

Phonetic and Semantic Developments of the Native Armenian Word “Yerkin” in Polynesian Languages and Armenian

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Abstract

The close prototype of the native Armenian word *yerkin* “sky, heaven” is found in the Polynesian Rapanui, Maori, Mangareva, Tuamotu languages, as an archaism preserved in the Far Eastern islands such as the penultimate stress and the VSO structure of the sentence specific to Pre-Proto-Armenian.

Continuing the examination of the parallels revealed in Armenian through the pan-Polynesian *rangi* (*rangi*) “sky” > Armenian *ērgi*, *yerkin* “sky”, this article presents more than **10** word parallels of the latter’s *lagi* (*langi*) and *laani* variants in Armenian. The regular phonetic developments and semantic changes they have undergone in Armenian are revealed.

Thus, it turns out that all the variations of the Polynesian root *rangi*, *langi*, *laani* “sky” in Polynesian languages are present in Armenian, with numerous and diverse dual-plan (phonetic and semantic) developments and form a fairly large genealogical cluster.

Keywords: *Polynesian languages, sky, Rapanui-Armenian lexical commonalities, masculine origin, appearance, image, peripheral area, water surface, root variations.*

1. Introduction

In our previous report, it was shown that the prototype of the native Armenian word *yerkin* “sky, heaven” is preserved in Polynesian languages, from which the Armenian word *yerkin* “sky” is easily derived (Stepanyan, 2024a).

This prototype of the native Armenian word *yerkin* had further interesting morphological and semantic developments in Polynesian languages and Armenian, which we find appropriate to present by starting our study with the Armenian word “*lajvard*”.

Lajvard (*lajuard*) “*lapis lazuli*” is a semi-precious stone of dark blue color in its natural state, with yellowish-white dots and veins and amazing luster. It was highly valued for its bright coloring since ancient times; it is mentioned in many myths of the ancient world. In the ancient world, *lapis lazuli* had a price equal to gold and silver. The homeland of *lapis lazuli*, mentioned in Sumerian epics, from where it was supplied to Sumer, is called *Aratta*, i.e., the kingdom of *Ararat*¹.

Accepted etymology: In Armenian reality, this stone is known by many names: *gočazm*, *partizak’ar* and *lajuard* with its six or seven variants, which are not etymologically analyzed. The latter, *lajuard*, with its variants is considered a borrowing from Iranian languages.

Lajuard (*lajvard*, *lažuard*, *lažurd*, *lazuard*, *lazvard*, *lačvard*), (we also find a *lazuart’* version with Acharyan) “a blue precious stone, *gočazm*, *partizak’ar*, *lajuard*; blue dye made from this” (considered a loan from Persian *lāžvard*) (Acharyan (1926b) 257; Jahukyan (2010) 292). According to Acharyan, “...this stone is special to Persia, where the main mines are located in *Badakhshan*²; from here it

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¹Extremely interesting discoveries about *lapis lazuli* and its successful competitor, the “Armenian stone” (*lapis armenus*), can be found in the following book: (Sargsyan (2023) 11-54).

²Today it is part of Afghanistan.

spread east and west, first entering India, it was *lājavarta*, *lājāvarta*, then it passed to the Arabs and through them it entered many languages. Thus, Arabic. *lājvard* or *lāžvard* “azure”, *lājvardī* “sky blue”, Turk. *lājiverd* “light blue, violet”, Kurd. *lajverd* “blue”, Lat. *lazulum*, *lazurius*, *lazur* “azure”, *azurum*, *azura*, *azolum* “azure color”, St. Grk. *λαζουριον* “azyre”, Ital. *lapislazzolo* “azure”, *azurro* “sky-blue”, French *lapis-lazuli* “azure”, *azur* “blue”, Span., Port. *azul* “blue”, Germ. *Lasur*, Rus. *лазурь* “azure and light blue paint” etc (Acharyan (1926b) 257).

2. Material and Methods

Let us try to find out the composition and meaning of the word by a comparative examination of the word material of Polynesian languages and Armenian, which has already been the basis of the etymology of many Armenian words of unknown origin, incomprehensible, considered misspellings and also borrowings (Stepanyan, 2015, 2017, 2024b,c).

