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THE LIZARD OFF LAWS: DOLOMITIC LADIN DESIGNATIONS WITH IRREGULAR DEVELOPMENTS¹

Abstract

The article offers etymological suggestions for the Dolomitic Ladin names for the lizard: (1) égadeks < South German eichdechs 'lizard' plus folk-etymology (ega 'water'!); (2) niñóla < Lat. *raniola 'little frog;' (3) lingóla < Lat. *ang(u)iola 'little snake' (plus agglutination of definite article); (4) lužérp < Lat. lacerta 'lizard' X Lat. *serpem 'snake;' (5) orbežígola < Lat. orbisicula 'slowworm;' (6) forfežígola < Lat. orbisicula X forfežigola 'earwig' (< forfex 'scissors'); (7) arp(e)žėia < Lat. *serpem 'snake' + Lat. caecilia 'slowworm', or Lat. *orbisilia X Lad. orp).

Introductory Remarks

While working on a compilation of Dolomitic, or Central, Ladin words not included in the EWD (cf. Grzega [in prep.]), I've experienced a relatively rich variety of names for the lizard over the relatively limited area of the so-called Sella valleys. The AIS (no. 449 for the small, gray lizard and no. 450 for the bigger, green lizard²) shows that this lexemic richness extends over all regions of Italy and Switzerland. The little animal obviously truly incited the linguistic creativity and imagination of the speech communities in these areas (cf. the lemma *Eidechse* in the REW's onomasiological index). In the heyday of onomasiological dissertations in the early twentieth century, Eugen Klett (1929) already devoted himself to the huge amount of forms in Romance dialects. In an earlier article Giulio Bertoni (1913) had carried out a similar study for the Appenninic peninsula. The examples that both list abound in blendings, folk-etymologies and other "irregularities" on the way from Latin to the Romance dialects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, down to the present day many of the very interesting forms of the Central Ladin³ dialects have not been in the spot or have, in my view, not been explained to a sufficient degree. Therefore, this brief article wants to draw attention to these very forms although, admittingly, not every problem will be solved.

1. Type "ęgadèks"

The form *egadecs*, or *eghedecs*, is attested for Mareo (AIS 449 P. 305 = San Vigilio di Marebbe; Videsott/Plangg 1997). It is indisputable that the ultimate basis here is German, or

¹ This paper is an extended version of part of a talk I gave at the Deutscher Romanistentag in Munich on 8 October 2001. For valuable comments I thank Professor Otto Gsell (Eichstätt).

² The fact that "lizard" is represented by two words in Italian confirms Wartburg's (1911: 402f.) view that onomasiology cannot always depart from a concept without taking psychological, mental facts into account, since concepts may not be viewed and subcategorized the same way all over the idioms to be studied. I am well aware of this problem, but it shall not be our concern in this study and it need not be since the Dolomitic Ladin dialects all treat the green and the gray species as one concept "lizard."

³ Under *Central Ladin* or *Dolomitic Ladin* I understand the Sella valleys of Mareo, Badia (or Gadera), Gardena, Fassa and Livinallongo (or Fodom); like the EWD I exclude Ampezzo and Cadore.

better: Tyrolean, $\dot{ai}\chi deks$ 'lizard,' which was borrowed into this most northern Central Ladin region here. But in a second step the form was then folk-etymologically reshaped, which was motivated by the noun ega 'water.' An encyclopaedic, semantic basis need not be searched for, since this is generally not necessarily given for folk-etymologies.

