

TURKISH *kav* ‘TINDER’

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Summary: Turkish *kav* ‘tinder’ belongs to words which have not been etymologically explained so far. The present author’s opinion is that it should be connected with a word family consisting of reflexes of a Turkic proto-stem **kag* (? < proto-root **ka*) and denoting ‘(something) dry’, e.g. Kazakh *kav* ‘last year’s grass’, and so on.

Keywords: Turkic, etymology, comparative lexicology, diachrony, historical linguistics, semasiology.

Türkçe’deki kav Sözcüğü

Özet: Türkçe *kav* sözcüğü, etimolojisi bugüne kadar açıklanmamış sözcüklerdendir. Bu yazının yazarı, sözcüğün ön-Türkçedeki **kag* (? < proto-root **ka*) kökünden türemiş sözcüklerden olduğunu ve örneğin, Kazakça ‘geçen yıldan kalan ot’ cümlesindeki *kav* sözcüğünün anlamı gibi, “herhangi kuru bir şey” anlamına geldiğini düşünmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Türk Dilleri, etimoloji (kökenbilim), karşılaştırmalı sözcükbilim, art-zamanlılık, tarihsel dilbilim, kavrambilim.

It is not easy to learn from etymological dictionaries about the origins of Turkish *kav* ‘tinder’. A good overview of what one can find in works published hitherto is given in Eren (1999: 218b):

(1) Egorov connects Chuvash *ävă* ‘tinder’ with Turkish *kav* but neither he nor Paasonen can explain the etymology of this word;

(2) According to Räsänen, Chuvash *ävă* goes back to **ū*. Menges agrees with Räsänen’s opinion;

(3) Räsänen compares Chuvash *ävă* with Mongol *ūla* ‘tinder’ while Ligeti discusses the Mongol word without mentioning Turkish *kav*.

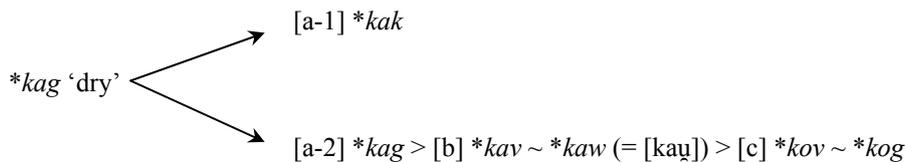
Eren (l.c.) does not himself suggest any etymological solution. Apart from the short report on previous opinions, as presented above, he only equates Turkish *kav* with its correspondences in some other Turkic languages, as e.g. Kirghiz *kū*,

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Tuvinian *kag*, Yakut *kia* ‘dry’, and so on. However, a sole rapprochement is far from being a proper etymology (Stachowski 2011: 77sq.). Gerhard Doerfer (1967: 532) could not suggest a solution either.

The popularity of this Turkic word is, for easily understandable reasons, rather limited nowadays and I did not think about it when I was, a year ago, working on my article concerning some Turkic words with (apparently) quite different meanings. The problem discussed there was that for “numerous Turkic words with only partially coinciding meanings” (Stachowski 2010: 179) identical or almost identical proto-stems have been suggested in the literature on Turkic etymology. Actually, all these words can be divided into three groups reflecting the following proto-stems: **kag* ‘dry’, **kab* ‘bark; snake skin’ and **kob* ‘hollow’. The phonetic similarity and consonant alternations have eventually led to mutual influences occurring among modern reflexes of these stems.

The proto-stem **kag* ‘dry’ has passed through three evolutionary phases:



The morphological proportion between **kag* and **kak* is not quite clear to me. The one possibility is that **kak* is just a phonetic variant of **kag*, while the other possibility is a division of both **kag* and **kak* into a yet older proto-stem **ka* and two independent suffixes: **-g* and **-k*. Even if the latter possibility looks somewhat artificial and contrived, one fact decidedly speaks for it: while all other forms are always nouns, reflexes of **kak* are both nominal and verbal (so that the notation **kak±* is even better): Turkmen *kak* ‘dry, parched’, MKāšgarī *kak* ‘dried-up lake’ on one hand, and Uygur (dialectal) *kak-* ‘(trans.) to dry’ on the other (Stachowski 2010: 184).

Nevertheless, it is the other branch of reflexes that is of special interest to us. For **kag* I could only say “No examples survived” in my article (op. cit. 184). The reflexes of **kav* are for instance: Kazakh *kav* ‘last year’s grass’, Bashkir *kiv* ‘dry (grass, tree)’, as well as later derivatives in Bashkir: *kivga* ‘last year’s grass’ and *kiva* ‘dead wood’. The reflexes of **kov* are rare; at that time, I could only find Turkmen *gov* ‘tinder, amadou’ (the notation given in ÈSTJa VI 8 is somewhat blurred because the letter <κ>, generally used for a velar *k*, has there a small breve below, denoting voicedness; unfortunately, I failed to see it and wrote *kov* instead of *gov* in my article).