Proposed etymology: It is necessary to start our efforts to understand the composition and meaning of the word from those Armenian versions of the latter, in which there is any meaningful root. In this case, they are the variants *laju-ard*, *lazu-ard* and *lažu-ard*, among which the **native** Armenian meaning-bearing root **ard** can be recognized.

ARD. Hr. Acharyan calls it “a widely used root that presents itself to us in various forms and with a rich affixation. The simplest initial form is *ard*, from which are derived *anard* “shapeless, formless”, “formless, ugly”... *anardil* “ugly, deformed”... *anardak* “matchless, incomparable”... *gm-bet‘ard* “dome-shaped” etc (Acharyan (1926a) 306). According to G. Jahukyan: native Armenian *ard* in the sense of “*form, way, order, composition*” (derived from **ar-t*-, (**rt*/**ar*-) “*to adjust*”; cf. Old Hindi: *rtu* “order, rule, result”, Greek *ἀρτυς* “order”, Lat. *artus* “joint”) (Acharyan (1926a) 307-308; Jahukyan (2010) 88).

We find the original prototype of the native Armenian word **ard** without the additional sounds -*t*/-*d*- (see: the assumed IE ***ar**- prototype) preserved in the ancient Polynesian languages as archaic forms in peripheral areas: Rapanui **aro** “look”, “front side”, “front side of the building”, “face, front”, “forehead”. The **native** Armenian parallel of this root is the Grabar word **ard** “form, manner, order, composition”, which is obtained by adding the consonantal element -*t*>-*d*- (*t*>-*ḡ*)³.

Thus, the second component of the word *lajuard*, the Grabar root **ard**, means both “*form*”, “*image*”, and “*look (external)*”, “*appearance*” (Sukiasyan (1967) 413) as well as “*like, similar*” (see: *ziard*? “in what form?”, “how?”, from which later the suffix *zerd* or *zert* “as if, like, similar” was derived (Acharyan (1926a) 306).

It follows from all this that the word *laju-ard* must mean “shape”, “face”, “image”, “external look”, “image”, “pattern” of something. And that something is expressed in incomprehensible **laž-**, **laž-**, **laz-**, **lač-** versions. It remains to find out the origin and meaning of this component.

Judging by its appearance and the names given to it in the ancient world, the name of this stone must be etymologically connected with the idea of “*sky*” and indeed it is; the Egyptians called it “*the sky stone*,” the Greeks said that the lapis lazuli “looks like a *dome of the sky decorated with stars*” (Fersman (1961) 217); this stone was associated with the ideas of the *beauty and infinity of the sky*, it was worshiped, and in medieval medicine it is described as a rock endowed with magical properties, whose *sky-blue glow* drove away all diseases.

The quality criterion is the *abundance and purity of golden dots in the stone, as a result of which it resembles the starry blue sky* (Figure 1a, b). Hence, the meaning of the first, unclear component **laž-**, **laž-**, **laz-**, **lač-** of the word *lajuard* must be related to the word “sky”.

LAG/LAJ. As has been shown, the prototype for the native Armenian word *yerkin* “sky” is preserved in Polynesian languages, from which the Armenian word *yerkin* “sky” is easily derived:

³The Rapanui **aro** “appearance”, “front side”, “front of the building”, “face”, “front” is also parallel to the **native** Armenian **yeres**, dial. (Ar., Tb. etc.) *ēres/ēresk*, (Hmsh., Krb.) *īres, īris* “face” with the well-known vowel shift *a>e>i* (DDAL (2001) 379). This is also proven by the existence of the word *ariga* (*ari-ga/ari-ḡa*) “form”, “appearance”, “face, countenance” formed from the Rapanui morpheme **ar-**, to which corresponds the most commonly used pluralia tantum form *yeres-k* of the native Armenian word *yeres* “the front of the face of humans and animals, where the eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks are located” (derived from the root **prepsa-* **prep-* “to catch the eye, to appear, face, countenance”) (Malkhasiants (1944) 577; Acharyan (1926b) 46-47; Jahukyan (2010) 223).



