

The Albanian name for badger

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Most researchers believe that the Albanian term for ‘badger’, *vjédhull(ë)*, also *vjédull(ë)*, *vjétull(ë)* and *vjéll(ë)*, is a innovative feminine formation derived from the Albanian verb *vjedh* ‘to steal, to rob’ (< IE. **weǵh-* ‘to drive’, cf. Skt. *váhati* ‘drives’, Lat. *vehō* ‘I bear, carry’, Gothic *ga-wigan* ‘to steal’). This explanation, suggested for the first time by G. STIER (1862: 40), is repeated in two etymological dictionaries of the Albanian language (MEYER 1891: 474; OREL 1998: 510¹) and many monographs and papers (e.g. SCHRADER 1917: 183; WEIGAND 1927: 209; ÇABEJ 1970: 85; BELLQUIST 1993: 333; POETTO 1998: 82–84). The badger is frequently analysed as ‘thief’ (“Dieb” in German), especially as ‘an animal stealing the corn’ (“Körnerstehler”)¹ (so SOLTA 1980: 51–53; KALUŽSKAJA 2001: 49; DURIDANOV 2003: 211).

This etymology was criticized (in my opinion, correctly) by the Polish Albanologist Waław CIMOCHOWSKI (1950: 254 = 2001: 43) from the semantic point of view («la plus grande difficulté serait présentée ici par le développement sémantique de ce mot»). In fact, no trace exists in the Indo-European cultural and mythological tradition that badger was named after stealing the corn or something other. POETTO (1998: 82) stresses, however, that the European badger (*Meles meles* L. = *Ursus meles* L.) belongs to the *Mustelidae* family. According to him, at least two names for the carnivore animals of this family were originally motivated by the semantics ‘to steal, rob’, namely:

- [1] Latin *fūro*, *-ōnis* ‘weasel, ferret’, hence OFr. *furon/fuiron*, Prov. *furó*, Catal. *furó*, Sp. *hurón* ‘ferret’, Port. *furão*, Ital. dial. (Lucca) *fuionco* ‘weasel’ (MEYER-LÜBKE 1935: 308), perhaps also Obwaldian, Vengadian *fierña* ‘marten’; Mediaeval Latin *furetus* ‘ferret’, hence Ital. *furetto*, OFr. *furet* (> E. *ferret*, G. *Frett*, *Frettchen*, Pol. *fretka*) is ostentatiously (“manifestante”) derived from the Latin appellative *fūr* m. ‘thief’ (cf. also Lat. *fūrōr* ‘to steal, purloin, pilfer’).
- [2] Latv. *zebieksts* ‘weasel’, Lith. *žebenkeštis* ‘id.’ is explained by Endzelin as an innovative form derived from Latv. *zebīt* ‘stibitzen, stehlen’ (MÜHLENBACH, ENDZELIN 1932: 701).

Unfortunately, the two semantic parallels, quoted by Massimo Poetto, seem to hang in the air. In my opinion, the Latin name for ‘weasel, ferret’ cannot be separated from different Indo-European terms denoting animals of the *Mustelidae* family, cf. Shughni *ḍāγ* ‘marten’, Gunji *ḍēgd*, *ḍēgg*, Bajui *ḍēwg* ‘id.’, Yazghulami *ḍaw’ak* ‘weasel’, Yidgha *l’ū* ‘pine-marten’, Tadjik (LW) *dalá* ‘weasel’ < East Iranian **dauš-in-*

1 However, Demiraj presents a sceptical position. He does not discuss the Albanian word for ‘badger’, but also does not include it to the family of the verb *vjedh* ‘to steal, to rob’ (DEMIRAJ 1997: 421–422), where e.g. *vjédhës*, *vjedhacák* m. ‘thief/Dieb’, Tosk *vjedbarák* ‘id.’ are listed. Thus he seems to treat Alb. *vjédhull(ë)* as etymologically unclear or a foreign Balkan loan word.

