

# Iranian \*L, and Some Persian and Zaza Etymologies<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper aims to establish Proto-Iranian \*l by focusing on a variety of words in (I) Persian and (II) Zaza, many of which are of intrinsic etymological interest. In addition, (III) other etymologically noteworthy Zaza words are discussed.

## Keywords

Persian Etymology, Zaza Etymology, Proto-Iranian \*l, Median.

I.

I shall here address the problem of the Indo-Iranian outcome of Proto-Indo-European \*l, via evidence from Persian (I) and Zaza (II). The systematic change of PIE \*l to Proto-Iranian \*r is a common assumption for Iranian (note, e.g., Cheung 2007, in which there are no PIran. etyma given with \*l). A similar view prevails for Indo-Aryan; the complexities of the distribution of r and l in Old Indian is beyond the scope of the present article. However, as I mean to show, PIE \*l is frequently reflected as l in Iranian languages (as against PIE \*r > Iran. l in simple environments). This indicates that PIE \*l was reflected as l in Proto-Aryan. It is conceivable that \*l > r began in early Iranian dialects contiguous with Proto-Indo-Aryan dialects in Central Asia. Eventually, PIE \*l was preserved only sporadically in Iranian, with both regional and psycho-ostensive (expressive) factors having a role in the preservation. In Av-

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estan there is no phoneme *l*, which agrees with the relative paucity of \**l*-preservation in East Middle and New Iranian.

In the Old Persian inscriptions, the sign *la* is formed only for some exotic proper names (e.g., the place names *Izalā-*, *Dūbāla-*, and *Labanāna-*, and the personal names *Ḥaldita*, whereas the renditions of more familiar foreign names, such as *Niditbaira* (“Nidit\_Bel”), *Arbela*, and *Bābiruš* (“Babylon”) have *r < l*; similarly *pīru-* “ivory” < Akkadian *pīlu-* “elephant”). However, an OPers. *l*-dialect (if not Aramaic) may have given Middle Persian *pīl*, whence we have Sogdian *pīδ* and thence Khwarezmian *pīz*.

Toward the existence of OPers. *l*, Gershevitch (1969a: 205) takes the Elamite proper name *Mirinzali* from OPers. \**mṛnča(t)-alī-* “he who destroys the false”, comparing \**alī-* with OPers. *arīka-*, Sanskrit *alī-ka*, Sogd. *rīk* “false”. He writes that the PIE \**l* phoneme “survived dialectally in Western Iran (as in any case was always clear from the NPers. evidence)”, and goes on to refer to Paper (1956) on *l(a)* in the OPers. script (for further Elamite renditions of Iranian names with *l*, see Gershevitch, *ibid.*, s.v. *Lakša*).

The existence of *l* and *r* dialects for OPers. proposed by Paper and Gershevitch seems corroborated by Middle Persian. Thus Pahlavi and NPers. have *larz-* “to tremble”, but Manichean Middle Persian has *rarz-*. Similarly, secondary *l < \*rd* is found in Pahl. And NPers. *sāl* “year”, but Man. MPers. *sār*, and Pahl. and NPers. *sālār* “chieftain, general”, but Man. MPers. *sārār* (cf. also Man. MPers. *arab* = Aram. *ālep/p* “Aleph”).

The *locus classicus* for NPers. preservation of PIE \**l* is that of Horn 1901: 55-56, who lists *lab* “lip”; *lang* “lame” (for which the Old Indian cognates should be supplemented by, e.g., Swedish *lanka*, *linka* “to limp somewhat”), *lištan*, pres. *līz-* (Av. *raēz-*) “to lick”; *ālēxtan* “to jump up”, *ālūdan* “to stain”; *kal* “bald”; *kul* “bent”; *galū*, *gulū* “throat”, etc. Many of these words have *l*-cognates in Kurdish and Zaza.

Finally, NPers. *lagad* (Gilaki *layat*, Sorani Kurdish *laqa* “a kick”) is inseparable from Greek \**lak-* in *lāks*, *lāgdēn* “kicking with the heel”, *laktízō* “I kick”. The Greek words were assigned to a PIE root \**lek* (*lēk*) “to bend, etc.” in Pokorny 1959: 673. Gershevitch (1959: 182, also 324) reconstructs the PIran. etymon of NPers. *lagad*, from this same PIE root, as \**l/rakata-* (IE < \**lekṇ-to-*).