Figure 1. a) A lapis lazuli bowl (Ermitáž); b) Reflection of the starry night sky on the water surface.

Rapanui **ragi** (raŋi) “sky” - native Armenian: (ye)**rkin**, dial. (Asl.) (ē)**rgi** (which is logically derived from the root **ragi** (raŋi) with the addition of the pre-sound ē (e) and the reduction of the unstressed a) (Stepanyan (2015) 80-86).

Polynesian languages are characterized by **r/l** shift, as a result of which the root **ragi** (raŋi) “sky” exists in these languages in two (perhaps even three) forms: Proto-Polynesian ***lani**, Rapan. **ragi** (raŋi), Maori **rangi**, Mangareva **ragi**, Tuamotu **ragi**, Tahitian **ra’i**, Samoan **lagi**, Tongan **langi**, and Hawaiian **lāni** (laani) “sky” (the latter is a consequence of the fact that the phoneme ŋ (=ng) splits into one n, one g).

The aforementioned (*r/l*) shift also occurs in Rapanui-Armenian lexical commonalities, such as:

Rapan. *rivariva* (*riva-riva*) 1) “good”, “abundant, rich” - Grab. *lav* “good, nice”, “advantageous” (**labh-* “to seize, possession, estate”);

Rapan. *rere* 2) “to go aside”, “to retreat”, *rerarera* (*rera-rera*) “surface of the sea” - Grab. *lelal* “to waver, to move” (from an onomatopoeic root **lel-*);

Rapan. *regorego* (*rego-rego*) “naked” - Grab. *lek*, *lerk*, *terk* “hairless, naked” (**lerg-* “smooth, even, slippery”);

Rapan. *rokiroki* (*roki-roki*) “lonely, solitary” - Grab. *lok* “only, just” (from **logo-* **lēg-* “weak”), etc (Stepanyan, 2024a).

It is obvious that the first components of the Armenian word *laḵu-ard*, *laj-/laz-/lazh-/lach-*, **laḵ-/laz-/laž-/lač-** are phonetically modified versions of the root **laŋ(i)** of the word **lagi** (**laŋi**) “sky” preserved in Polynesian. Since the Polynesian word **ragi/laŋi** “sky” is the closest prototype to the native Armenian word *yerkin* “sky”, therefore the root **lag-** and its phonetically modified versions are native Armenian roots.

Accordingly, the Armenian word *laḵu-ard* in its (*lazu-ard/laču-ard/lažu-ard*) variants is etymologized by two **native** Armenian components, as **lag** > **native Armenian laḵ** (**laz-/laž-/lač-**) “sky” + **ard** “face”, “front part”, “shape”, “appearance, form, image”, “like, similar”.

Conclusion: The word *laḵu-ard*, considered a borrowing from Iranian languages, is a **native** Armenian formation, the meaning of which is “face of the sky”, “shape, form, image, appearance of the sky”, “like, similar (to) the sky”. This etymology not only fully corresponds to the description of the stone’s appearance, but also explains the reason for its worship as “the appearance, image of sky” on earth.

Thus, the prototype of the native Armenian word *yerkin* “sky” is preserved in Polynesian lan-

guages in the forms *raŋi* and *laŋi* “sky”. The first of them, as has been shown, is the root of the Armenian words yerkin/yerġink’ “sky”, *řang* “color” and *yerang* “subtle difference” (Stepanyan, 2024a), and the latter gave rise to the name of the stone *lajuard* (*lajvard*, *lažuard*, *lažurd*, *lažuard*, *lazvard*, *lačvard*) with the meanings “face, face of the sky”, “like, similar”.

The impression is that the version *lagi* of the native Armenian word “yerkin” preserved in Polynesian languages, had much more numerous and diverse manifestations in Armenian than the *ragi* version.

Let us give examples:

LAGAN. The Armenian word “*lagan*” (*lakan*, *lekan*, *lkan*, *tekan*) “wash-basin, wash-tub” is also considered a borrowing from Persian *lakan* (*lagan*) < Greek *λακάνη* (*λεκάνη*) (Acharyan (1926b) 261; Jahukyan (2010) 290).

