

# GEORGIAN *laqe*, an ‘addle egg’ in Kartvelian

Review of a Georgian Etymology

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In the *Etymological Dictionary of the Kartvelian Languages* compiled by the late Prof. Georgij Klimov (1998: 107), we find the proto-form *\*laqe* “rotten”, reconstructed for the Georgian-Zan level. The here underlying lexemes are GEORGIAN *laqe* ‘rotten, putrid, unsound, addle; stinking, having a bad odour’ and LAZ (Xope) *loqa* ‘sweet; sweet juice of grapes’ (Marr 1910: 163b).<sup>1</sup> Obviously there is no early attestation for this term, neither in Old Georgian nor in the 18th century in Sulchan Saba Orbeliani’s famous *Leksiķoni Kartuli*. In modern and contemporary language, *laqe* bears in colloquial speech additionally the metaphorical sense ‘stupid, silly, of intellectual torpidity’; cf. *laqetavian-i* “addle-head(ed)” (KEGL 4: 1495f; Tschenkéli 669f). For the most part, however, it appears in the semantic unit *laqe kvercxi* ‘addle egg’.<sup>2</sup>

Phonologically speaking this reconstruction—which, incidentally, was first proposed by Fähnrich (1980: 73a)<sup>3</sup>—looks absolutely reliable, since all correspondences exactly meet the Kartvelian sound laws; i. e. the consonants KARTVELIAN *\*l*, *\*q* correspond regularly with GEORGIAN and ZAN *l*, *q* and the vowels KARTVELIAN *\*a*, *\*e* with GEORGIAN *a*, *e*, ZAN *o*, *a* respectively. Under semantic considerations, however, the match is not very convincing. This point, already stated by Klimov, brought him to the conclusion that the “semantic difference can be explained by assuming a metaphorical shift in Laz”. Of course, semantic shifts are possible and conceivable in general, but to prove such a shift in particular, needs more than just a short statement, it needs at least some good arguments, if not distinct indications, to provide such an assumption with some credibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Variants to be appended are: LAZ (Atina) *loja*, (Viçe-Arkabi) *loca* id. (Marr ibid.); *loca* ‘sweet; sugar’, *loya* ‘fruit juice’ (Erten 2000: 195f), *loka* ~ *losa*, *loža* (= *loza*?) ‘sweet’, *loga* ‘fruit juice’ (Benli 2004: 112, 307a). One should note, that Benli’s material is unfortunately quite messy and mostly not trustworthy!

<sup>2</sup> Here some literary references for this term, taken from KEGL (ibid.): *uceb scenaze davarda erti laqe kvercxi* (Šalva Šarašize, alias Taguna, \*1880, †1934) ‘suddenly an addle egg fell down on the stage’; *gamišvit! erti davakero da, tu laqe sazamtrosavir ar gaskdes, čemi siqme moqvdes!* (Avksenti Cagareli, \*1857, †1902) ‘let me go! to clap on his face, and if he will not burst like a watermelon, let my manhood become extinguished’. For more information on the authors just mentioned, see Fähnrich 1993: 241f and 297.

<sup>3</sup> This in the form of a stenographic “one-line etymology” lacking further comments or explications: “\*laqe: georg. laqe ‘verdorben, schlecht’, las. loqa ‘süß’”.

Additionally, one ought to mention, that beside GEORGIAN *laqe* we find the verbal stem *laq-* ‘to rot, to make something rot, to spoil (intr.), to make spoil; to become stupid, to make stupid’ (Tschenkéli 699a)<sup>4</sup> and a dialectal form (IMERULI) *laqar̥to* ‘putrid, rotten, frowzy, musty, mouldy’ (Ylonṭi 1984: 325b), which must be brought into the discussion, since both forms clearly indicate that the stem of the etymon is *laq-* and subsequently the form *laqe* is a derivative. Further in this context, the alternative notation *laq-i kvercxi* “протухлое яйцо, болтунъ, недосидокъ, œuf sans germe” (Čubinašvili 1840: 259a) must be emphasized, apparently the oldest attestation for this term so far.<sup>5</sup> The remaining element *-e* is a suffix by means of which denominal adjectives are formed; cf. *bot-e* ‘stupid’ *cxar-e* ‘hot (from taste)’, etc. This *-e* very often is a relic of the affix combination *m-e* (see Fährnich 1986: 33), what may be true in our case too, if the parallel form *m-laq-e*—according to Klimov existing in the “modern language”—is not simply the product of more recent analogy to lexemes of this type.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, all this isn’t in contradiction with Klimov’s above etymology, since it has no consequences for the sound correspondence of GEORGIAN *e* : LAZ *a* in the suffix (cf. Fährnich & Sardshweladse 1995: 119).

