

On the Origin of the Names of Anthropomorphic Creatures in Abkhaz

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The paper argues that the word *ayəṭaa* ‘devil’ attested in Abkhaz was borrowed from New Persian where it denoted the ancient written monument of the religion Zoroastrianism of the ancient Iranian people (Avistā). The Abkhaz *aʒəʒlan* // *aʒəzlan* denotes a fairy. The paper argues that the lexeme might have a complex structure: *aʒ* meaning ‘water’ + the transformation suffix *-s > z + the local preverb *la* + *n*. In Abkhaz *aʒnēš* is one of the lexical units denoting Satan, a devil. Our attention is also focused on the Old Georgian lexical entry *memaʒani* ‘horrifying’ that entered Georgian from the Asian languages. We believe that the lexemes *aʒnēš*, *ʒahanam*, *memaʒani*, which entered Abkhaz and Georgian from the Asian languages, were derived from the common source *ʒahnam* // *ʒahanam* ‘hell’.

The paper also deals with the analysis of the Abkhaz proper name *aʒ°ejpšaa* and its etymology.

In order to thoroughly analyze the ethnopsychology of any ethnos, we think that studying the etymology of anthropomorphic names is very important. In our opinion, this part of a language’s vocabulary clearly shows the linguistic worldview, history, ethnological traditions, customs and rituals of an ethnos.

Our etymological research focuses on 4 anthropomorphic words: Abkhaz *a-yəstaa* ‘devil’, *aʒəʒlan* // *aʒəzlan* ‘fairy’, *aʒnəš*, ‘Satan, the devil’, and *aʒ°ejpšaa* ‘the deity of beasts’.

1. On the Etymology of the Abkhaz Lexeme *a-yəstaa* ‘Devil’

In the Abkhaz language the word *a-yəstaa* // *a-ystaa* denotes the devil and is also used as the adjective ‘astute/cunning’.

In the Abkhaz-Circassian and Kartvelian languages a lexeme that has a similar or phonetically close root cannot be found. In Adyghe, the word *šaitan*, having an Arab origin, is used to denote the said meaning. In Kartvelian, the lexeme *ešmaḳ*, of an

Iranian origin, means the same. We think that the word *a-yəstaa*, attested in Abkhazian, may have been borrowed from New Persian in which it denoted the ancient written monument of the religion Zoroastrianism of the ancient Iranian people. In Middle Persian this work was called *apastak* meaning ‘base’ or ‘the basic text’. In New Persian the word *avistā* is its phonetic variation.

Our assumption does not face any phonetic obstacles as the Iranian final long vowel *a* is represented with double *aa* in Abkhaz, which is typical of the Abkhaz borrowed material. As for the initial vowel *a-*, it seems the language considers it as a formant of generalization-definiteness, which is a feature of the Abkhaz language.

As for the semantic side of the word, we believe that denoting evil by this lexeme is secondary. Originally, in the period of fire-worship, this term did not have a negative meaning in Abkhaz. Supposedly, it entered the language as the main term for a fire-worshipping service and when fire-worship was replaced by Christianity the word acquired negative semantics.

Similar facts are known from culturology: when one religion is replaced by another, a number of terms from the old religion still remain in the new one. For instance, in Georgian, a large part of the vocabulary related to Christianity has Iranian origins, e.g. *zuaraki* ‘offering’, *barzimi* ‘chalice’, *pešxveni* ‘charger’, *ṭazari* ‘temple’.

Determining the ways and directions of borrowing the word is to some extent problematic. It is possible that the word entered Abkhaz from Karachay-Balkar or Ossetian. However, we could not attest a similar lexeme in Ossetian. In this language *fəst* means a ‘writing’. Is this word related to *avesta* with the semantics of ‘writing’? It is also worth mentioning that the word *fəs* means ‘sheep’ in Ossetian. ‘Sheep’, ‘leather’ and ‘writing’ are semantically interrelated concepts.

In the field of linguistics there are a number of facts to consider when a loanword is attested in the target language but cannot be found in the intermediary language. The research lexeme has survived in Abkhaz in the same way that the creature of the Paleolithic period survived in the favorable ecological conditions, not changing over time.

2. *aʒəʒlan* // *aʒəzlan* ‘Fairy’

In Abkhaz *aʒəʒlan* // *aʒəzlan* means ‘fairy’. We think that this lexeme might have a complex structure: *aʒə* ‘water’ + the transformation suffix **-s > -z* + the local preverb *la*, i.e. ‘in’ + *-n* that is the set form of the Past Simple suffix in this case. **a-aʒəslan > aʒəzlan > aʒəʒlan* may be an example of progressive assimilation. The blade sibilant aspirate spirant *-s* changed next to the sonant *-l* and turned into the blade sibilant voiced spirant *-z*; then, under the influence of the preceding sibilant affricate *ʒ-*, it was assimilated and became the blade sibilant affricate *ʒ-*. This phonetic process is typical of the Abkhaz language. However, both *aʒəʒlan* and *aʒəzlan* are still used, as parallel forms in the language. *-s* is the suffix of transformation. Abkhaz words having this suffix are similar to the Georgian words in the equative case in terms of meanings. The local preverb *la-* is presented without a person marker.