One of the important astronomical “instruments” of the Polynesians was a bowl-shaped, wide-mouthed container made of the dried peel of a large pumpkin and filled with water, the tub, which in Armenian is called a *lagan* or *lakan*. In this primitive astronomical “instrument”, the *night starry sky* was reflected (Figure 1b), or, in other words, the *night starry laŋi* “sky” appeared on the surface of the water filled in the bowl, hence the name *lagan* for the tub. We assume that initially the *surface of the water* was called *lagan*, on which the image of the sky was reflected, later this name was transferred to a *bowl/basin filled with water*, and then to *any bowl/basin* in general. This is proven by the Rapanui root *raga*₁ (*laga*) “to flow, to cause a puddle”. Let us note that *lagi* “sky” also finds its reflection in a puddle and it is not surprising that it has a name formed from the same root.

This root allows us to understand the deeper meanings of the Grabar words *lakanadēt* and *lakanagēt*, “casting spells by looking into the tub (water)” (Malkhasiants (1944) 180). They actually mean the one who observes *lakan*, i.e., “the sky reflected in the water” – “skyobserver” and one who studies “the sky reflected in the water”, one who knows – “skyscientist” (cf. Rapanui *kite*₂ “to see, to notice”, “to know” – Grab. *gēt/git* “knowing, knowledgeable”); by the same logic, the word *lekanadyut’ut’yun* will mean *yerknadyut’ut’yun* “skycharming.” We see the Armenian roots *lek* and *lik* (a>e>i) as phonetic gradation variants of the Polynesian words *lagi* “sky” and *laga* “to make a puddle.”

LEK. The root *lek* is used separately in Armenian, as non-etymologized *lek* “thin skin with hair removed”, “the same skin pierced, which is pulled under a sieve” (Malkhasiants (1944) 192). We believe that the *pierced* skin pulled under a sieve was also likened to the sky covered with stars (the holes are stars) and is the vowel gradation version of the same root *laŋi* “sky”, from which we have the *lekan* version of the word *lakan*/*lagan*.

LIK. The Armenian root *lik* has the meaning of “lake, basin”, from which we have the compound *lkajev* “lake-shaped” and the word *lkil* “to melt” (from *lĕg-, *leg- “to drip, to trickle, dissolve”). This root has the following parallels in Indo-European languages: Old Irish: *legaim* “to dissolve, to melt”; Old English *lekan* “to wet”; Old Icelandic *lokr* “stream”; Armenian *lič* “lake” (Acharyan (1926b) 281-282; Jahukyan (2010) 296-297). It is identical in meaning to the Rapanui root *raga*₁ (*laga*) “to flow, to cause a puddle” and also proves the truth of our assumption that *any surface of water in which the sky found its reflection, image, face*, was called by the same word (cf. Russian *лик/лицо* “face, countenance”, “icon, image (of a saint)”).

A variant of the same root should also be considered the *native* Armenian word *lkil*, *lk’nul* “to melt, to begin to melt (of ice)” (from the root *leg- “to drip, to leak, to dissolve”), cf. Old Irish *legaim* “to dissolve, to melt” (Acharyan (1926b) 289; Jahukyan (2010) 298).

LIČ. “lake”. The *native* Armenian root *lič* has the meaning of “lake, opening”, (*lĕgiā -, from the root *leg- “to drip, to flow, to dissolve”) (Jahukyan (1987) 135). That is, the *native* Armenian word *lič* is actually a modified version of the root *lik*.

LAYAN. Let us remind that the word *ragi*/*raŋi* in some East Polynesian languages sounds like *lagi*/*laŋi*, and in Hawaiian it is *lāni* (*laani*) “sky”.