2. Type "linğóla"

The forms *lingiola* and *ringiola* are recorded for the Val Gardena (cf. AIS 449 P. 312 =Selva, and Lardschneider-Ciampac s.v. lingiola). Otherwise, the form is not attested. Klett (1929: 13) had seen the AIS form-together with the form under Section 3-as a metathesized output of an etymon *langurola, from *langurus, a word regarded as of Celtic origin (Klett 1929: 10). However, a Celtic form *langurus has otherwise not been confirmed yet. But the FEW (V: 163f.) cites the lemma languria 'lizard' from Plinius. The derivation from Lat. lacerta 'lizard,' as proposed by the REW (4820), is no more convincing either and is rightly rejected by Lardschneider-Ciampac (1933: s.v. lingiola). In return, Lardschneider-Ciampac is not convincing in grouping the form with the Val Badia variant arbjaia (cf. Section 7). At first sight, we could assume the same etymon as in the type under Section 2, viz. *raniola 'little frog,' but in the Val Gardena, too, we would expect a middle consonant $-\tilde{n}$. Another possible etymon that suggests itself when reading Klett's dissertation is a derivation of lancea 'lance, spear,' namely *lanceola. A derivate lanceotto is mentioned by Klett (1929: 56). But he detects such forms only for South Italy; moreover, a **lanceola* would at best yield a form **linciola* in the Val Gardena⁴. Consequently, another theory must be searched for. Klett (1929) did not only find cohyponymic transfers from names for the frog, but also from names for the snake. One of the Latin lexemes for "snake" is anguis, which appears considerably wide-spread in the Cisalpine region (cf. REW 462). Griera (1928: 27) and Klett (1929: 60) defend this etymon (plus a suffix -itta) for the form angwéta (AIS 449 P. 193 = Borgomaro). If anguis is the correct etymon, then we would have to postulate the following development: *anguis + -ola > *anguiola > *angiola (simplification of the triphthong, as in many eastern Cisalpine words from a secondary form *angia, e.g. Emil. besanzola 'slowworm' [cf. LEI s.v. anguis, REW 462, Faré 462]) > *anžóla/*andžóla (the latter with a svarabhakti consonant or an alternative development due to the rareness of the combination -ngi-) > *landžóla(agglutination of definite article l(a)) > $lind\check{z}\delta la$ (raising of -a- before nasal, cf. Section 2).

3. Type "niñola"

In the Fassa Valley we find the forms *nignola* (cf. Rossi 1999, Mazzel 1995) and *gnignola* (Mazzel 1995). In addition, the AIS records *nignola* for Penia (Canazei). As with the form mentioned under Section 2, Klett (1929: 13) had categorized the AIS form, which he erroneously gives as *ringola*, under **langurola*. The weaknesses of such a hypothesis have just been pointed out. But in every instance, the cluster $-\eta g \mu$ - should normally yield $-\eta g$ - in Dolomitic Ladin (in contrast to Venetian, where Lat. -ng- can become $-\tilde{n}$ -, e.g. Lat. *angelum* > Ven. *agnol*, which was then borrowed into some Ladin idioms [EWD s.v. *angel*]). Therefore, it seems much easier to view the type *nignola* as a daughter form of a reconstructed Latin **raniola* 'little frog,' from *rana* 'frog.' Already Klett (1929: 37, 63) himself had observed confusions and blends with names for the frog. The initial consonants

⁴ Unless we suggest another irregular sound development, by which -*č*- was sonorized to -*š*- for better distinction from *linciola* '(fruit of) Swiss pine, Pinus cembra.' But then—how should such a homonymic clash be problematic?

must then be explained as assimiliations toward the middle consonant. The vowel -*i*- agrees with other cases where -*a*- is raised to -*i*- before nasals (cf., e.g., Lat. *lanterna* > Val Gardena *lintierna* 'lantern,' Lat. *laminella* > Gardena *limbela* 'knife blade').⁵

4. Type "lužerp"

The form *lujerp* is another name for the lizard in the Fassa Valley. In addition, the AIS records the form *ližérp* for Location 323 (= Predazzo [Trento]); the REW lists still more instances in various Romance areas. The REW (4821)—quite convincingly—sees this type as a blending of *lacerta* 'lizard' and *serp(ent)em* 'snake,' with the usual variation in initial, prestressed syllables. In addition, Lat. *lux* 'light' might also have its share in the development.

5. Type "òrbežígola"

The lexeme *orbejigola* originally denoted the slowworm (Lat. *orbisicula*). By way of cohyponymic transfer it was also used to desginate the lizard in Arabba (Livinallongo). Transfers from names for the slowworm are already observed in Klett (1929: 64). But not even *orbejigola* is a regular Dolomitic Latin development from Lat. *orbisicula*. The regular result should be *orbesógla* in Livinallongo (cf. Lat. *soliculus* 'sun' > *sorógle*). The word must therefore have been borrowed from adjacent (Venetian) dialects.