Horn’s (*ibid.*: 56) examples of NPers. *l* from \**r* are all faulty. *Alborz* has *l* via dissimilation of *r ... r* in *Harā Bṛz-*; NPers. *āluh* (*āloh*) “eagle” has *l* from *rd*, OPers. \**rdifya-*, Av. *ərəzifiia-*, cf. Arm. *arciw*; NPers. *Balx*, MPers. *Bāhl*, *Bāxl* represent an East Iranian, ultimately Bactrian, outcome of \**Bāxθri-*, cf. Late Av. *Bāxəδī* (with *δ > l*, as in Sogdian!); NPers. *kalāy* “crow”

has onomatopoeic development from \*gurāy (see further Schwartz 1975: 410, fn. 17).<sup>2</sup>

## II.

1. Zaza *ləzga* [m.] “branch” (Özcan 1997: 118), *lizge* (Berz 2004 s.v. *lizg-lizge*). Compares with a series of Baltic and Slavic forms given by Pokorny (1959: 660) under a general definition “twig” (Zweig, with original reference to branches of the hazel bush): Latvian *lagzda* “hazel bush”, Old Prussian *laxde* (*laksde*) “id.”, *kel-laxde* “shaft of a spear”; Lithuanian *lazdà* (< \**lagzdà*) “stick, hazel, shrub”, Polish *laska* “stick”, etc. The latter forms appear to derive from PIE \**lH<sub>1</sub>g<sup>(h)</sup>sd<sup>h</sup>e-H-*; > PIran. \**liyžda-* > \**ližgda-* > Zaza *ləzga*?

2. Zaza *lü* [m.] “fox” (Özcan, *ibid.*: 119). A Proto-Iranian etymon \**lupi-* “fox” would also give Avestan *urupi-*, a member of the “dog family” (*spā.cithra-*), which is sharp-toothed, *tiži.data-*, and whose pelt provides a garment, perhaps as a shamanic covering, whence the epithet *urupā(.) azinauuant-*. For \**lupi-* ~ \**rupi-* note also Kurd. *rūvī* “fox” (cf. also Pahl. *lpwk*, gloss on *urupi-*, via metathesis?). The nom. *urupā* (like *kauuā* and *haxā*) indicates a stem in PIE \**-eH<sub>1</sub>-* as in variant forms of the “fox” words: Lat. *vulpēs* “fox” (cf. Lith. *vilpišys* “wildcat”; NPers. *gorbe* “cat”). The PIE \**-eH<sub>1</sub>-* compares with PIE \**-eH<sub>1</sub>ko-* suffixation found for “fox” in PIIran. \**laupāśa-* (OInd. *lopāśa-*), Gr. *alōpēx*, Arm. *alouēs*. Proto-Indo-Iranian \**laupāśa-* (for *-au-* cf. Av. *raopi-*, another animal of the “dog family”), is generally reflected in Iranian with *r-*, but \**l* is preserved in Gilaki *lavās* and Danesfani (a Southern Tati dialect) *luwās* (see also De Vaan 2000: 279ff.).

3. Zaza *č’əlā* [f.] “lamp” (Vahman/Asatrian 1990: 270). The *l* is also found in Gilaki, Mazandarani, and Semnani *čalā* “id.”. The base is PIran. \**čūl-*, preserved with *-l-* in Saka languages: in Khotanese Saka *tcūlye* “splendid”, *hamjsūl-* “to kindle”, Digoran Ossetic *idzulun* “be bright”, with \**-ū-/u-* preserved in Psalter Pahlavi *cwl’dy /curā/*; cf. Man. MPers. *cr’h*, Judeo-Pers. *cr’* for the */-ā/* (Schwartz 1975: 412, with fn. 27; and *idem* 1982: 344), to which I now add Afghan Persian *čurāy* (= Iranian Persian *čerāy*). In Schwartz 1975: 412, I further connected the Iranian root \**čūl-* with Lith. *kūlē* “blast on grain” (following Bailey, who, however, proposed separate lemma from *čir* for the “lamp” word). In Schwartz

<sup>2</sup> Asatrian and Livshits (1994: 98-100, § XXII) maintain a radically different view concerning the preservation of the PIE \**l-* in Iranian; they think that the Iranian forms with *l* are mostly the result of secondary developments, especially in the expressive lexemes.