In Armenian, the word *lagan* is known in several versions: *lakan*, dial. *lagan* (Ar., Tb., Krb., Hvr., NN, Kr., Msh. etc.), *lekan* (*lekan*) (a>e>i) “tub, basin”, dial. (Sb.) *lekan* “basin, tub” (DDAL (2001) 217) (considered a borrowing from the Greek word *λεκάνη*) (Jahukyan (2010) 294) and, most

interestingly, *dial.* (NB, Khtj., Bl., Msh., Vn.) **layan**. This last Armenian dialectal variant **layan** “tub” literally corresponds to the Hawaiian word **lāni** (*laani*) “sky” with the reduction of the last sound.

LAYN. It is also not excluded that the *native* Armenian word **layn** “wide” originates from the Hawaiian version **lāni**, associated with the boundless vastness and infinity of the sky. It is derived from the root *pleteno-, *plat- “wide and flat, to widen” (Jahukyan (2010) 291). The similarity of the Hawaiian words **laan**(i) “sky” - Armenian **layan** “basin” and **layn** “wide” is obvious (see also Arm. *dial.* (Kr., Sb.) **lannal**, **laynvil** “to widen” (DDAL (2001) 201), Armenian *dial.* (Ar., P.) **lagan/lakan** “special footwear that is tied to the feet when walking on snow so as not to get stuck in the snow”, **lagaš**, **lagaš-beran** “a person with a large mouth”, **laza** “a large barrel in which grapes are crushed” (DDAL (2001) 192)).

LAZ. The *laz-* version of the root **la** “sky” is found not only in the Armenian compound word **lazu-ard** and the words **laza** “large barrel in which grapes are crushed” formed from the original simple root, but also in the base of the word **lazu-r** “light blue color”, “color of the sky, sea”, “light blue paint” (Malkhasiants (1944) 179). In the latter, the meaning has been narrowed: the emphasis is not on the general *appearance, image* of the sky (later also of the sea), but only on the *color* “blue”.

The following foreign names of lapis lazuli demonstrate complete morpho-semantic correspondence with the *native* Armenian word **lazur** “blue”: Latin **lazulum**, **lazurius**, **lazur** “azure”, **azurum**, **azura**, **azolum** “color of the azure”, St. Grk. **λαζούριον**, Italian **lapislazzolo** “azuree”, **azurro** “sky-blue”, French **lapis-lazuli** “azure”, **azur** “blue”, Span., Port. **azul** “blue”, Germ. **Lasur**, Rus. **лазурь** “azure and light blue paint” etc (Acharyan (1926a) 257). It is obvious that they also indicate the color azure “blue”.

LAČ. The root **lač** of the **lačuard** version of the word **lačuard** in Armenian has the meanings of “young boy” (Malkhasiants (1944) 181), “son, boy, servant” (Jahukyan (2010) 290), **lačik** “little lač, boy” and is considered a borrowing from some neighboring language; cf. Kurdish **lağ**, Geo. (Imeret.) **lači**, Zaza **lāğ**, Duzhik **lağik**, especially Ethiopian Amharic **lağ** “son”. “But what is the source of all these and what is their connection with each other is not known” - Hr. Acharyan writes (Acharyan (1926a) 261; Jahukyan (2010) 290).

Let us try to find out the source of all of them and the semantic commonality that connects them. We have already proven that the **lač** component of the *native* Armenian word **lačuard** has the meaning of “sky”. It is noteworthy that this name, **lač**, meaning “sky”, is given exclusively to *male* children or persons. We believe that this is explained by the fact that in ancient Armenian mythological ideas, the sky was considered a symbol of the *male* origin. This is also the case in Polynesia, where the sky and the earth are presented as spouses separated by the efforts of their sons, with the sky being the father and the earth being the mother. Therefore, it is not surprising that male children are named with a root meaning “sky”. What connects all these words is the semantic commonality **lag>lač** “sky = male origin”.

Conclusion: the root **lač** is also a variant of the native Armenian root **lag-** and passed from Armenian to other languages.

The root **ragi** “sky” of the native Armenian word **yerkin** “sky”, preserved in Polynesian languages, is one of the few roots whose two variants have been preserved in Armenian (Stepanyan (2015) 59-86). Moreover, in Armenian we have a bird name that is composed of these two variants.