6. Type "forfežígola"

The two forms *forfejigola* and *ferfejigola* are recorded for Livinallongo (cf. Pellegrini 1985, Tagliavini 1934) and are also listed by the EWD under the lemma *forfejia* 'earwig.' The EWD adopts Tagliavini's (1934: 138) hypothesis that *orbejigola* (cf. 5.) was confused with the word for the earwig, which goes back to VLat. *forfex* 'scissors' + *-icula* (or in Badia *-ilia*; for this suffix alteration see also Section 7), due to the similar sound chains.

7. Type "arpªžája"

The last type of this study, the isolated form of the Val Badia (cf. AIS, EWD, Videsott/Plangg 1997: s.v. *arbejëia*⁶), is doubtlessly the most problematic one. In the EWD the lemma $arp(e)j\ddot{e}ia$ is equated with the type *orbejígola* 'slowworm; lizard' from the other Ladin valleys and the first one is explained as the regularly Ladin development of Lat. **orbisicula*, while the latter type is interpreted as a borrowing from neighboring Veneto. This view, however, seems a bit too simplistic. The form normally to be expected from an etymon **orbisicula* in the Val Badia would be **or*(*b*(*e*))*sëdla*. This means that there are four irregularities that would have to be clarified:

- (a) the ending -ëia;
- (b) the alteration of *-p-* and *-b-*;
- (c) the initial *a* instead of the *o*-;
- (d) the $-\tilde{z}$ instead of -s-.

⁵ Taking type 2 into account, Professor Gsell points out to me that another development is also imaginable: *ang(u)iola > *anola (Venetian development) > *na-n-anola (indefinite article plus euphonic *n* as a form of hiatus deletion) > *na ninola. However, so far no hints have been found that would prove the existence of this morphological type in Venetian.

⁶ In Mareo the type still serves as a name for the slowworm. Aside from *arp(e)jëia* there is also a masculine variant *arp(e)jëi*.

Ad (a): The ending may be explained as a simple change of suffixes. A suffix -*ëia* goes back to Lat. -*ilia*.

Ad (b): The -p- reminds one of some form of auslautverhärtung, especially since some dictionaries also list a variant with -b-. But an auslautverhärtung would only make sense, if there were an influence from an adjective *orp* or if $arp(e)j\ddot{e}ia$ is a clearly felt compound. The latter is certainly not the case. As to the first thought, the lexemes *orp* 'blind' in the Gardena Valley and *orbu* in the Comelico (FEW s.v. *orbus*) support this view. A form *orp* 'blind' is not attested for the Val Badia, though; the usual word for 'blind' is *verc*.

Ad (c): The *a*- can only be accounted for if we find parallel cases of secondarily stressed o or o before r turning into a. Such examples seem almost absent in Badiot (exception: *scarpión* 'scorpion'). Moreover, such a change would consciously demotivate the word, as the relation with *orp* would no longer be transparent.

Ad (d): A sound $-\tilde{z}$ - from -s- (before \tilde{i}) also requires parallel examples for explanation. The best explanation seems to be influence from Venetian, as Ven. z is reflected as \tilde{z} in Ladin (as with the other valley variants).

We might therefore attempt a second theory for the evolution of $arp(e)j\ddot{e}ia$. Since we know that the lizard was often called after the slowworm and since Klett (1929: 60f.) also observed that the lizard is occasionally seen as some sort of snake, we may suggest two other etymons, namely a tautological *orba caecilia* and a genus-plus-species-patterned *serpe(nt)em caecilia*⁷. Professor Gsell suggests a third hypothesis, viz. Lat. **orbisilia*, secondarily blended with Lad. *orp* 'blind.'