1982: 342-4, I also analysed the “lamp” word from \*čūl- plus a suffix of agency \*-āga-, whence not only -ā(y) with “lamp” words, but also in Judeo-Pers. *darāy*, Pers. *darā(y)* “bell” < \*drāwāga- and Pers. *damāy* “nose” are derived.

4. Zaza *k’əla* [m.] “flame” (Vahman/Asatrian 1990: 273). This word may now be explained as a cognate of č’əlā “lamp” and Lith. *kūlé* (see the preceding entry). It is tempting to reconstruct, with \*-r- from \*-l-, an early Parth. \*kūrak or \*kurak as the source of Arm. *krak* “fire, flame”.<sup>3</sup> The Iranian \*kūl- forms match the Lithuanian and explain the evidence for the etymon, hitherto adduced only from Greek and Lithuanian (for the etymon, see Pokorny 1959: 595, where \*k̄ should be replaced by \*k); in laryngeal terms, zero-grade \*kuHI- (> \*kūl-) stands alongside \*keH<sub>1</sub>wl—similarly the words for “hernia” (see Pokorny 1959: 536-537), “sun” (ibid.: 881), and “fire” (ibid.: 828-829)—, where \*-eHwC- ~ \*-uHC- > \*-ūC- show regular metathesis. Possibly, Iran. \*čūl- is analogical zero-grade to \*čāwl- < \*kēwl- < \*keH<sub>1</sub>wl-, but may alternatively be an analogical variant of \*kūl-.

5. Zaza *lōzən(a)*[f.] “opening, hole in roof for letting out smoke” (Vahman/Asatrian 1990: 273); the Siwerek dialect of Zaza has forms with ž and ĵ (Berz 2004, s.v. *lojin*, *lojini*, *locini*). Equivalent forms are Av. *rao-cana-* and Pers. *rauzan* (*rouzan*) “hole in wall for letting light in”—from PIE root \*leuk- (with velar k̄); note also OInd. *loka-* “open space”, but *rócis-* “light”, etc.

6. Zaza *pəlōsək* [m.] “thunderbolt, flash of the lightning” (Vahman/Asatrian 1990: 274). The PIE root is \*leuk- (with palatal final!), well represented by Arm. *loys* “light” (< \*louko-). A vestige of the verb is found in OInd. *ruśánt-* “brilliant, flashing”; Khotanese Saka has *rrus-* and *parrus-* “to shine”. The latter form, with preverb \*pati-, points to deriving Zaza *pəlōs-* from \*pati-lausa-. With reflection of different preverb, Kurmanji has *birūs-* “to flash, sparkle”, *birūsk* “lightning”; cf. Sorani Kurdish *birīske-* “to flash, sparkle”, Ormuri *brūš* “lightning” (\*apa-rausya-?). The Khotanese and Kurdish forms are wrongly derived from Iranian root \*rauč- in Cheung 2007 (s.v.).

The one example I have noted of Zaza *l* for \*r in a simple environment is *mūlacka* “ant. emmet” (Vahman/Asatrian 1990: 273); here the *l* probably has an expressive diminutive function, cf. the variant *mōrjila* (ibid.).

<sup>3</sup> Eilers (1974: 320ff., also 318) derives the Arm. *krak*, along with a number of Niran. words for “fireplace”, from PIran. \*kar- (< PIE \*ker- “to burn”). However, at least *kūlanj* in NPers. and *kūlak* in Anaraki in the list of Eilers (ibid.: 320), may derive, I suppose, from PIran. \*kūl-.

## III.

I conclude with a few examples of the list in Vahman/Asatrian (op. cit.: 269-275), showing the interest of Zaza for Middle Iranian etymology.

A. Zaza *becək* “finger”, Pahl. **bck**, evidently a finger measurement, gloss to Av. *ṭbišiš-* and *baši-drājah-*.

B. Zaza *daža* “pain, suffering”, Man. Parth. *džg* ‘id.’ < “burning”.

C. Zaza (Siwerek) *gərd* “big, great”; cf. MPers. *gird* “collection” and “round” (= Pers. *gerd*); further Sogd. *γγərt* “wide, broad” < \**wi-grta-*. Note also Sogd. *γurs* “around” (\**grt-s-u-*). The base \**grt-s-* could also explain Zaza (Erzinjan, Dersim) *gərs* “big, great”. The basic notion is “comprehensive, capacious”.