**dauša-* (MORGENSTIERNE 1974: 31; RASTORGUEVA, EDELMAN 2003: 419–420), Slavic **dъxorъ* ‘polecat, *Mustela putorius*’ (< IE. **dbus-*), Slovenian *dihúr*, dial. *dəhōr* m. ‘polecat’, OCz. *dchoř*, Pol. *tchórz* ‘id.’, Russ. *xopъ*, *xopĕk* m. ‘polecat’ (VASMER 1987: 270; SŁAWSKI 1984: 153–154). See also German dial. (Prussian) *dūs*, *dous* ‘polecat’ (as if a loanword from Old Prussian). It seems probable that Germanic **deuzan* (n.), attested in Gothic *dins* ‘a wild beast’, ON. *dýr*, German *Tier*, Dutch *dier* ‘an animal, beast’, E. *deer* ‘a ruminant quadruped’, denoted originally ‘a small wild animal of the *Mustelidae* family’, later it was applied to all sorts of wild animals. It is obvious now that the traditional etymology of the Latin and Romance term for ‘weasel, ferret’ is evidently wrong. Latin *fūro*, *-ōnis* derives safely from IE. **dbous-on-* ‘weasel, ferret, marten, polecat or a similar animal of the *Mustelidae* family’ and it has nothing to do with the Latin appellative *fūr* m. ‘thief’ = Gk. *φύρ* m. ‘id.’ (< IE. **bhōr*, an apophonic derivative from the root **bher-* ‘to carry’). The connection between *fūro*, *-ōnis* and *fūr* is caused by the so called popular or folk etymology. An ancient folk etymology is quoted for the first time by ISIDORUS OF SEVILLA (*Orig.* XII 2.39): “*furo* a *furvo* dictus; unde et *fur*; tenebrosos enim et occultos cuniculos effodit, et eicit praedam quam invenerit” – “Weasel (*furo*), as well as thief (*fur*), is called after the adjective ‘dark, dusky, black’ (a *furvo*), namely weasel digs up its dark and hidden burrows and brings there its prey, whatever finds” (MALTBY 1991: 249).

Also the Baltic analogy is not universally and unanimously accepted. For example, FRAENKEL (1965: 1294) and ALINEI (1986: 189) only register Endzelin’s etymology, not explaining their own position. KARULIS (1992: 551) rejects it and derives the East Baltic term for ‘weasel’ (Lith. *žebenkštis*, Latv. *zebieksts* ‘weasel’) from the Indo-European root **gebh-* ‘to eat, crush, destroy’. This etymology seems correct in the context of Skt. *jabhya-* m. ‘snapper; a kind of animal destructive to grain’ (MONIER-WILLIAMS 1899: 412), representing actually IE. **gebh-yo-* ‘gnawer’. It cannot be excluded that Hitt. *kapart-*, *kapirt-* (c.) ‘mouse, rat’ derives from IE. **gebh-* as well.

Also the Albanian term for ‘badger’ cannot be treated as a valuable example of the suggested development from ‘to steal, rob’ to ‘weasel, ferret, badger’. First of all, such a development must be excluded on the basis of phonological aspects, which are discussed below. Secondly, an alternative etymology, which is perfectly motivated by the nature of the badgers, may be suggested.

The traditional etymology of the Albanian noun in question does not explain the variant forms with the intervocalic phonemes *-db-*, *-d-* and *-t-*, which are registered in many Albanian dictionaries, e.g. MEYER 1891: 474 (*-d-/t-*); KRISTOFORIDHI 1904: 28–29 = 1961: 383–384 (*-db-/d-/t-*); BSH. 1908: 492, 493 (*-db-/t-*); CORDIGNANO 1932: 231, 232 (*-d-/t-*); FGSh 1954: 613, 614 (*-d-/db-*); see also LEOTTI 1937: 1630 (*-db-*); FGSSh 1980: 2172 (*-d-*); WAD 1987: 620 (*-db-*), NEUMARK 1999: 935–937 (*-db-/d-/t-*). As well as I known, JOKL (1912: 192–210; cf. also JOKL 1923: 299–300) has discovered that the twofold variation of the Albanian dentals (*db ~ tb*) or even the multifold one (*db ~ d ~ t ~ tb*) goes back securely to the Indo-European cluster **sd(h)*. The same variation is seen in Ancient Greek, see Gk. Homeric and Ionic *μαξός*, Doric *μασδός*, Aeolic *μασθός* and Attic *μαστός* m. ‘woman’s breast; animal’s udder’ (< **masd[h]ós*). This development of IE. **sd(h)* to the multifold dental reflex

in Albanian is accepted by most Albanologists². The most convincing etymologies are listed below:

- [3] Alb. *gjeth*, rarely *gjedh* m. 'foliage, green leaves' < IE. **gwe/osdo-*, cf. OHG. *questa* 'tuft', ON. *kvistr* 'branch', OE. *cwist* 'id.', Slavic **gvozdb* 'wood, forest' (POKORNY 1959: 480; HULD 1984: 69; DEMIRAJ 1997: 187–188; OREL 1998: 133–134); cf. also the diminutive form *gjesbk* 'dry leaves' (< **gwe/osd-iskos*).
- [4] Alb. *ledh*, dial. *leth* and *let* m. 'bound(ary) between fields, wall' < IE. **loisdos*, cf. OHG. *līsta* 'stripe, edge', G. *Leiste* (OREL 1985: 282; contra DEMIRAJ 1997: 235). A different etymology appears in OREL's etymological dictionary (1998: 216), where the relation to OPruss. *laydis* 'clay' is preferred.
- [5] Alb. (Gheg) *pidh* beside (Tosk) *pith* m. 'cunnus, vulva; female pudenda' (TAGLIAVINI 1965: 94; EULER 1985: 111), dial. (in Greece) *pidhe* f. < IE. **pisdos*, **pisdā*, cf. Pol. *pizda*, Russ. *нузда* 'vulva' (< Slavic **pizda* f. 'female pudenda'); OPrus. *peisda* 'bottom', Lith. *pyzdā* f. 'female pudenda' (ROZWADOWSKI 1895: 353–354; POKORNY 1959: 830; DEMIRAJ 1997: 319–320; OREL 1998: 325).
- [6] Alb. *drihtë* 'grain, wheat' < IE. **gh̥rsdā-*, cf. OHG. *gersta* 'barley', Lat. *hordeum* n. 'id.' (< *gh̥rsdeyom*), Gk. *kriq* f 'barley' (HAMP 1960: 277; 1985: 11–12; OREL 1985: 282; DEMIRAJ 1997: 145–146; POKORNY 1959: 446). In his different work OREL (1998: 75) notes the following remark: "In Albanian, the development of the voiced Indo-European cluster seems to be surprising", referring to the fact that no variation of *-th-* is attested.

The same dental variation is observed in some different Albanian examples, whose etymology is not firmly established:

- [7] Alb. *badër* ~ *badhër* ~ *bathër* f. 'narcissus, daffodil' derives from PALb. **basd(h)rā* rather than **bastrā* (OREL 1998: 13), cf. Skt. *bhāstrā* 'bellows', based on IE. **bhes-* 'to blow'.
- [8] Alb. *gjithë*, dial. *gjidhë* and *gjillë* adj. 'all' (cf. HULD 1984: 69–70; DEMIRAJ 1997: 188–189; OREL 1998: 136). The term in question remains with no convincing etymology. In his comment HAMP suggests a protoform **sisd(h)-*.
- [9] Alb. *kadh* ~ *kath* 'sty' < PALb. **kasd(h)ā-* (cf. OREL 1998: 163).
- [10] Alb. *lerth* ~ *lerdh* 'ivy' (cf. OREL 1998: 219).
- [11] Alb. *mjedhër* ~ *mjetërr* ~ *mitër* ~ *mjedër* f. 'mulberry; tares' < PALb. **mesd(h)rā* (cf. OREL 1998: 269).

Also the Roumanian ("substratal") phoneme *-z-* appears to render the cluster **-sd-* (Note, that Greek zeta [z] also derives from **sd*), whereas Roum. *d* and *g* can be regarded as regular equivalents of Alb. *d(h)* in some other cases. In this case Roum. *viezure* may belong to the Dacian heritage and must not be explained as an Albanian loan word.

2 A similar opinion is expressed by HULD (1984: 149): "**sd* seems to yield a consistently voiceless interdental spirant *th*, while **sdh* seems to be reflected by a voiced spirant, *dh*, eg *drihtë* 'grain' < **gh̥rsdom*, *gjeth* 'leaf' < **Guósdoi* but *pidh* 'vulva' < **peisdh-*". Huld's position does not explain the observed variations in Albanian (e.g. *-dh-* ~ *-th-* ~ *-d-* ~ *-t-*).