Lat. caecilia is a frequently attested form for the slowworm (and the lizard) in the Romance area (cf. Klett 1929: 64; FEW II,1: 32; REW 1459; Faré 1459). There are daughter forms also in marginal areas such as the Grisons, but, unfortunately, there are no direct descendents in the marginal zone of Central Ladin idioms. The continuance of Lat. caecus in Central Ladin is debated. In general, the distribution of the competing Latin synonyms orbus and caecus in the Romance languages doesn't reflect any rules (cf. Wartburg 1911: 411). As regards the forms Badiot *ciodlé* 'blinzeln' (3rd sg. *ciodleia* ~ *ciodlaia* ~ *ciodlaia*, Gardena *ciudlé* (3rd sg. *ciúedla* ~ *ciudela* ~ *ciudléa*) and Badiot *ciödl* 'schielend' some see them as daughter forms of a Latin etymon *caeculus (Lardschneider-Ciampac 1933: s.v. tšudlè; EWD s.v. ciödl; REW 1460; Faré 1460), Plangg (1997: 176ff.), on the other hand, regards the Ladin forms as borrowings from a South German form schiegeln ~ schilchen 'be cross-eyed' (cf. MHG schelch 'not straight, oblique'). From a semantic viewpoint the Germanic hypothesis is unproblematic, the phonetic aspect is more troublesome. Plangg (1997: 177f.) thinks that the initial *š*- was replaced by the presumably more frequent initial \check{c} -, which does not seem to be a very strong argument. He therefore had better refer to Tyrolean tschegg. But a *tscheggelen doesn't easily lead to ciudlé either. In order to explain $-dl - \langle -gl - Plangg$ himself rather supports a Middle High German loanword in the end (Tyrolean -gl- normally remains -dl- in Badiot). But even from a MHG schiegeln it is hard to explain the stem vowel. Plangg (1997: 178) assumes a development (3rd sg.) *schiegelt* > **čüegla* > *čuedla* > *čudlé/ciödl*, but a so-called "verdumpfung" in the diphthong *-ie-* lacks parallel instances. Moreover, concepts denoting physical defects are hardly taken from Middle High German, but rather from Tyrolean-or they are of Romance descent. Therefore, I shall depart from an etymon *caeculus* for *ciödl* etc. and explain the stem vowel-like Lardschneider-Ciampac (1933: s.v. tšudlè)-as a blend with Lat. ŏculus 'eye' or *ab-ŏculis* 'blind.' Since the adjective is restricted to Val Badia only, the verb actually

⁷ Faré (462) lists the parallelly formed type *anguis caeca* 'slowworm.'

seems to be older (cf. also Plangg 1997: 176); *ciödl* might therefore be a back-derivation. This would also comply with Wartburg's observation (1911: 413) that in *orbus*-zones *caecus* has been conserved in a long list of derivations. A Tyrolean hypothesis, on the other hand, seems more convincing for the type *cech* 'oblique' [cf. EWD s.v. *céch* (present in Badia, Gardena and Livinallongo)], however, for which the meaning 'cross-eyed' is recorded for Badia and Livinallongo until the first half of the 20th century. But we also may suggest that *caecus* 'blind' survived in Central Ladin as *ček* 'cross-eyed' (*e* can be regular result of Lat. *é* in the three valleys concerned [cf. Kramer 1977: 62f.]).⁸ In sum, the survival of Lat. *caecus* and derivates in Dolomitic Ladin cannot automatically be excluded.

Less debated among scholars is the existence of Lat. *orbus* 'deprived [of eyesight]' for Val Badia; nevertheless, a safe continuant of *orbus* is not guaranteed for Val Badia (incl. Mareo) unless *órp* 'boil' is one⁹. A concept such as "blind," a flaw of the face, is likely to be center of attraction in Sperber's (1923) sense and it is also a concept where confusion with similar flaws like "shortsighted" and "cross-eyed" may arise (cf. Wartburg [1911-1912] and also the respective maps of the AIS and the ALF). Therefore it should not surprise that we might find another, new expression for "blind" here. As a matter of fact *orbus* is the major lexical type for "blind" north of the Appennines (cf. Wartburg 1911: 411ff.).

The third term that has been brought into discussion is *serpentem*, or rather its frequent short form, *serpem*, which is found as a simplex or in combinations (e.g. with *lacerta* and *lux*) in Occitan, Engadine, Cisalpine, Transappenninnic and Sicilian regions (cf. Klett 1929: 32, 60). The most common etymon for "snake" to have left traces in the Central Ladin valleys seems to be Lat. $b\bar{t}stia < b\bar{e}stia$ 'animal' in the form of Lad. *biscia* and *bisca* (in the latter the *-k*- still needs explanation) (cf. EWD s.v. *bisca*). But there are also hints that the concept of "snake" is a center of attraction as well (cf. also AIS 452), since in the EWD we also find the lemma *serpënt*, which, however, is labeled as a borrowing from Italian, stylistically elevated and not an everyday term. However, the Fassa form *serp* 'big snake' (cf. also Rossi 1999: s.v. *serp*) looks definitely older and not borrowed, which suggests that the Latin *serpem* was known at least in parts of Central Ladin.