Of some interest within the scope of Kartvelian—and especially in our context here—might be a small number of lexemes in Svan, which can be grouped in two pairs: SVAN *laxane* ‘rotten, bad’, *nalxani* ‘rottenness’ (Nižaradze 1910: 468) and *leg* ‘bad’, *nalgi* ‘badness’ (Gudjedjani & Palmaitis 1985: 145, 227). At first glance, one might identify these forms unconditionally as cognates of *\*laq-*, if not as a result of regular development, then at least as internal loans, for instance from Georgian, which however is nothing more than a dangerous deception. Let us begin with the second form of these two pairs, which is a deadjectival noun, made by means of the circumfix *na-i* (*na-lxan-i*; *na-lg-i*), a derivation pattern common in Svan; further cf. *na-bg-i* ‘firmness’ <— *bagi* ‘firm’ (see Tuite 1997: 20). This step allows for the separation of the units *laxan-(e)* and *leg*, the first of which represents morphologically a *la-(e)* derivation, forming deverbal adjectives (Tuite *ibid*).<sup>7</sup> This means, the nucleus of this form is *xan-* and not *\*lax-*. For the second lexeme, however, it is save to say, that it reflects the pure stem. If we now compare its sound structure to either the reconstructed GEORGIAN-ZAN

<sup>4</sup> Derivatives of this stem include in particular: Inf. *laq-eb-a* / (trans.) *a-laq-eb-s* (*ga-a-laq-eb-s*) “etwas (e. g. Hitze) läßt etwas verfaulen bzw. verderben”, (*gamo-a-laq-eb-s*) “etwas (z. B. eintönige Arbeit) läßt jemanden verblöden” (Tschenkéli *ibid*).

<sup>5</sup> This form (the stem plus nominative marker *-i*) is proved to be true by entries like *laq-i* “verfault, *laqi kvercxi* “faules Ei” (Meckelein 1928: 265a) and *laq-e* ~ *laq-i* “addled, rotten, bad” (Cherkesi 1950: 106b).

<sup>6</sup> Outside Klimov’s dictionary there is no further evidence for this form, not even in the recent *Kartuli enis ortograpiuli leksikoni* (= Topuria & Gigineišvili 1998)!

<sup>7</sup> For the regular syncope affecting even-numbered syllables in Svan, see Tuite 1997: 9.

\**laq̇-* or GEORGIAN *laq̇-*, we cannot easily make up a good match answering to the sound laws.

In the *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Kartwel-Sprachen* Fähnrich & Sardshweladse (1995: 221) however, separated GEORGIAN *laq̇-e* from LAZ *loq̇-a*, by comparing the latter with GEORGIAN *luq̇-i* ~ *luq̇-e* ‘mild, not strong or hot (taste)’. This etymology—first introduced by Sardshweladse (1987: 19b) and accepted by Fähnrich afterwards—is not less vague than the one discussed above, with the difference that the convincing arguments here refer to the semantic correspondence (‘sweet’ : ‘mild’), whereas the phonological interpretation is problematic and asks for the assumption that the form *luq̇-*, which is attested in the Gurian dialect solely, must have developed from KARTVELIAN \**loq̇-* by the shift *o > u* (“Wenn diese Verbindung richtig ist, muß *luq̇-* aus *loq̇-* durch Wandel *o > u* entstanden sein”). However, explanations enlightening us to the motivation of this change, which is not in accordance with common Kartvelian sound laws, are not given. Here too I would like to supplement some few lexemes, as for instance GEORGIAN *luqurṫ-i* ‘flavourless, greasy food without hot seasoning; a lazy, sluggish person, a slow-coach’, treated by Tschenkéli (696f) as a synonym for *luq̇-e*, and the dialectal (LEČXUMURI) *luq̇uc-i* ‘greasy, heavy food’.