It is possible now that the Proto-Albanian name for ‘*Meles meles* L.’ contained the cluster **sd(h)*. If this suggestion is correct, then we must accept the conclusion that Alb. *vjedhull(ë)* f. ‘badger’ has nothing to do with the Albanian verb *vjedh* ‘to steal, to rob’ (< IE. **weǵh-* ‘to drive’). Note that the verb in question demonstrates no trace of such dental variation, which may be observed in the Albanian name for ‘badger’ (*-dh-/-d-/-t-*). In my opinion, Alb. *vjedhull* derives securely from the Indo-European appellative **wesd(h)-es-* ‘suet, lard, animal fat’ (cf. Iran. **vazd-ah-* n. ‘animal fat, grease’) by means of the suffix **-ulo-* (masc.) or **-ulā* (fem.). The appellative in question, IE. **wesd(h)-es-*, is well documented in numerous Iranian languages:

- [12] Avestan *vazdab-* n. ‘±fatness’, Pashto *wāzda* f. ‘animal fat, grease’, Parachi *γāzd*, Yidgha *wāzd*, Munjani *wāzd*, Kurdish *baz* ‘id.’ (< Iran. **vazdab-*).

It seems to be related to the Indo-European root **wes-*, which is attested in five Indo-European subgroups:

- [13] OInd. *vāsā*, also *vasā́* (f.) ‘fat, grease; brain’, Pali *vasā* (f.) ‘fat’, Prakrit *vasā* f. ‘fat; marrow’, Sindhi *wahā* f. ‘fat, grease, blubber of fish’, Kumaoni *baso* ‘fat’, Nepali *boso* ‘id.’; Oriya *basā* ‘fat, suet’ (TURNER 1966: 667, No. 11443); Kashmiri *was* f. ‘marrow, brain’ (< Dardic **wasā*, according to TURNER 1966: 667, No. 11443); Avestan *vañhā-* f. ‘ein Teil des Rückens’ (BARTHOLOMAE 1904: 1348); Alb. *vjamë* f. ‘(animal) fat, lard, suet, tallow’ (< IE. **wes-men-*) and perhaps Hittite *wašši-* n. ‘Ingredienz, Heilmittel, Salbe’ (FRIEDRICH 1991: 248).

The suffix *-ulo-* (feminine *-ulā-*) is well attested in the Albanian animal terminology, see especially the following two examples:

- [14] Alb. *hardhël* f. ‘lizard’ < IE. **skord-ulā* f. ‘lizard, triton or a similar animal’, cf. Gk. Hesychian *σκορδύλη ζῴον τι τῶν τεσματιαίων, ἐμφερες <ᾰσ>καλαβώτη* (“an animal of the standing waters, similar to the spotted lizard”), usually Gk. Att. *κορδύλος* m. ‘triton, water-newt, *Triton palustris*’. See also *κορδύλη*, dial. *σκορδύλα* f. ‘a kind of sea-fish’. Other Albanian variants, for ex. *hardhje*, Tosk *hardh(ë)jë* f., *hardhjeshkë*, *hardhicë*, *hardhickë*, *hardhucë*, *hardhuckë*, *hardhushkë* (DEMIRAJ 1997: 194; OREL 1998: 142; NEUMARK 1999: 302–303), Vaccarizzo Alb. *γard̄le* (E. P. HAMP in his reviewer’s comments), are also noteworthy. The Illyrian tribal name *Scordisci* seems to be a totem name for ‘lizard-people’, cf. Alb. *hardhushkë* beside *hardhjeshkë* f. ‘lizard’ (as if from IE. **skordiskā*).
- [15] Alb. *thnegël*, dial. *thënegullë* f. ‘ant’ < PALb. **tsangula* (OREL 1998: 480) < IE. **seng-ulā* f. ‘(winged) ant’, cf. OPruss. (EV 791) *sangis* ‘ant’; OIr. *sengán* ‘ant’, MIr. *seangan* ‘id.’; NPers. *eng* ‘bee’, Kurd. *heng* ‘bee, queen bee’ < Iran. **hangu-* ‘queen bee’ (WITCZAK 2003: 176–177; 2005: 206–207).
- [16] Alb. *dheulë* f. ‘ant’, liter. ‘diejenige, die in der Erde lebt’ (CAMAJ 1966: 119; DEMIRAJ 1997: 155; OREL 1998: 82), cf. Alb. *dhe* ‘earth, land’ < IE. **ǵhđōm-* (orig. *m*-stem, later *n*-stem) ‘id.’. It derives from **ǵhđem-ulā* f. and demon-

