

A Note on Armenian-Caucasian Albanian Contacts

*The Words for “Bishop” and “Maid”**

▼ **ABSTRACT** The paper discusses two possible borrowings between Classical Armenian and Caucasian Albanian (CALb.). It is argued that CALb. *iskapōs* is borrowed from Arm. *(e)piskapōs* attested in two of the earliest Armenian inscriptions and modern Armenian dialects. The similarity of CALb. *axal-* “nurse” and Arm. *ałaxin* “maid, female servant” is probably not due to chance.

▼ **KEYWORDS** loanwords, language contact, Ancient Greek language, Classical Armenian, Caucasian Albanian, inscriptions, literary language.

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1. Introduction

The prolonged contact between speakers of Armenian and Caucasian Albanian (CALb.) since late antiquity has led to a series of borrowings from the former into the latter language. Table I lists examples of probable loanwords that have been identified so far.¹

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¹ Cf. Gippert et al. 2008, vol. 2, 80–81; Gippert 2011; Schulze 2015; Schulze 2018; Schwartz 2023, and Gippert and Schulze 2023, 219.

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Table 1: Armenian loanwords in CALB.

CALB.	← ARM.
<i>marmin</i>	<i>marmin</i> մարմին “body, flesh”
<i>avel</i> “much, many”	<i>aweli</i> ւաւելի “more”
<žd>	<i>žolovowrd</i> ժողովուրդ “people, assembly, congregation” ²
<i>hačex</i> “right (hand)”	<i>aǰuǰ</i> “right (hand)”
<i>kor-</i> “back” ³	<i>kor</i> կոր “crooked, bent” ⁴
<i>kala</i>	<i>kał</i> կալ “lame” ⁵

Other forms look conspicuously similar to Armenian correspondents, but deviate in aspects that make a direct borrowing at least questionable; note e.g. the different vowels in CALB. *garazman* “grave” and Arm. *gerezman* “id.”.⁶ Beside loanwords, numerous calques, for instance, in word-formation, bear testimony to the influence of Armenian on CALB., e.g., *ayzi-d’ip-* [land-writing] “land taxation” ~ Arm. *ašxar(h)a-gir-, b’eğown-powl* [sun-eye] “sun” ~ Arm. *areg-akn*, Georg. *mzis-tual-i*, *p’a-hüwķ* [two-heart] “wavering” ~ Arm. *erk-mit, sa-hüwķ* [one-heart] “harmless” ~ Arm. *mi-a-mit*, etc. (cf. Gippert et al. 2008, vol. 2, 21–22).

Since these words are visible for us only in the Bible text, it is impossible to decide whether they were *ad hoc*-creations rendering the Armenian forms and remained artificial or had also gained currency in general language use. The same might apply to the loanword *marmin* and probably *žolovowrd*, which Gippert et al. (2008, vol. 2, 81) describe as having a “notable religious connotation”, and which might have been restricted to ecclesiastic language. But the other terms listed above belong to every-day language and basic vocabulary, for example, *avel* “much” and *hačex* “right”, and if the explanation of *iškāpos* proposed in section 2 is correct, it would equally speak in favour of a complex and long situation of bilingualism. The usual direction of borrowing was clearly from Armenian as superstrate language to Caucasian Albanian. However, in section 3 a possible case of the inverse direction shall be discussed.

² The form is always written abbreviated as *žd* in the CALB. palimpsest, so the identification is not guaranteed.

³ Cf. *kor-biyesown / kor-ihesown* “to return”, *il’ow-kor-biyesown* “to answer”, lit. “to return word(s)”, *kowl-kor-biyesown* “to recompense”, lit. “to return hand(s)”.

⁴ Cf. also CALB. *kori-baksun /-besun* “to bend” < “to become / make crooked”.

⁵ Cf. however also Georg. *kel-ob-* “to limp”, *m-kel-ob-el-i* “lame, limping”. CALB. *mow’ak* “worker” could be borrowed from Iranian, cf. NPers. *mušāq*, Arm. *mšak*, Georg. *mušaki*, cf. Gippert and Schulze 2023, 216–217.