Objectively speaking, neither of the two treatments just presented sheds any credible light on the linguistic history of *laq̇e*, it becomes even doubtful whether its etymon belongs to the Kartvelian, or at least Georgian genuine vocabulary. For the purpose of searching for possible etymological links outside the Kartvelian language family one should screen the areal linguistic environment. And indeed, first evidence comes immediately from the direct neighbourhood: ARMENIAN (dialectal) *lak* (Erevan, Łarabał) ‘addle egg’, (Łarabał) ‘rotten, unsound watermelon’ ~ *lax* (Erevan, Van) ‘an egg badly hatched out and addled’, (Nor-Bayazed, Sürmalu, Van, Tp’his) ‘over-ripe, unsound watermelon’ (Ačařyan 1913: 407b; HLBB II: 196b) and TURKISH (dialectal) *laq* (*Şavşat*), *lak* ~ *lāk* (*Şavşat*—Artvin; *Erciş*—Van) ‘addle egg’, (*Ardanuç*—Artvin; *Erciş*—Van; Kerkük) ‘ripe water- or sweet melon, its inside is already rotten; unsound fruit’ (Tokdemir 1993: 656a; DS 3059b; DD 1029a). Dankoff (1965: E62), the first who has discerned the relationship between the Armenian and Turkish forms, traces at least the Armenian ones directly back to PERSIAN *lāk* ‘spoiled, ruined; bad, useless, good for nothing’ (Steingass 1957: 1122b), what looks acceptable from both the phonological and the semantic point of view.

However, a much better point of departure here would be PERSIAN *lağ* ~ *laq* “an addle egg” (Steingass 1957: 1124b, 1126a; PRS 1985: 427b), because it fits every aspect of our set of forms which moreover consists of some more pieces, to be exhibited here: a)

CHAGHATAY *laq* ‘an addle egg’, first mentioned in *Sanglax*, the famous mid-eighteenth century Chaghatay-Persian dictionary compiled by Muḥammad Maḥdī Xān (Clauson 1960: 74c and facsimile 317v:8), then by Pavet de Courteille (1870: 493; “froc; œuf gâté”), Radloff (III: 728) and even by Räsänen in *Versuch eines etymologischen Wörterbuchs der Türkssprachen* (1969: 314b),<sup>8</sup> although he doesn’t offer any etymological hint, b) OTTOMAN *laq* ‘bald; addled (egg)’, *daq u laq* ‘bare (soil, etc.); empty, void’ (Redhouse 1890: 1636b), c) AZERI *lax* ‘rotten and having a bad odour, stinking, spoiled’ (ADİL III: 227),<sup>9</sup> d) TURKMEN (dialectal) *lak (yumurtga)* ‘spoiled, rotten (egg); an egg badly hatched out’ (TDS 1962: 411a; TkmR 1968: 428b),<sup>10</sup> and e) a couple of forms from languages in the Caucasus such as LEZGIAN *laqu*, TABASSARAN *laqu* (*murta*)<sup>11</sup> and UDI *laq (qok:la)* (LzgR 1966: 222a; TabR 2001: 216b; Gukasyan 1974: 167)<sup>12</sup> as well as OSSETIAN (Iron) *laqqūq (ajk)*, (Digor) *qwælæq (ajkæ)* ‘addle (egg)’ (Abaev II: 31).

Despite this relatively rich documentation of the term in quite different languages, no potential etymology looms up, since the internal relations—the forms depend on each other—still remain obscure. For certain is, however, that the term in question isn’t a Kartvelian etymon in the common sense, what makes Klimov’s attempt at explanation invalid.

Under formal criteria, the forms can be grouped in three types:<sup>13</sup> a) forms representing the pure stem (*laK{Ø}*), b) forms with an additional vowel at the end (*laK{V}*) and finally c) forms with a complex segment attached (*laK{quq}*). The first group, by far the largest one, once more underlines *laK* as to be the radix of the term. The forms bearing a vocalic element attached are derivatives. As already demonstrated in the case of Georgian *laq-e* the suffix LEZGIAN, TABASSARAN *-u* too forms denominal adjectives; cf. LEZGIAN *q:ac-u* ‘green’ ← *q:az* ‘green colour’, *yaçu* ‘thick’ ← *yaç*

<sup>8</sup> No data are available about how deep *laq* is embedded in Chaghatay. Besides the evidence in the *Sanglax*—which falls into the period of late Chaghatay, early Uzbek resp. (see Clauson 1960: 5)—and in Pavet de Courteille’s *Dictionnaire turk-oriental* another attestation comes from Šejx Sulejman Efendi’s *Čagataj-Osmanisches Wörterbuch* (“*lak (lek)* : iči bozuk jumurta. – Faules Ei.”; ed. Kúnos 1902: 142). The standard works on Chaghatay such as Zenker’s *Dictionnaire Turc-Arabe-Persan* (1866), Fazylov’s *Starouzbekskij jazyk* (1966-71), Borovkov’s *Leksika sredneaziatskogo tefsira XII-XIII vv.* (1963) or *Navoiy asarlari učun qisqača luyat* (Hasanov 1993), representing the vocabulary of the classical language, doesn’t deal with this term, possibly displaying it being a late intermixture from Persian as a result of the intensive interaction between both languages.