strates a regular lost of *-m-* in the intervocalic position, cf. Alb. *grusht* ‘fist’³ = OInd. *grumustīh*, *gurumustīh* m. f. ‘heavy fist’ (< IE. **g^uru-musti-* ‘id.’). Thus Alb. *dheulë* cannot be treated as an innovation. It must represent a very archaic form, which was created as early as in the Proto-Albanian period.

The suggested etymology seems acceptable from the semantic point of view. Badgers eat a wide variety of food and are usually regarded as omnivores and very fat animals, especially in the autumn, when they put on a thick layer of fat under the skin (DOBROUKA 1998: 74). In the ancient and medieval times badger’s grease was used as a remedy.

Badgers were frequently named after their fatness, e.g.

- [17] Germanic **pahsu-* m. ‘badger’ (cf. OHG., MHG. *dahs*, German *Dachs*, Dutch *das*, also Norv. *svin-toks* ‘badger’) and Latin (late) *taxus*, also *taxo*, *-onis* m. ‘badger’ (probably a borrowing from Germanic) seem to derive from IE. **t.g-s-*, see also Gallo-Latin *taxea* f. ‘lardum’ (i.e. ‘badger’s grease’). According to F. SOMMER (1912–1913: 359–361), the German name for ‘badger’ derives from the Indo-European adjective **tegu-* ‘fat’, cf. OIr. *tiug*, Welsh *tew*, Corn. *tew* ‘fat’; OE. *dicce* ‘fat’, OHG. *dicchi*, OSax. *thikki* ‘dick, dicht, häufig’ (POKORNY 1959: 1057).
- [18] AGk. Ionic ἄρκηλος m. ‘young panther’, Doric (Cretan) ἄρκαλος ‘badger’ (and not ‘porcupine’), Mod. Gk. dial. (Crete) ἀρκάλος m. ‘Cretan badger, *Meles meles arcalus*’; Byz. Gk. ἄρκουμος ‘badger’, liter. ‘badger-mouse’ (< Proto-Greek **fárkos* ~ **fárkalos* < IE. **wrk̥-os* and **wrk̥-ālos*); Sanskrit *vṛśa-* m. ‘a small animal living in the holes’, *vṛśa-* or *vṛśa-* m. ‘rodent’ (< IE. **wrk̥-os*); Nepali *bharsia* ‘badger’ (< *vṛśika-*), Hindi *bijju*, Bengali *gor-bijju* ‘id.’ (< *vṛśuka-*); NPers. dial. *barsū* ‘badger’, Kurd. *barsuk*, Arm. *goršuk* ‘badger’, Turkish **borsuk* (< Iran.). All the terms derive from IE. **wrk̥-* adj. ‘fat’, cf. Hittite *wark-ant-* adj. ‘fat/fett’ (FRIEDRICH 1991: 245).
- [19] OPrus. *wobsdus* ‘Dachs/badger’ (EV 670); Lith. *opšrys*, *opšrūs*, *opšrūs* m.; Latv. *āpsis*, *āpšis* m., *āpša* f. ‘badger’ go back to the Baltic archetype **ābs-*, which was extended by a number of different suffixes **-du-*, **-ryo-*, **-ru-*, **-yo-*, **-yā-*. The Baltic **ābs-* seems to derive from the form **adp-s-* (the suffix *-s-* appears in the names of wild animals, cf. Lith. *lāpė* vs. Latv. *lapsa* ‘fox’; German *Luchs* vs. OSved. *lō* ‘lynx’ < Germanic **luhsaz* vs. **luhaz*, etc.) with the regular lengthening of the initial vowel in agreement to Winter’s rule (law). The derivational basis may be seen in IE. **adep-* ‘(animal) fat’, cf. Lat. *adeps* ‘suet, lard, animal fat’, Umbrian *aēpes*, *aēper*, *aēpe*, *aīpes*, *aīper* abl. pl. ‘adipibus’; Roshani *adaḡog* ‘piece of lard’ (< Iran. **adap-ačī-*); Arm. *atok*‘ adj. ‘full, fat, abundant, fertile’ (< IE. **adep-oko-*). Also Slavic **azvъ* and **azvъcb* m. ‘badger’ (cf. LSorb. *jazw*, *jaz*, OCz. *ježvec*, Cz. *jezevec*, Slovak *jazvec*, Kashubian *jozc*, *jopść*, OPol. and Pol. dial. *jaźwiec*, Ukr. dial. *язвец*, Russ. dial. *язвец*, Slovenian