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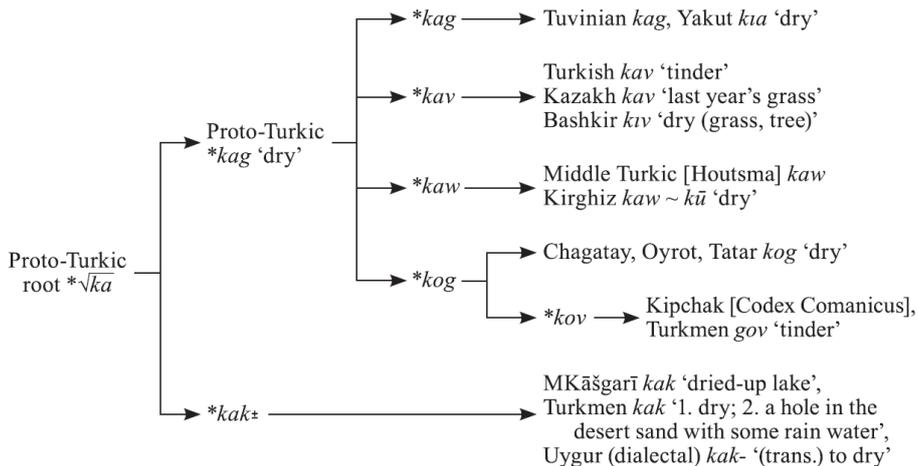
It is of course clear now that also Turkish *kav* 'tinder' belongs to this word family. Moreover, while looking after cognates of Turkish *kav* we come across -g- words from other Turkic languages which means that we now can both show the origins of the Turkish word and add to the scheme in which no reflexes of **kag* were given.

In sum, I would like to suggest the following etymology (with ⟨w⟩ = [ɯ]) of Turkish *kav* 'tinder':

Turkish *kav* 'tinder' = Kazakh *kav* 'last year's grass' = Bashkir *kiv* 'dry (grass, tree)' < **kav* < Proto-Turkic **kag* 'dry' > [a] Tuvinian *kag*, Yakut *kia* 'dry'; [b] **kaw* > Middle Turkic [Houtsma's vocabulary] *kaw*, Kirghiz *kaw* ~ *kū* 'dry'; [c] **kog* > [c-1] Chagatay, Oyrot, Tatar *kog* 'dry'; [c-2] **kov* > Kipchak [Codex Comanicus], Turkmen *gov* 'tinder'; [d] **kak±* > MKāšgarī *kak* 'dried-up lake', Turkmen *kak* '1. dry; 2. a hole in the desert sand with some rain water', Uygur (dialectal) *kak-* '(trans.) to dry'.

Or, if my conjecture about the **kag* and **kak* being two different derivatives is correct the above scheme should be slightly changed:

Turkish *kav* 'tinder' = Kazakh *kav* 'last year's grass' = Bashkir *kiv* 'dry (grass, tree)' < **kav* < Proto-Turkic **kag* 'dry' (< Proto-Turkic root **√ka* > **kak±* > MKāšgarī *kak* 'dried-up lake', Turkmen *kak* '1. dry; 2. a hole in the desert sand with some rain water', Uygur (dialectal) *kak-* '(trans.) to dry') > [a] Tuvinian *kag*, Yakut *kia* 'dry'; [b] **kaw* > Middle Turkic [Houtsma's vocabulary] *kaw*, Kirghiz *kaw* ~ *kū* 'dry'; [c] **kog* > [c-1] Chagatay, Oyrot, Tatar *kog* 'dry'; [c-2] **kov* > Kipchak [Codex Comanicus], Turkmen *gov* 'tinder'.



Some doubts can arise about the second meaning of Turkmen *kak*: ‘a hole in the desert sand with some rain water’ because a hole with water is *not* dry. At first thought, one is tempted to look after a Turkic parallel to the idea known from Latin and Germanic studies, that is one connecting the senses ‘dry’ and ‘drink’ (< ‘to slake one’s thirst’) with each other (Levitskij I 146sq.). However, another explanation seems easier and more tangible: the Turkmen meaning probably results from a secondary semantic evolution: ‘dry’ > ‘dried-up lake’ (MKāšgarī) > ‘a hole with some water’ (Turkmen).

Additionally, Turkish *kavur-* ‘to dry, to roast’ (< **kavur-* < **kav* < Proto-Turkic **kag* ‘dry’ > [a] **kagur-* > MKāšgarī *kagur-* ‘to dry’; [b] **kog* > **kov* > **kovur-* > Turkmen *govur-* ‘to dry’) can also be added here.

References

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