<sup>9</sup> *Bu pula heč bir lax yumurta vermäzlär* ‘for this [amount] of money they will not even give one single addle egg’ *Für das Geld gibt’s noch kein faules Ei’ Älbättä, lax yumurta yıysan jüjü jıxmaz* ‘of course, if you keep an addle egg, no chick will come out’; *laxlıq* ‘addleness (of eggs)’ (ADİL *ibid.*).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *lak čikmak* ‘to turn out / prove to be rotten’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>11</sup> TABASARANIAN *murta* < SW-TURKIC, most possibly AZERI *yumurta* ‘egg’ (Xajdakov 1973: 53b).

<sup>12</sup> Karl Bouda mentions in his *Berichtigungen und Ergänzungen zu M. Räsänen* (1974: 75) a form LAK *laq-ù* “faul, von Eiern”, which I, however, cannot verify in any of the relevant sources on Lak.

<sup>13</sup> Excluded here are the Georgian forms discussed above and normal paradigmatic forms like *ga-laq-eb-ul-i* (= Past Participle, Passive; cf. Fähnrich 1986: 68).

‘thickness’, and *lik-u* ‘lame, limping’ ← *\*lik* ‘?’, *çar-u* ‘striped, with stripes’ ← *çar* ‘line’. This morphological element is described as ‘unproductive’ today in Lezgian, and in Tabassaran it appears in some cases attached to roots which no longer exist separately (cf. Talibov 1966: 561; Kurbanov 2001: 426), what also is true of TABASSARAN *laq-ú* (cf. TabR 2001: 216b; LezR 1966: 222a).<sup>14</sup> This suggests, that the term possibly could be of higher age within these languages. However, there is no data about when the suffix *-u* became obsolete.

The third group consists of one single member: OSSETIAN (IRON) *læqqūq* (*ajk*), (DIGOR) *qwælaeq* (*ajkæ*), where—according to Abaev—the second variant came off the first by a quite complex kind of metathesis. It is not possible to interpret *-qūq* language-internally from out of Ossetian or Iranian, either as a derivational suffix or as an independent lexeme or a relic of such. Here too the linguistic neighbourhood provides some potential candidates for connection, as for instance TSAKHUR *quq* ‘egg’ (ÉCJa 1999: 886a) or—less likely—GUNZIB *qōqla* ~ *qoqla*, UDI *qok:la* (*qoqla*) ‘egg’ (van den Berg 327; Gukasyan 1974: 164). According to Nikolayev & Starostin (1994: 932f), the Tsakhur word ultimately must be traced back on PEC *\*q̄wāq̄wV(-t̄V)* ‘seed, grain, egg’, while the Gunzib and Udi forms are to be connected with PEC *\*q̄wVt̄Vq̄V* ~ *\*q̄wVq̄Vt̄V* ‘egg, grain’ (id. 906). Most probable is, in my opinion, to regard both variants in Ossetian entirely as an input form an East-Caucasian language, in which case their formal difference is not to be attributed to a metathesis as proposed by Abaev, but results from the free positioning of the attributive adjective in the source language before or after the corresponding substantive; that is to say *\*laq̄V quq* → *læqqūq*, but *\*quq laq̄V* → *qwælaeq*. Be that as it may, this discussion doesn’t bring us a step forward in the discovery of our protagonist’s etymology!

What is striking is that the other Dagestaniaan—especially Lezgian—languages show no evidence for this term, and moreover that its distribution among the Caucasian languages as a whole appears quite erratic, which could be an indication for foreign origin. In other words, it is not possible to place the etymon within the hereditary word stock of any Caucasian language family. Thus, one gets the impression that the forms in these idioms are borrowed from neighbouring Azeri, if not directly from Persian (Iranian), since the evidence from Turkic (Chaghatay, Azeri, Turkmen and Ottoman/Turkish) can easily be traced back to Persian. However, another hypothetic scenario is also imaginable, with Armenian as the hot spot. Consequently, Armenian must be the immediate source of Georgian, Turkish and Udi, which as a matter of fact once was in closer contact with Armenian and therefore obtained a number of

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also LEZGIAN *laq-vac* ‘a person suffering from flatulence’ (ibid.).

Armenian loan words. The entrance of the word into the Dagestanian world and the old Atropatene, which was formerly inhabited by Iranian tribes, could be set to explain its appearance in Persian and Azeri. However, one would expect to find last traces of this term in the remaining Iranian tongues of these areas, like Talyshi or Tati.

