

Albanian *gogël* and Indo-European ‘acorns’

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Albanian *gogël* ‘acorn’ derives from an archaic compound which preserves two (PIE ***HaiG-** and PIE ***g^wl̥A-**) of the three basic stems reconstructed for Paul Friedrich’s semantic domain of Indo-European oaks. Additionally, the Albanian cognate preserves the original feminine gender assignment of the Proto-Indo-European lexeme for ‘acorn’ and serves as a further witness for the commonplace anatomical metaphor that Indo-Europeans derived from the acorn’s appearance.

Proto-Indo-European possessed a feminine thematic noun ***g^wl̥A-o-**, which denoted the acorn, the characteristic fruit body of species belonging to the genus *Quercus*, i.e. the oaks. Additionally, because of a visual similarity, PIE ***g^wl̥A-o-** also denoted the tip of the human penis. This natural metaphor is present in most, if not all, surviving Indo-European reflexes of the word for ‘acorn’ and accounts for the fact that even today the anatomical term for this body part, *glans*, is in fact simply the Latin word for ‘acorn’. The zero-grade thematic noun, which I take to be the basic form, is recorded only in Indic where Sanskrit lexicographers preserve an Old Indic masculine noun *gula-* restricted to the metaphorical sense of ‘glans penis’. All other reflexes of this stem, both as derivatives and compounds, have as their principal meaning ‘acorn’, and that fact assures us that such was in fact the “original” meaning, and these nouns can be readily explained as derivatives or compounds based on the thematic noun.

The Baltic languages preserve a derivative with the common **-i(o)A₂** suffix of feminines, suggesting that despite Friedrich’s proposal that Indo-European oaks were regarded as masculine (1970:157, n. 1), the term for ‘acorn’ may well have been feminine, in which case, the gender assignment given to *gula-* by Sanskrit grammarians must have been a later and natural accommodation to its anatomical referent. Cognates

pointing to PIE ***g^wl̥A-joA₂** are found in all three recorded Baltic languages: OPrus. *gile*, Lith. *gīlė*, and Lett. *dzīle*.¹ Only in Lithuanian is the word living, and there it has both its botanical and anatomical meanings. The grave accent of the Lithuanian form indicates that the syllabic lateral was originally lengthened and so records the former presence of the stem final laryngeal.

Greek and Armenian preserve yet another derivational pattern, an *-eno-* extension. Gk. *βάλανος*, significantly a feminine noun,² is a rather straight-forward development of PIE ***g^wl̥A-eno-** in which the stem-final laryngeal colored the initial vowel of the suffix. The uncolored vowel of Arm. *katīn*, in which *-in* is the regular reflex of PIE ***-eno-**, is probably to be ascribed to analogical influences, for, despite Frisk (1960:213), after the *a*-coloring laryngeal of the stem, PIE ***-eno-** would have given underlying **-anos*. Analogic restoration of the e-grade is surely a far more parsimonious explanation than positing a suffix ***-eno-** for Armenian beside ***-ŋⁿo-** in Greek.

The other cognates of ‘acorn’ are all compounds. Italic and Slavic both have forms with both the nasal and a voiced apical stop, probably unaspirated. The latter is a rarity in Indo-European suffixes, and rather than assume a concretion of two separate suffixes, it is more probable that the Italic and Slavic cognates are compounds based on the root ***Ωend-** ‘stone’. This nominal root is attested as an expected e-grade in Mir. *ond* (Pokorny 1959:778), an s-stem reflecting PIE ***Ωend-es-**, and a zero-grade in OInd. *adri-* ‘stone’ < PIE ***Ωnd-ri-**.

¹ This form with the unexpected macron is, in fact, a reconstruction of Endzelins. In his reworking of Mühlenbach’s *Lettisch-deutsches Wörterbuch*, Endzelins records this word in two spellings, *dzīla*, a glossary entry equated with Polish *żołądź* and a reconstituted (*d*)*zīle*. The word seems to be a back-formation from a compound *ozoldzīle* ‘oak-acorn’, which my friend Daira Stumbrs informs me is the current form. Reconstruction of the simplex from a compound may account for Endzelins’ inconsistent spellings and the improper macron; Endzelins also misspells the Lithuanian cognates as *gīlė* and *gylė*. In fact, the Lithuanian word is *gīlė*; *gylė* is a different word designating ‘the depths of the sea or of a river’ (as opposed to a ford or shallows).