⁶ Cf. the recent discussion of these forms by Schwartz 2023, Gippert 2023 and 2024. As pointed out by one of the anonymous reviewers, the Armenian dialect of Julfa (Jula) has *g’arezman* which might preserve an older variant preceding vowel assimilation, if it is not a recent borrowing from New Persian *garizmān*; cf. also Achařyan 1971–1979, vol. 1, 542–543.

2. CALb. *iskapōs*

CALb. *iskapōs** “bishop” is attested as *iskaosown* (GEN) in a marginal gloss to 2. Tim. 4:1 and on the Mingčaur pedestal, probably written in 557 CE, in the ergative form *iskaposen* (cf. Gippert et al. 2007, vol. 2, 86–87): its vowel /a/ instead of /o/ seen in the standard corresponding forms Arm. *episkopos* and Georgian *episkoposi* from Gr. ἐπίσκοπος finds a match in the Armenian variant (*e*)*piskapos* (տ)պիսկապոս, recently discussed by Clackson (2020), attested in the earliest Armenian inscriptions: in the Tekor inscription, dated between 478 and 490 CE (cf. Greenwood 2004, 79–81, no. A1), the form *piskapos* stands at the left margin of the inscription at the beginning of the line with no space to its left.⁷ This makes it questionable if one should indeed read *episkapos* (or even correct the reading to *episkopos*) and assume that the first letter is missing due to mistake or for some other reason. Probably, the form should be taken at face value, i.e., *piskapos*. Beside this, in the later Mastara inscription from 640–50 CE (cf. Greenwood 2004, 84, no. A10), one reads *episkaposi* in line 2. These forms might indicate that before the standard Greek form *episkopos* was generalized in the literary language, Armenian had at least two further variants, *piskapos* and *episkapos*. The latter is continued in a number of modern Armenian dialects showing its local survival,⁸ and such a variation does not seem unusual in the process of the accommodation of loanwords.⁹ While the sound change /o/ > /a/ is likely to be an inner-Armenian development (cf. again Clackson 2020), the aphaeresis of the initial vowel may have occurred already in Greek. In fact, *πίσκοπος* occurs as a surname in Modern Greek, it is found as place name e.g. on Crete near Αγία Ρουμελη, in the compound Πισκο-πιανό (Ηρακλείου) on the northern coast of Crete between Heraklion and Malia, and in literary texts such as the twelfth century “Story of the donkey, the wolf and the fox” (Γαδάρου, λύκου και αλουπούς διήγησις ωραία): l. 202 πάγω σαν ηγούμενος, σαν *πίσκοπος* γυρίζω “I stride like an abbot, I walk around like a bishop” (cf. Kriaras 1969–1994, s.v.). While aphaeresis is common in Modern Greek, cf. βρίσκω “to find” < εὐρίσκω, (ἐ)ντόπιος “local”, (ἐ)ξυπνός “awake”, δέν “not” < οὐδέν, etc. (cf. Hatzidakis 1892, 74, 321–322), examples for ancient Greek are more difficult to find, except in the context after a vowel, where it occurs frequently, for instance, in papyri, e.g. τὰ ’πιγεγραμμένα (for ἐπιγεγραμμένα, POxy. 1453.27, 30/29 BCE) (cf. Gignac 1976, 1.319). Apart from these cases, the phenomenon is probably hidden by the normalizing effect of written transmission, and only exceptionally may we catch a glimpse of lexicalized forms showing it. One such case could be the lemma νῆς in Hesychius (ν 527) glossed as τὸ ἔνης, ὅπερ ἔστιν εἰς τρίτην, Δωριεῖς [δὲ] νῆς λέγουσι (cf. Beekes and Beek 2010, 424), i.e. the

⁷ Cf. the photograph in Der Nersessian 1977, 55.

⁸ E.g., Araratyan *yebiskabos*, Jula / Julfa *yepiskapos*, Marala *yepaskapōis*, Salmast *yepiskapos*; in Western Armenian dialects: Polis *ebisgabos*, Xarberd *yebisgabos*, Alaškert *yebiskabos*, etc. Cf. Acharyan 1971–1979, vol. 2, 29.