A hypothesis *orba caecilia*, which can easily explain a second word-part *-jëia* (**-a-caecilia* > *-a-(cae)cilia* or *-(a-c)aecilia* > *a-gilia* [*-c-* in intervocalic position] > (e)-jëia [cf. $m\bar{n}r\bar{a}bilia > morv\ddot{e}ia$ 'wonder,' *ervilia* > *arbëia* 'pea']), would still have to explain the following sounds of the Badia form *arpejëia*:

- (a) -*p* (~ -*b*-);
- (b) *a*-.

-*p*- is now much better explanable than in an etymon *orbisicula*, since now the speakers could feel the morphemic boundaries. As has been shown, it cannot be excluded that secondarily stressed *a* before *r* goes back to an original *o*. But such a change would render the assumed relation with *orp* opaque, and would thus require further reasonable explanations. This difficulty also arises with the hypothesis "**orbisilia*? *orp*."

⁸ Surselv. *ček* 'blind' is traced back to Lat. *caecus* by Faré (1461).

⁹ The Badiot and Mareo word *órp* 'boil' is regarded as a relic of Lat. *herpes* 'sore, boil, ulcer' by the EWD. Gsell (1990: 136; 1994: 327), however, traces it back to Lat. *orbus* 'blind.' Phonetically, there is no reason for objecting Gsell's proposal; the semantic development is paralleled by daughter forms of Lat. *caecus*, e.g. Surselv. *čiek*, and Lat. *caeculus*, e.g. Tuscan *čekkyo*, (REW 1460, 1461; Faré 1460, 1461). Of Lat. *herpes*, on the other hand, no other known traces have been detected in Romance dialects. This does not change the fact, however, that there are no hints for an adjective *órp* 'blind' in Val Badia and Mareo.

A hypothesis serpem caecilia requires explanations of the following irregularities:

- (a) $(-p-) \sim -b-;$
- (b) -*e* > -*a*-;
- (c) the loss of *s*-.

The result -*p*- is natural if the compound is still recognized as such; the result -*b*- is natural if the word is seen as one unit and if -*p*- is then treated as a normal intervocalic plosive. The alternation between *e* and *a* is paralleled by cases like Lat. *circāre* > Badiot *ćiarćé* 'try a meal,' *cippus* > *ćiap* 'sole of plough,' *harpa* > *erpa* ~ *arpa* 'harp', or *ervīlia* > *arbëia* 'pea.' The loss of *s*- is the most complicated feature to be explained. The only parallel case where initial *s*- is dropped in Val Badia seems to be *angröna* from G. *Sinngrün* 'evergreen, Vinca minor L.' It may be argued, though, that in the phrase *las sarpejëies* the *s*- was dropped due to the lack of motivation and due to a confusion with the homophonous combination of article and initial syllable in the singular, i.e. *la sarpejëia*; in the singular deglutinations and agglutinations of the definite and indefinite articles are not rare (e.g. Lat. *lamella* 'blade' > Badiot *andela* 'dito', Lat. *ava* 'grandmother' > Badiot *lâ* 'dito', Lat. *ursu* 'bear' > Badiot *laurz* 'dito' [Kramer 1977: 174]).

It cannot be denied that both hypotheses bear at least one apparently inextricable phonetic difficulty. My personally preferred version is *serpem caecilia*, particulary since there is also a masculine form *arpejëi*, which would reflect the insecurities concerning the gender of *serpes/serpem*. In a combination *orba caecilia* this difficulty would not come up, since *caecilia* is the regular substantive here and *orba* the corresponding form of an adjective.

Conclusionary Remarks

The words examined have illustrated how the lizard and other reptiles stirred people's imagination, creativity and desire for (re-)motivation. They have also shown that people have a hard time in keeping apart the various reptiles (lizards, frogs, slowworms, snakes) due to similarities in their body movements, their movements of the tongue, their body colors etc., and are thus perfect examples of what some linguists call "blurred concepts," or in this case better: "unclear reference" (cf. Grzega [in print]). Also of note, in such instances irregularities seem more "normal" than regular developments.

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