² This fact is significant because the simplest explanation for the Greek gender assignment as feminine is to assume that that was the original gender; the shift to masculine by Sanskrit lexicographers would be natural in light of the word’s having been restricted to a part rather prominently displayed by the human male anatomy.

Another possible cognate not mentioned by Pokorny is a Germanic i-stem, recorded in OE *ent* 'giant' < * Ω **ond-i-**,³ which may have designated stone giants.⁴ The stem of Lat. *glāns*, *gland-* reflects a compound with a zero-grade of the first member and e-grade second member, * $\mathfrak{g}^w\mathfrak{I}A-\Omega$ **end-** 'oak stone'. The long vowel *ā* that arose naturally from the contraction of *lā* (from PIE * $\mathfrak{I}A$) plus *-ond-* (PIE * Ω **end-**)⁵ was preserved before the *-s* of the nominative, but regularly shortened before *-nd* (Buck 1933:94; Sommer 1914:124).

The Serbo-Croatian short acute (*žlūd*) points to the former presence of a laryngeal, but the array of Slavic cognates offers interesting parallels to the Latin form. The Slavic cognates [RCS *želodi*, R *želud'*, Bjel. *žoludž*, Ukr. *žotud'*, SC *žlūd*, Slov. *želod*, Cz. *žalud*, Slvk. *žalud'*, and Pol. *żołędź*] point to PS **želandi-* < PIE * $\mathfrak{g}^we\mathfrak{I}A-\Omega$ **nd-** 'oak stone'. Though with differing vowel gradations, the Slavic cognates also reflect a compound formed from exactly the same components as the Latin cognate, a situation that points to a period of commonality.

The shared compound may be explained in two ways. Either * $\mathfrak{g}^w\mathfrak{I}A-o-$ 'acorn' had come by synecdoche to mean 'oak tree' and a new term, 'oak stone' was required to describe the acorn; otherwise, * $\mathfrak{g}^w\mathfrak{I}A-o-$ retained both of its meanings 'acorn', the botanical and the anatomical. In that case, the botanical sense could have been signaled by compounding with 'stone', signifying the hard shell of the acorn. That this differentiated botanical 'acorn' came once again to signify the anatomical acorn is a commonplace in the history of euphemisms.

The only other record of the thematic noun for 'acorn', PIE * $\mathfrak{g}^w\mathfrak{I}A-o-$, is found to be in an Albanian compound *gogël*, which denotes the acorn. The earliest etymology of this feminine noun, that of Gustav Meyer (1891:126), takes this

³ Holthausen (1934:91) gives as a cognate NHG *Enz* 'monster', a word with which I am unfamiliar and which is unreported in the twenty-second edition of Kluge (1989).

⁴ The concept of giants or monsters of stone has parallels in other mythologies, notably Ullikummi in Hurro-Hittite myth. J.R.R. Tolkien's use of *ents* as tree-giants represents his own novel reworking of Germanic mythology.

⁵ Cf. *Mārs* and earlier *Māvors* for the contraction of *ā+o* > *ā* (Sommer 1914:116).

word as a diminutive of the abusive term *gogë* ‘bricklayer, lazy person, Vlach’.⁶ This etymology is both morphologically and semantically unsatisfactory. It requires both an ad hoc suffix *-lā* and a completely unjustified semantic shift from ‘bricklayer’ to ‘acorn’.⁷ Not surprisingly alternatives have been proposed.