⁹ Cf. e.g. variants of German *Felleisen* “knapsack” from Ital. *valigia* “suitcase” such as *Fellis*, *Felles*, *Fellentz*, *Velleis*, or of *Hängematte* “hammock” from Taino (Haiti) → Span. *hamaca*, Germ. *Hamacca*, *Hamach*, Pl. *Hamacos*, *Amaknen* (cf. <https://www.dwds.de/> s. vv.). In the case of Armenian (*e*)*piskapos* one might consider an influence of *kapem* “to bind”, as one of the anonymous reviewers points out.

genitive of ἔνῃ (ῥῆμα) “the day after tomorrow”, based on PIE **h₁eno-* “that one”. Since both **h₁eno-* and **h₁no-* would result in Gk. ἔνο-, the Doric form, if one can trust Hesychius that it existed, must be due to aphaeresis. Another case often mentioned in the literature is σκορακίζω “to despise” which was explained already in antiquity as a delocutive form going back to the curse (ἐ)ς κόρακας “To the ravens (with you)!” (cf. e.g. Lejeune 1987, 223), but which could derive from a noun **skoro-* “critique, blaming” from PIE **sker-* “to cut” (cf. Kölligan 2018, 66, n. 12).

In any case, the colloquial variant πίσκοπος could be the source for Arm. *piskapos*. Armenian would then have had a form similar to those attested in the early Germanic languages, ON *biskup*, OE *bisceop*, OHG *biscof*, etc. (in contrast to Gothic *aipiskaupus* directly taken from literary Greek) which because of its initial /b/ Kretschmer (1951, 103–04) explains as borrowed from another colloquial Greek variant, viz. ἐβίσκοπος, attested e.g. in Lydia (Διογᾶς ἐβίσκοπος Ἀμμῷ πρεσβυτέρα μνήμης χάριν) (cf. Körte 1902, 31), compare also other forms showing the same voicing of /p/, e.g., from Thera (IG XII 3, 905) Ἐβικτοῦς, from Phrygia (MAMA X 396) Ἐβικτητος, and from Paros (IG XII [5] 378) Ἐβάφρᾱς, etc., while EWAhD II.112 prefers the hypothesis that the Germanic forms were taken from Romance languages, cf. Span. *obispo* (with rounding of /e/ due to the following labial?), Port. *bispo*, Ital. *vescovo*, where the form without initial vowel is probably due to the definite article (*l*)o, i.e. **l'obispo* > *lo bispo*. Another possibility might be a voicing dissimilation of the two labials (**[e]pi-skopo-* > **[e]bi-skopo-*) in the Germanic languages and/or influence of the prefix **bi/bi-* (Germ. *bei*).¹⁰ In any case, it seems that both in Greek and Armenian next to the standard forms ἐπίσκοπος / *episkopos* there were various colloquial forms coexisting with and, in the case of Armenian, later replaced by this form in the standard language. The Armenian form closest to CALb. *iskapos* is the variant *piskapos*, the only major difference being the word-initial labial stop, which may have been lost due to its generally weak auditive distinctness¹¹ combined with the presence of a second labial stop in the same word. One may stress that so far it is only Armenian — apart from CALb. — that attests a form with /a/ (also contrast Syr. *ēpīsqōpā*), which makes the assumption of an Armenian influence onto the CALb. form likely.¹²

3. Armenian *alaxin* and CALb. *axal-*

The discussion about the origin of Armenian *alaxin* աղախին “maid, female servant” (cf. for its meaning e.g. Gen. 12.16 *carayk' ew alaxnayk' daniayp lu աղախնայք παῖδες*

¹⁰ Dissimilation also seems to be at work in Old Georgian *ebiskopoz/s* next to *episkopoz/s* (ratio of attestations: 1:4), strengthened by the tendency to avoid three glottalised stops within a single word (cf. Gippert 1993, 106, 253). An instance of the complete loss of an initial stop by dissimilation is Georg. *etrati* < **tetradi* from Gr. τετράδιον.

¹¹ Cf. the classical study of Miller and Nicely (1955) and its repetition by Lovitt and Allen (2006).