3 The traditional etymology derives Alb. *grusht* ‘fist’ (and Roumanian *gîrșt*) from a South Slavic source (MEYER 1891: 133; OREL 1998: 126). In my opinion, Slavic **gъrstъ* ‘handful, hand’ may be treated as an early borrowing from the Albanian language.

jazbec, jazvec, Serbo-Croatian *jazavac*, Maced. *jazovec*, Bulg. *язовец*) may derive from **ábzwas* and IE. **adp-swos* ‘fat animal’, as well as AGk. Hesychian ἄψοος θηρίον τι κατεσθίον ἀμπέλους m. ‘an animal gnawing grape-vines’ (< Common Gk. *ἄψοφος < IE. **adp-sə₃wos*).

It is worth emphasizing that badgers are also called “pigs” on account of their fatness, as well as their size and proportions, e.g.

- [20] Alb. *baldosë* and *dosëbalë* f. ‘badger’ (ÇABEJ 1976: 141–142; DEMIRAJ 1997: 87; NEUMARK 1999: 40, 179), liter. ‘pig with white spots [on its forehead]’ or perhaps ‘pig-badger’, cf. Alb. *dosë* f. ‘pig, sow’, *bal* adj. ‘white-haired; with white spots’, also *balë* f. ‘white spot’, *balë* f. pl. ‘badger’ (OREL 1998: 15).
- [21] Mod. Gk. γουρουνοασβός m. ‘badger’, liter. ‘pig-badger’ (CHORIKOV-MALEV 1980: 226).
- [22] Norv. *svin-toks* ‘badger’, liter. ‘sow-badger/Schweinedachs’ (KLUGE, SEEBOLD 2002: 126).
- [23] The Modern Welsh name for ‘badger’, *mochyn daear*, means nothing other than ‘earth pig’.
- [24] In colloquial English the male badger is called a *boar*, the female a *sow*.
- [25] In some north-western dialects of Spain the Eurasian badger is called *porco* ‘pig’, e.g. *porco toixó*, *porco toixo*, *porco teixo* (liter. ‘pig-badger’) in Galicia, *porco* in Asturias.
- [26] In some Yuman languages, spoken in California and North-West Mexico, the primitive term for ‘badger’ changed its original meaning and began to denote ‘pig’, cf. Walapai *mah^wá*, Yavapai *mah^wá*, Mohave *mah^wá*, Yuma *max^wá*, Diegueño *max^wá*, Campo *max^wá*, Tipai *max^wá* ‘badger’ vs. Havasupai *mah^wá* ‘satát’ ‘pig’, Paipai *max^wá*, Kiliwa *mah^wá* ‘id.’ (WARES 1968: 78). It was caused by the fact that pigs resemble badgers as to their size and fatness.

Conclusions

The instances mentioned above (from [17] to [19]) demonstrate clearly that the *Benennungsmotiv* for badger, based on an adjective meaning ‘fat’ (cf. [17–18]) or on a noun denoting ‘suet, lard, animal fat’ (cf. [19]) is highly popular and plausible. Badgers are commonly regarded as fat animals like pigs (cf. [20–26]). My guess is: Albanian *vjédhull(ë)*, as well as Roumanian *viezure* ‘badger’ (if it derives from a Pre-Latin substrate), may represent IE. **wesd[h]-ulā* f. (liter. ‘fat animal’) deriving from a term meaning ‘animal fat, grease’ (cf. Iran. **vazdab-* [12] < IE. **wesd[h]-es-*; see also IE. **wes-* [13]). I believe that the traditional etymology of Alb. *vjédhull* is doubtful from the semantic point of view (cf. [1–2]) and the phonological one (cf. [3–11]).

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