Jokl suggested that this word might be based on an anit root denoting round objects, citing Lat. *galla* ‘oak-gall’, OInd. *glāu-* ‘ball’, and OHG *chliuwa* ‘ball’ as parallels (1911:24-25). Deriving Lat. *galla* from **gal-nā*, Jokl reconstructed a syllabic reduplication **ga(l)-gal-nā*. Not only does Jokl have to assume later dissimilative loss of the first lateral, but he also has to propose an *ad hoc* rule to account for the attested *o* rather than expected *a* of the first syllable. Additionally, had the etymon been trisyllabic as Jokl proposed, the attested accent on that first syllable violates the Albanian accent placement rule in which nominal accent appears on the syllable preceding the penultimate mora; moreover, this etymology depends on Jokl’s choosing the rarer meaning ‘round object’ in preference to the more widely established meaning ‘acorn, seed’, which is the first meaning given both by Newmark (1998) and by the *Fjalor i gjuhës së sotme shqipe* (1980:558).⁸

⁶ It is in the *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der albanesischen Sprache* that Meyer makes his actual pronouncement of this derivation, and not his later survey of Arvanitika dialects, in whose glossary he derives *makarundë gōgël’ë* (i.e. *makarundë gogëllë*) ‘maccheroni alla napoletana’ from *gogë* by taking *gogë* as ‘plumper ungeschickter Mensch’ and explaining that the reference must be to the short, fat neapolitan pasta, but Meyer never actually defined *gogëllë* in that work (1895:78), though both Demiraj (1997:179) and Orel (1998:120) cite the later reference as the source for this etymology. In his 1891 etymology, Meyer assigned the ethnic slur to the Albanians, the meaning ‘bricklayer’ to the Romanians, and ‘lazy person’ to the Greeks, but all three meanings are given as current Albanian in Newmark’s recent *Albanian-English Dictionary* (1998:258^a).

⁷ Moreover, the nearly synonymous *gogól* ‘bogyman, scarecrow’ is rather obviously the derivative of *gogë*.

⁸ Five definitions are given, all but two dealing with seeds: 1) *Kokërr e vogël me lëvozhgë të fortë, që bëjnë disa drurë pyjorë si dushku, qarri, selvia etj.* [A small seed with a hard shell, which some forest trees such as the oak, the Turkey oak [*Q. cerris*], cypress, and others make]; 2) *lëng më ngjyrë të errët që nxirret nga këto kokrra e që përdoret zakonisht për të ngjyer flokët* [a liquid with a dark color which is extracted from these seeds and serves commonly to color hair]; 3) *topi djathi* [ball of cheese]; 4) *secila nga kokkrat e vogla të numërorit, që përdoret si mjet për mesimin e aritmetikës ...* [any of small seeds of an abacus which serve as a medium for teaching arithmetic ...]; 5 (fig.) *send i vogël e pa vlerë* [a small thing without value].

Nevertheless, Jokl’s etymology was accepted by Pokorny, who identified the root as ***gel-** ‘ballen, sich ballen (1959:357),’⁹ although Mayrhofer had categorically rejected any such root equation with the words for ‘acorn’ (1956:341), and the presence of a laryngeal in the acorn words speaks against it.

Demiraj correctly assumed that *gogël* was based on the Proto-Indo-European forms for ‘acorn’, but reconstructed a form employing syllabic reduplication, PIE $*g^{w}e(l)h_2-g^{w}h_2$ (1997:179), a form perhaps overly influenced by Jokl’s abortive etymology. As with Pokorny’s reconstruction, the front vowel ought to have assibilated the preceding labiovelar unless there is an unstated presumption of very early dissimilative loss of the lateral while the laryngeals were still operable within Indo-European. Perhaps because of these obvious weaknesses, Orel reported all these views without giving a reconstruction and failed to endorse any of them, identifying the word merely as “a descriptive stem” (1998:120).

Despite the obvious flaws in earlier etymologies, Alb. *gogël* does indeed contain the Indo-European lexeme for ‘acorn’. However, PALb. †*gogla* < †*gogla* < $*gāglā$ is not to be taken as a reduced form of a syllabic reduplication; it is instead a tatpuruṣa compound whose first element is one of the usual Indo-European designations for the ‘oak tree’, PIE ***HaiG-**.¹⁰ This noun is preserved as a feminine athematic noun in Germanic, PG $*aik-$, where its reflexes (ON *eik*, OE *āc* [pl. *ēc*] OFrs. *ēk*, OS *ēk*, and OHG *eih*) all mean ‘oak’.¹¹ Compounds, serving to distinguish varieties of oak or oak-like species, are recorded in Lat. *aesculus* ‘mountain oak’,¹² two Greek species *αἰγίλωψ*

⁹ Pokorny actually gives the form as $*gel-gal-nā$, but a reduplicative vowel $*e$ ought to have palatalized an Albanian tectal, giving initial $gʲ$ not attested g .