¹² Cf. Gippert et al. 2008, vol. 2, 81: “Only CA *iskapos* ‘bishop’ shows a special shape vs. Gk. ἐπίσκοπος, Arm. *episkopos* and Georg. *episkopos-i*, which may indicate a deeper integration into the spoken language, probably in connection with an early date of borrowing”.

καὶ παιδίσκαι, Lk. 12.45 *zcaraysn ew zalaxnays* զծառայսն եւ զալախնայս τοὺς παῖδας καὶ τὰς παιδίσκας) is summarized up to 2010 by Martirosyan (2010, 24–25). One can identify two basic approaches, viz. (a) to take it as a loanword from a non-Indo-European language, and (b) to assume an IE origin:

(a) Marr (1915, 22, n. 1) derived *alaxin* from Arm. *alx* (-i-, Bible+) “lock; ring; furniture, possessions; group of wayfarers, crowd”, taking the latter to have meant “house” originally.¹³ D’jakonov (1971, 84; 1980, 359; 1985, 598) further connected both *alx* and *alaxin* with a reconstructed Hurritic form **all-ahḫe* “household”, Urart. *alae* “lord/lady”, and Akkadian *alahḫinu(m)* supposed to mean “miller” (cf. also Greppin 1983, 266). Recently, Simon (2022, 70) has discussed this proposal again, concluding that the connection with *alx* is uncertain, both due to the different meanings of the Armenian form (“ring button, lock; baggage, goods; crowd”) and due to the fact that one would rather expect Arm. **alax* than *alx*. He points out that “The meaning, the Hurrian origin, and Diakonoff’s morphological analysis of *allahḫe/innum* are uncertain”.¹⁴ Also, as a designation of some kind of official, probably a miller, a semantic connection with *alaxin* seems not very promising. Therefore, Simon proposes a Hurrian adjective **allahḫinni* “belonging to the lady” (cf. Hurr. *alla* “lord/lady”, Urart. *alaeue/i-* “lord”), which would seem to provide a better semantic fit and be a correct form in Hurrian. Since this source for the Armenian word is reconstructed on the basis of the Armenian form itself, this etymology is possible, but not certain. An alternative proposal has recently been made by E. Alleva (Università di Pavia),¹⁵ who takes *alah(h)inni* to derive from the root *al-* “to speak”, to which the suffix *-ahḫ-* (used only with verbs) was added and the suffix for professions *-ini*. The form would thus mean “he who speaks (on behalf of someone else)”. In this case, there would be a considerable semantic gap between the Hurrian and Armenian forms, which makes a borrowing less likely.

(b) Meillet (1936b, 73) proposed to derive *alaxin* from *alam* “to grind”, with *-x-* functioning as a suffix as in *glowx* զլուխ “head” beside Lith. *galvą* etc. (cf. Meillet 1936a, 36). Olsen (1999, 470, 770, 776, 836) suggested a connection with the root of Lat. *alō* “to feed, raise”, via a form **(h₂)l̥h-k-ih₁no-* with a complex diminutive suffix as in PDE *lamb-kin*. Arm. /x/ would then be caused by preaspiration in the context /Hk/. In both explanations the existence and possible prehistory of the suffixes is difficult to ascertain.

A different proposal might be to connect the Armenian form with a CALb. word for “nurse” attested once in the Gospel palimpsest in 1 Thess. 2.7 in the ergative form *axalnen*:

¹³ Cf. also Acharyan 1971–1979, vol. 1, 118b.

¹⁴ NB the precise meaning of Akkad. *allahḫinu* is unclear, cf. Black et al. 2000, 10: “*alahḫinu(m)*, *alḫenu*, NA *lahḫinu* ‘miller’? Ass.; NA (an official in temple service); OA *rabi a.* (an official)”, hence it is not evidence for the existence of the Hurrian form.

¹⁵ Mauro Giorgieri p. c.

<i>axal-n-en-hačinke</i>	<i>bân 'i-ba-hanay-ağ-en-ke</i>	<i>ğar-m-owx</i>
nurse-STEM-ERG-as	great-make: PRS-REL-REF:F:SG-ERG-REL	child-PL-ABS ¹⁶

Arm.