D. Zaza *yani* “source, well”. Turgut’s (2006: 141) dictionary for the Bingöl area gives *hêne*, *yene*, *hyena*; cf. Av. *xəniia-* ‘id.’.

E. Zaza *h(y)agā* “field”. Turgut (ibid.) gives *hêga*, *yega*, *hyega*. The parallelism with Turgut’s forms for item D. suggests that this word is cognate with Pers. *xāk* [(x)āy-] “land” (for etymology and semantics of the Persian word, see Gershevitch 1962: 76-78). For both items D. and E., reflection of OIran. \*-y- is possible.

F. Zaza *hīt(a)* “moist” is from \**hixta-*; cf. Av. *hixtaiaē* “to moisten” (cf. Zaza *pot-* < *poxt-* “cooked”). The form is remarkable because of the great rarity of MIran. and NIran. forms without preverb (see list in Cheung 2007: 127, to which the Zaza should now be added).

G. Finally, Zaza *k’ənj* “clothing”. My student Vahdat Avcı, who speaks the central Zaza of the Bingöl area, insists on the voicelessness of the final consonant, i.e. -c. In any case, the final -j (=dz) reflects -j̥, as in Kurmanji we have *k’inj̥*. Further cognates, referring to upper garments, are Man. Parth. *qñjwg*, Sanskrit *kañcuka-* (< Iran.?), Khwar. *knck* (“shirt” and “snake-skin”, also occurring among the meanings of Skt. *kañcuka-*), and OPers. \**kandu-* (Greek *kándus* “a Median garment with loose sleeves”) < Median \**kanzu-*, attested in Elamite script as *kansuka* (cf. Schwartz 1969: 447 with reference to Gershevitch 1969b: 172).<sup>4</sup> Ossetic *k’anjol* (= *k’āndzol*) is from Russian *kamzol* (< German *Kamisol*), but Arm. dial. *kənjul* (= *kəndzul*) “shirt” (Vahman/Asatrian, ibid.: 273) can be a NW Middle Iranian form with the Arm. diminutive suffix -ul, from Middle Median

<sup>4</sup> For Kurmanji *k’inj̥* Asatrian/Livshits (op. cit.: 86, § VII) reconstruct further the OIran. proto-form \**kañcuka-*, probably on the basis of the Skt. *kañcuka-*. However, regarding the parallels in OPers. and Median I mentioned above, the PIran. etymon of *k’inj̥* must be, rather, \**kanzuka-*, where, likely, the Skt. form comes from. Moreover, the intervocalic \*-č- in Kurmanji regularly gives -ž-, not -j̥- (see Asatrian/Livshits, op. cit.: 89, § XI, 2).

\**kanz*, as in case of Arm. *ganj* “treasure” and *ginj* “coriander” (cf. Henning 1963), which are presumably borrowings from the same source (the *-ə-* in the first syllable of the Arm. word is from *-a-* in preaccented position). For etymology of Median \**kanzu-*, I suggest metathesis from \**kaznu-* (like \**ganza* < \**gazna-*).<sup>5</sup> For the root, cf. PIE \**kag<sup>h</sup>-*/\**kog<sup>h</sup>-*, with the basic meaning “to enclose” (Pokorny 1959: 518), whence for enclosing structures; and note especially Welsh *cean* “covering, skin” < \**kag<sup>h</sup>-nā-* (ibid.). The root may rather be \**kag<sup>h</sup>-* or \**kog<sup>h</sup>-*, with *-nu-* suffixation in Iranian. The Median word could have spread through Persia, Parthia, and Chorasmia to India. From the same root may derive Sogd. *k'z'kh* / *kāzē* “hut, small house (of wood)”, NPers. *kāz(e)* “cow-shed”, also *kāza* “shelter for ibices in the mountains” in Kashan dialects (Asatrian 2009, s.v.).

I have no doubt that the further study of Zaza by scholars more competent than I in the study of New Iranian languages (and particularly those of northwestern Iran) will bring forth abundant material of interest for Iranian historical linguistics.

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<sup>5</sup> The metathesis \**-zn-* > *-nz-* was one of the “special features of the ancient Median language” (Henning 1963: 197-198).

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