¹⁰ Incidentally, Albanian provides the only testimony to the series of the Indo-European tectal in this stem. Not surprisingly, the uvular (pure velar in Neogrammarian terms) serves to distinguish ‘oak’ (PIE ***HaiG-**) from ‘goat’ (PIE ***Haiǵ-**) with its palatal stop.

¹¹ Though early Icelandic retains the sense ‘oak’ in addition to the metaphorical meaning ‘ship’, in the later language *eik* has come to mean ‘tree’ in general.

¹² The Latin noun is usually taken as a diminutive from ***HaiG-s-klo-s** or the like (Walde-Hofmann (1938:20); Pisani (apud Walde-Hofmann 1938:844) derived *aesculus* from ***aiks-quolo-s** which he proposed was in fact a metathesis of ***aigz-loquo-s** and thus formally identical with Greek *αἰγίλωψ*. Because I believe that the second element of *αἰγίλωψ* is identical to Lat. *ilex* ‘holly’, I regard Pisani’s etymology as more ingenious than illuminating.

‘Turkey oak, *Quercus cerris*’ and *κράτ-αιγος* ‘thorn tree, *Crataegus heldreichii*’,¹³ and most probably Zeus’s *aegis*, his protective shield, which, despite native folk-etymologies which persistently derive this noun from the synonymous *αἴξ* ‘goat’, most likely, as Hirt first noted, was an oaken shield. As Hirt observed, a cognate of NHG *Eiche* [and NE *oak*] might also be found in Greek *αἰγανέη* ‘spear’ and Zeus’s *αἰγίς*, the oaken shield of the Oak-God.¹⁴ As a feminine noun, the Albanian word was fitted with the productive *ā*-stem marker, which, as regularly happened in *tatpuruṣa* compounds, bore the word stress, and so became the source of the stressed *o* of Alb. *gogël*. The second element was regularly syncopated, and PIE ***g^wl̥A-oA₂**, became the source of the final syllable, *-gël* from underlying PALb. †*g^wl̥b*. Thus, the original compound was PIE ***HaiGóA₂+*g^wl̥A-oA₂**. The second element is the feminine noun, ***g^wl̥A-o-**, the unrecorded, underlying form with which we began our discussion; moreover, unlike the Indic thematic noun, the Albanian noun preserves the original postulated feminine gender preserved in the Italic, Baltic, Slavic, and Hellenic cognates; thus, it is the most accurate reflex of the Indo-European form. By regular sound-laws, PIE ***HaiGóA₂+*g^wl̥A-oA₂** became late IE **aigā+gulā* which in turn became early PALb. †*ag^wgl̥b*, which regularly gave late PALb. †*gogl̥b*. The phonological developments by which this compound became the attested Albanian form are entirely regular.

We must ask, however, what would motivate such a compound in the first place. Surely the phrase ‘oaken acorn’ is a pleonasm. And so it is if PIE ***g^wl̥A-o-** designated only the botanical ‘acorn’, but if PIE ***g^wl̥A-o-** also had an anatomical sense recorded in the Indic cognate, then the need to distinguish the botanical sense of ‘acorn’ by a compound ‘oak-acorn’ from the anatomical sense is entirely explicable. In this compound, Albanian then preserves traces of two of the ancient Indo-European words relating to the semantic domain

¹³ These are Liddell and Scott’s identifications; formally the last noun is a compound meaning ‘strong oak’, and some authorities gloss the word as such or as ‘some species of oak’.

¹⁴ *So findet sich unser deutsches ‘Eiche’ in gr. αἰγανέ ‘Speer’ und in der αἰγίς des Zeus, dem Eicheschild des Eichengottes, wieder* (1892:482). If Hirt’s shrewd guess about the origins of the *aegis* is accepted, it implies a derivation from PIE ***HaiG-id-s** rather than PIE ***Haiġ-id-s**.

for oaks, PIE ***HaiG-** 'oak' and PIE ***g^wlA-o-** 'acorn' as well as the dual function of the latter as both a botanical and anatomical referent, a duality which Friedrich suggested was already present in Proto-Indo-European (1997:408^a).

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