<i>Orpēs</i>	<i>dayeak</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>snowc'anic'ē</i>	<i>mankowns</i>
որբէս	դայեակ	մի	որ	սնուցանիցէ	մանկունս
Like	nurse	one	REL	nourish.3SG	child.ACC.PL

Greek

ἐὰν	τροφός	θάληππ	τὰ	ἐαυτῆς	τέκνα
when	nurse.NOM.SG	cherish.SBJV.3SG	ART.ACC.PL.N	self.GEN.SG.F	child.ACC.PL

“like a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (tr.: English Standard Version)

Since the origin of CALb. *axal-* is unknown (cf. Gippert and Schulze 2023, 220), one could in principle assume a borrowing in either direction:

- a. Arm. *alaxin* → CALb. **alax(i)n-* > *axal(i)n* with metathesis of /x/ and /l/ and subsequent inflexion following the model of stems in *-al-n-*: *axal-* belongs to a small group of words with the non-past participle suffix *-al-*, which add the stem formant *-n-* before the ergative case ending, cf. *ba-al* “doing/doer”, ERG *baal-n-en*, *b'akexal-n-* < **b'akexal* “opposition”, *qa-bital-n-* < **qa-bital* “veil”, *bal'-baqal-n-* < *bal'-baqal* “servant”.¹⁷
- b. In the opposite direction, the CALb. ERG *axalnen* may have been the source of the Armenian NOM *alaxin* (GEN *alaxnoy*). In this case one has to assume
 1. a metathesis of /x/ and /l/ (**axalnen* > **alaxnen*), which may have been triggered by the semantically close form *atij* / *atjik* աղջիկ “girl” (*t-j*: *x-t* → *t-x*),¹⁸ cf. Gr. *παιδίσκη* and Lat. *puella* meaning both “girl” and “female slave”. Metathesis in loanwords in Armenian can also be seen in other cases, cf. Arm. *t'snami* թշնամի “enemy” < Iran. **duš-maniḡ-* (cf. Olsen 1999, 450); Arm. *xlowrd* խլորդ (Lev. 11.30) “mole” ultimately from Syr. *xuldūdā*

¹⁶ Cf. Gippert et al. 2008, vol. 2, 59. NB the verb stem is *bân'i-biyesown* “make great, nourish”.

¹⁷ Cf. Gippert et al. 2008, vol. 1, II–23. Regarding the representation of Arm. *η* /*l*/ as CALb. /*l*/ as in *kala-* ← *kal* “lame” (cf. Table I) cf. further instances pointed out by one of the reviewers: *kalamb* → Udi *kalamb* “cabbage”, Lezg. *kəlamp* “radish” (cf. Vinogradova and Klimov 1979, 156, 158; Greppin 1991, 82), Arm. *mangal* “sickle” → Udi *mangal* (Achařyan 1971–1979, vol. 3, 251b; Vinogradova and Klimov 1979, 157), Arm. *plinj* “copper” → Udi *piling* “copper” (Achařyan 1971–1979, vol. 4, 89; Vinogradova and Klimov 1979, 156).

¹⁸ A. Scala, p. c. A metathesis of /x/ and /l/ is also seen in *maxal* մախալ “sack, bag” for which Achařyan 1971–1979, vol. 3, 228a reports a variant *malax* մալախ in *The Lives of the Holy Fathers* (Վարքա պրքոց հայրաւոյց).