In Abkhaz, local preverbs are related to the bases and roots of relevant words by their origin. The verbs containing local preverbs sometimes have a person marker. This depends on the degree of generalization of the preverb itself. The higher the degree of generalization, the lower the frequency of a person marker being next to a local preverb, i.e. if a verb is used in a general sense and a certain person is not meant, we do not have a marker (Lomtadze, 1982).

We think that we have exactly the same case in the said example. As for the suffix *-n*, it may be a set formant of the Past Simple tense. However, this suffix is also found in noun formation (Lomtadze, 1977). Thus, the original meaning of the word may be ‘something in the water’.

The proposed semantics of the lexeme *ali* ‘fairy’ is familiar in the Georgian-Caucasian folklore as well. In the Georgian Explanatory Dictionary this lexical unit is not defined as a single entry but it includes the following lexemes: *alis-ḡbili* (lit. trans. a fairy’s tooth) that is the shell of a colored snail; *alis-.quri* ‘(lit. trans. a fairy’s ear” that is the shell of a beautiful colored sea snail”. As it seems, an anthropomorphic creature – a fairy is related to water even in Georgian consciousness.

3. On the Origin of the Abkhaz Lexeme *ažnəš*, ‘Satan, the devil’

In the Abkhaz language *ažnəš* is one of the denominations of the devil. We think that this lexeme was derived from the word *žahanəm* ‘hell’ attested in Abkhaz that was borrowed from Turkish: *žahnam* // *žahanam* ‘hell’. *žahnam* became *a-žnəša* ‘the devil’ by dropping the syllable *ah*, losing the final consonant *m* and adding the phoneme *š*. We believe that this phoneme is currently the ‘fossilized’ Future II formative suffix *ša* > *š*, c.f. *sancaša* ‘when I have to go’, the imaginary meaning of the word may be ‘of hell, for hell’. In this context, the Old Georgian lexical unit *memažani* ‘horrifying / astonishing’ attracts our attention; it may have entered the Georgian language from the Asian linguistic world. This word can be found in three lines of ‘The Knight in the Panther’s Skin’: “igi mindors aroninebs tansa mčevrsa, *memažansa*”; “igi xelmcipe mayali, mebrzolta *memažania*”; “dia didta *damažneba* ušmagoman vit gaago!” (Daušvili, 1986). According to Iustine Abuladze, this word means ‘shocking / horrifying / astonishing’ in ‘The Knight in the Panther’s Skin’. This meaning is also familiar to Abkhaz, as the word *ažašara* denotes ‘astonishment’. It is possible that this lexeme was derived from the word *žahnam* // *žahanam* ‘hell’.

We think that the lexemes *ažnəš*, *žahanəm*, and *memažani*, which entered Abkhaz and Georgian from the Asian linguistic world, must have been derived from the common source *žahnam* // *žahanam* ‘hell’, taking into consideration certain semantic changes.

4. *až°ejpšaa* ‘the Deity of Beasts’

In Abkhaz, *až°ejpšaa* is the name of the deity of beasts. The structure of the word gives the impression that it was formed through composition: *až°+ej+pš+aa*. We think that it is a compound consisting of four components – the first element *-až°* is an ‘old’ lexeme, the second one *-aj* > *ej* is a relative prefix, the third element is *pš* < *a.qapš* ‘red’ (Lomtadze, 1976) and the final element *-aa* is a plural marker (collective). The relative prefix also appears with adjectives of color in Abkhaz, e.g. *ajk°ač°a* ‘black’, *ajač°a* ‘green’ (Lomtadze, 1976). The literal translation: ‘old’ (inanimate) > (‘old’ (animate)) + relation + ‘the red-headed’, i.e. ‘old red-headed’ (c.f.: *away apš* ‘a man red-headed’, *abgapš* ‘a wolf ginger’, *acapšš* ‘wheat’, etc.). The structure of the compound corre-

sponds to the order of a modifier and a head typical of Abkhaz – a modifier that is an adjective follows the head.

Considering the fact that such names are characterized by taboo, such a sense of a word should not be surprising. As for the plural formant, it is typical of Abkhaz anthropomorphic names and originates from the period of polytheism (c.f. *anc^oa* ‘God’ = ‘mothers’ (Lomtadze, 1978: 145), *aš^oac^oa* ‘the one who gives birth’ (Janashia, 1960).

The term for the deity of beasts *až^oejpšaa* corresponds to Tapantian *š^oazapš* and Ashkharian *až^oapš*. Ashkharians call the language of hunters *až^oaypšibəzx^oa* which means ‘the language of *až^oejpšaa*’ in word-for-word translation. As we can see, in this case we have the remains of the adjective *pš* ‘red-headed/ginger’.

In the scientific literature there have been just two explanations of the term. According to them, it may be related to the numeral ‘fourteen’ (*ž^oipš*, *ž^oipšyə*) or it may mean ‘a guarding wing’ -*až^oya* ‘shoulder’, ‘wing’, ‘to guard’.

In the vocabulary discussed, the linguistic worldview and consciousness of the Abkhaz ethnos is apparent. This is quite interesting from both a linguistic and an ethnological perspective.

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