a < *-ē(n) and by word correspondences such as Germanic *uksē(n), *uksniz, Vedic uksā, ukṣnāḥ < *h₂uksēn, *h₂uksnēs ‘ox’. The weak cases would be the same as type a, i.e. with *-n-.

6.3 Type c (amphikinetic thematic Cato-type) shown by the heavy use of -an- in all weak cases in North and West Germanic, and by the individualizing derivation being the prime function of the n-stem in Germanic, also giving Germanic its so-called ‘weak’ adjective.

7. Germanic origin of *aba

7.1 Type c is generally claimed to have acquired suffix ablaut in analogy with type a and b, but the evidence turns out to be scanty. Traditional prime examples are *hasan-/hazan- ‘hare’ and *beran-/bern- ‘bear’. *hasan-/hazan- belongs to type c, being individualized from *kasō- ‘grey’, but the Germanic n-stem exhibits only accent mobility, no suffix ablaut. *beran-/bern- is said to be individualized from the adjective seen in Baltic *bʰēro ‘brown’ (Lithuanian bėras), but the Baltic adjective and the Germanic n-stem (and numerous other IE formations) are better taken as derivations of an athematic *bʰer-, which would make *beran-/bern- belong to type a. Since *aba shows ablaut in the suffix (ab-n-), it cannot have belonged to this type.

7.2 From its hysterokinetic ablaut type b would have a zero-graded root, which *aba does not show.

7.3 Type a would have a full grade in the root, and show -n- in the weak cases. Both these traits correspond to Gothic *aba/abn-, so it seems to have belonged to group a, the primary amphikinetic n-stem.

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8. **Etymology of *aba***

8.1 The root of *aba* has long been root-etymologized to *h₃ep*-‘do, make’ without an explanation of its derivation. A nomen agentis formation straight from the root is problematic as long as the underlying verb does not exist anywhere outside Sabellic,⁴ and deriving agent nouns from verbal roots with a primary *n*-suffix has not been established for PIE.

8.2 There is an acrostic heteroclite *h₃óp-*/h₃ēp-*‘wealth, riches, possession’ in PIE.⁵ There are good examples to show that *r/n*-stems in PIE had animate possessive amphikinetic *n*-stems made to them through internal derivation:⁶

- *h₃rēg-*/h₃rēg-*‘power’ (Old Avestan rāzarā) → *h₃rēg-on-*/h₃rēg-* ‘having power’ → ‘king’ (Vedic rājān/-rājān)
- *h₁óyHd⁻⁴/h₁ēyHd⁻⁴-* ‘udder’ (Greek οphis) → *tri-h₁ĕyHd⁻⁴-on-*/h₁uHd⁻⁴-* ‘having three udders’ (Vedic tri-ūdhān-)
- *pējH-wr/piH-wēn-* ‘fat’ (Greek πυος) → *pējHw-on-/piHu-n-* ‘having fat’ (Greek πυος)
- *h₂érh₃-wr/*h₂r₃-wën-* ‘grain’ (Old Irish arbar) → *h₂ér₃w-on-/h₂r₃u-n-* ‘having grain’ → ‘field’ (Armenian harawownik*)

If we do the same with *h₃óp-*/h₃ēp-*‘wealth, riches, possessions’, where ‘the one possessing the riches (in the family)’ naturally would designate the pater familias. The PIE base would give Germanic *afan-/abn-*, which after the regular generalization of one of the Verner-variants would precisely give Gothic *aba*

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⁵ Seen in e.g. Hittite hāppar-‘trade; payment’, hāppina-‘rich’, Latin opulentus ‘rich’, Vedic ápna- ‘property’.

(abn-) as well as comply with its meaning ‘husband’ and the ON meaning ‘male relative with hereditary status’.

9. **Further support**

That *h₃óp-t/*h₃ép-n- served as the base for Gothic aba gains strength from the fact that other Germanic words can be taken as derivations from the same heteroclite.

9.1 Germanic *abra- ‘powerful, strong’ (Gothic abrs, ON afr-) is best taken as an exocentric derivation from *h₃óp-t, i.e. *h₃óp-r-ó- ‘having riches, property’ > ‘powerful’.

9.2 ON efni ‘stuff, material’ < Germanic *af/hnija- should be taken as a genitival derivation *h₃ép-n-úo- ‘that of property, possession’ from *h₃ép-n-.

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