ARAGIL, LAGLAG. Hr. Acharyan considers the original form of the word **aragil** to be the Greek **περαγλός** and derives it together with Armenian from an Asia Minor source (Acharyan (1926a) 291-292), while Gr. Ghapantsyan connects the name **aragil** “cormorant, stork” with the name **Ara** the Handsome (Ghapantsyan (1944) 140-141). G. Jahukyan rightly considers the etymologies of the word **aragil** by Gr. Ghapantsyan and Hr. Acharyan to be doubtful, however offering no other version (Jahukyan (2010) 83). So, it has not been etymologized to this day.

The non-etymologized Armenian word **a-ragi-l** is composed of the pre-sound **a** regularly added in Armenian to words with the initial **r**, the prototype **ragi** “sky”, preserved in Polynesian languages, of the native Armenian word **yerkin**, and the ending **l** (or, from the pre-sound **a**, the root **rag-** obtained by dropping the final sound of the word **ragi** “sky” and the ending **-il**). We also have the Armenian word **arabil** “a bird” of unknown origin, perhaps a stork.



Figure 2. a) Stork and its reflection; b) The reflection of reeds on the water surface.

The second version of the bird-name is formed by the repetition of the root **laŋ** (lag) obtained by reduction of the final sound of the word **laŋi** (lagi) “sky” in the Eastern Polynesian languages: **laŋ(i)** – **laŋ(i)** > **laŋ** – **laŋ** = Armenian **laglag** “stork”. In the dialectal versions of the Armenian word *aragil*, we find all the gradation alternations of the Polynesian word **langi/lagi/lani** “sky”. (Ar., Tb., Hvr., Knd., Pl., NN, Kr., Sv., Shtkh.) *laglag/laklak*, (Msh., Mks.) *laylak*, (Bl., Vn.) *laylang*, (Urm., Sb.) *leylek* “stork” (DDAL (2001) 192).

Being an important part of the system of mythical thinking, birds and their symbolic images are associated with the high, upper spheres and symbolize the upper, that is, the *heavenly* divine essence. The stork was considered a symbol of the mother goddess in ancient times among many peoples: in Roman mythology, it is a symbol of Juno, the patron goddess of motherhood and the family hearth, and in the Greek mythology, it is the companion of Hera, the patron goddess of fertility. In the imagination of Europeans, the stork helps the water bring newborn children or itself brings them with its beak, and in a medieval Armenian fable, *the stork is the zealous one in raising and continuing its offspring* when its companion dies, unlike the turtle dove. “The stork, which, by the way, *is not killed in our country, is not only zealous for the growth of generations, bringing children to people or multiplying its offspring by remarriage*, but is also zealous, perhaps in this regard, for marital fidelity,” writes Gr. Ghapantsyan (1944).

As for why exactly the name of the stork is composed of roots meaning “sky,” we have the following explanation: we assumed that the root *lag-* initially meant *the image of the sky reflected in the water*, through which they observed and studied the sky. Here is the stork, which lives in waters, swamps, and most of the time stands in the water, due to its long legs, and as a result, *the image of its body above the water is always reflected in the water, like the image of the sky* (Ghapantsyan (1944) 141) (Figure 2a). That is why it is considered by Armenians not only a symbol of the sky, but also a bird that brings to earth children who are considered a “heavenly gift.” In other words, he is also a being who ensures the connection between heaven and earth.

YELEGN “reed”. In our opinion, the reed is comparable to the stork in terms of its image being reflected in water and providing a connection between sky and earth (Figure 2b). It grows in standing waters and swamps, and its image is also reflected in water. We believe that the Armenian word **yelegn** “reed” is composed of the presound **ye** and the **legn** variant of the word *rangi/langi* “sky”

(see the Armenian word *lekan/lekan* “basin, tub”). In support of this, we note that the Rapanui word *ragi₄*, meaning “sky” (*ragi₃*), has the meaning of “reed”. We will discuss this word in more detail on another occasion.

Thus, the archaic prototype(s) of the native Armenian word *yerkin*, preserved in Polynesian languages, form a rather rich etymological bouquet in Armenian, with regular phonetic and semantic developments, which cannot be considered a random coincidence.

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