“field-mouse” via **xldur(a)*,¹⁹ and Arm. *patasxani* պատասխանի “answer” from Iran. **patsaxani* < **pati-saxwan-iā-*.²⁰

2. loss of the first nasal (**alax[n]en*), probably caused by its double occurrence in the same syllable (dissimilation),
3. raising of /en/ > /in/ (**alaxen* > *alaxin*) as a phonological process and/or as an adaption to other nouns in -in, cf. NOM *marmīn* մարմին “body”: GEN *marmnoy*, and *darbin* դարբին (-nac’) “blacksmith”.²¹

Other case forms that so far are not attested in our limited corpus of CALb. might have provided further starting points for the creation of the Arm. paradigm, e.g., a GEN.PL **axal-n-oy* could have been reinterpreted as a GEN.SG in Armenian (*alaxnoy*) and have given rise to the NOM *alaxin* following a model like *marmīn* “body”: GEN *marmnoy*. Also the other inflectional forms of Arm. *alaxin* can be explained by inner-Armenian models: the plural in -ayk’ follows *kin* “woman”, PL *kanayk’*: *alaxin*: x = *alax(i)nayk’* (cf. Olsen 1999, 463), and for the forms in -eay- (e.g. Agathangelos § 186 *zalexneays* զաղախնեայս) one may compare other nouns in -eay- designating persons, e.g. *p’axsteay* փախստեայ “fugitive” (*p’axowst* փախուստ “flight”), *k’ristoneay* քրիստոնեայ “Christian”, and especially the semantically close *paštōneay* պաշտօնեայ (-ēic’) “servant” (*paštōn* “service”; cf. *ibid.*, 381–382).

Loanwords designating nurses and midwives are e.g. Arm. *dayeak* դայեակ “nurse” < MP *dāyag* (PIE *d^heh₁-* “to suckle”), OLith. *mamkā*, *momkā* “wet nurse” (CIG₁ 78 *Mamka* ‘Amme .. die das Kind .. fäuet’) borrowed from Polish or some East Slavic variety, cf. OPol. *mamka*, East Sl. *mamka* (ORuss. *mamka*, Russ., BRuss., Ukr. *mámka*),²² and Lat. *maia* “midwife” (Cypr. Gall., Gl., Romanian *maie* “old woman, grandmother”) borrowed from Gr. *μαῖα*, and Lat. *iatromea* < Gr. *ιατρόμαια* “professional’ midwife” (CIL 6.9477, 9478). One may add the late Latin *paraba/olānī* “sick-nurses (esp. of infectious diseases)” (*Cod. Just.* 1.3.17, 18 *paraba/olanin*), based on παράβολος “reckless person, person exposing themselves to danger”.²³

While Arm. *alaxin* “handmaid, female servant” and CALb. *axal-* “nurse” are not a perfect semantic match, it is conceivable that the meanings may develop into one another in a situation where acting as a nurse is one of the duties of a female servant, or vice versa, nurses may take on further duties.²⁴ Whatever the direction of borrowing, Arm. *alaxin* and CALb. *axal-* may belong to this group and should probably be discussed together.

19 *ibid.*, 885.

20 Cf. *ibid.*, 901. In CALb. cf. *čaqar* “temple” beside Arm. *tačar* տաճար, OP *tacara-* “palace”.

21 Probably borrowed from Urartian, cf. Hurr. *tabrinni-* “id.”, cf. Yakubovich 2009.

22 Cf. Hock 2020 s.v.

23 Cf. Bowersock 2010 on this both charitable and violent group.

24 NB in ancient Rome, “the *τιθήνη/tithēnē* or *τίτθη/tithē* [...] was usually a slave” (Wiesehöfer 2006). For modern times one may compare the *aleksandrinke*, Slovene peasant women migrating to Alexandria between the 1850s and 1950s to serve as domestic workers, often wet nurses, cf. Hladnik 2015.

4. Conclusion

The long-term contacts between speakers of Armenian and Caucasian Albanian are reflected in Armenian loanwords and calques in the latter language. Among these, the form *iskapōs* is of special interest, as it seems to reflect a non-standard variant of the Armenian word for “bishop”, *(e)piskapōs*, attested in early Armenian inscriptions and modern dialects. Together with basic vocabulary items like words for “right (hand)” and “much/more”, they show that contact was not restricted to the Armenian literary standard, which soon ousted such variants in favour of the form closest to the Greek source word. In the case of Arm. *alaxin* “female servant” and CALb. *axal-* “wet nurse” (ERG *axalnen*), the direction of borrowing cannot be determined definitely. Since so far the discussion about Arm. *alaxin* has not settled the question of its etymology, it might be worthwhile to take CALb. *axal-* into account.

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