To clarify these aspects, we should survey the term's background in Persian and Iranian as well as in Armenian, in order to decide whether its origin from one of these is likely.

To start with Iranian, we observe that the word in this formal and semantic combination ('addle egg') isn't reflected in languages and dialects other than Persian. However, under purely formal considerations, a relation to forms like KURDISH *leq* 'unstable, infirm, unsteady, weak; shaky, loose, rickety; decrepit, exhausted' (KR 1960: 494f; KR 1983: 594a; Cabolov 2001: 577; Omar 1992: 368b), DARI *laq-ak* 'shaky, rickety; disorderly, disorganized' (DariR 1976: 621a), GILANI *ləy* 'loose' (*dəndānə ləy* 'loose tooth') (GilR 1980: 154), etc. is perfectly possible, and from the semantic point of view one may argue that an addle egg is "something defective" and thus "too weak to bring life forth". But does this argumentation tally with historical reality or isn't it an adventurous guess beyond verification?

Dehxdā's *Luḡat-nāma*, the most comprehensive dictionary of Persian provides us with quite rich material for *laq* (~ *laḡ*), reflecting the following semantic variety (volume *Lam*: 231c, 248a): 'bald, bald-headed, (*bī mūy-i va šāf* 'hairless and bald'); weak (*mīḡ-i laq* 'a week nail'); tottering (at its place), loose (*dandān-i laq* 'loose tooth'); bad, rotten, unsound, putrid', etc. As can be seen, this semantic field in Persian encompasses most of the meanings we have encountered in the different languages possessing a lexeme LAQ. This might strike one as the positive solution of our above assumption. Nonetheless, here the appearances may be deceptive since there still is no indication that allows us to determine whether one and the same etymon is underlying the whole bulk of this semantic spectrum. In other terms, we can not exclude, that two (or even more) homophonic etyma, in addition semantically close to each other, are gathered here and subsumed under one single lemma.<sup>15</sup>

Concerning KURDISH *leq*, Cabolov (2001: 577) compares this lexeme—apparently under the semantic consideration of motion—with ARABIC *laqq* 'shaking' (\*трясение) <— *laqqa* 'to shake'. The verification of the radix ARABIC  $\sqrt{laqq}$ , the widespread distribution and use of which seems to be extremely sporadic and limited, gives rise to serious

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<sup>15</sup> A similar situation we find for UDI *laq*, which occurs—coincidentally with Persian—as designation of 'an addle egg' as well as in the meaning 'unsteady, shaky' (Gukasyan 1974: 167) ; cf. KHALAJ "laq 'locker', eher 'lose'" from Persian (Doerfer 1987: 299, 198 No. 537).

objections to Cabolov's etymological attempt. The verb ARABIC *laqqa* is well attested but it has the meaning "to hit a thing; to slap a thing (with the flat of one's hand)" (WKAS 1991: 1042a), which does not suit at all to the semantics of the Kurdish word. Dealing with this etymology Cabolov was perhaps inspired by Jaba & Justi (1879: 380a), who once have recognized KURDISH *leq* "plaie; coup" as ARABIC *laqqun*, which in this case must be the *nomen actionis* of *laqqa*.

An other etymological proposal—first suggested by Ačaryan and later supported by Ĵahukyan (1972: 294, 296)—describes the Armenian candidate, *lak*, as an element of the Indo-European heritage in Armenian, putting it as a new link into the following chain of forms: GREEK *λαγάρως* 'slack, loose; thin, narrow', LATIN *laxus* 'wide, loose, open; spacious, roomy', OLD-IRISH *lacc* 'weak, slack', MIDDLE-LOWGERMAN, DUTCH, etc. *lak* 'slack, loose' < INDO-EUROPEAN *(s)lāg-* : *(s)lag-* 'to be slack, faint' (Pokorny 1994: 959f). If this reconstruction reflects correctly the etymon's historical development, the Armenian realisation, indeed, could be the ultimate source of all these forms in Causasian, Iranian and Turkic languages. However, from the view of Indo-European linguistics, this compilation is problematic. And even if we accept it, the shift ARMENIAN *k* > *q/ġ, ġ* and alike in all other languages is hardly credible.

Most likely in my opinion is—at least at the moment—to accept Persian (*laq* 'an addle egg') as the ultimate point of departure for the forms in Caucasian, Armenian and Turkic mentioned above. Even though the deeper historical background of the etymon is still obscure, it is quite interesting to see a term of such a specific and exceptional meaning acting in the role of a loan word with a rather wide areal distribution.

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