

## KUT: THE MYSTERY OF KHACHAPURI AND AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH PLANTAGO

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**Abstract.** In Svaneti, "diar" remains the term for everyday bread, while the functionally and conceptually distinct ritual bread is called "le-mzir," or the bread of "mzir." "Le-mzir" exhibits remarkable diversity, among which is "kut/kutv" – khachapuri, cheese-filled bread.

This study examines the preparation technology of cheese, a significant attribute of ritual culture. To demonstrate that humans in the Georgian territory used plant-based rennet before animal enzymes for curdling milk, an experiment was conducted which confirmed that cheese production using plants is possible without animal stomach enzymes, and that this plant is the plantago, distinguished by its medicinal properties and bearing the name of bread and khachapuri – "kut- ḳvax" ("kut" – khachapuri, "ḳvax" – bread without filling).

**Keywords:** plantago; cheese; kut; le-mzir; diar.

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**Introduction.** In Svaneti, "diar" denotes bread of any form, content, or purpose. From it derives an entire series of words: "diro-ob" – bread-making, "me-l-diar" – eater, "li-diar-i" – eating, "le-diar-i" – food, "la-ldiar" – manger where livestock are fed, and so forth (Žavaxišvili, 1979, pp. 418-419). Even marriage in Kartvelian languages is connected with "diar." Semantically, "diar" must have signified mother's bread, which is hardly surprising since agriculture was traditionally women's responsibility, just as hunting and livestock husbandry were men's work. "Di" means mother in Svan, while "ladiar," "ladjer" means motherland (Čuxua M. , 2017, pp. 188, 616).

The Svan language, one of the most ancient Kartvelian spoken languages, is divided by theonym into sacred and ordinary (secular); accordingly, the theonym determines the existence of both sacred and profane lexicon. Sacred consciousness in Svaneti begins speech with the word "mzir," which shapes pre-Christian worldview and creates all possible variants of religious context.<sup>50</sup> From "mzir" five nouns are formed and derived:

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<sup>50</sup> While researching the etymology of the sun and moon, Ivane Javakhishvili notes that the full form of the sun's name is "mzira" / "mzera" and "mžara," alongside which stands Svan "miž" (mižara), on the other hand, the moon's name is Chechen "mazer,"

1. "le-mzir" – sacrificial holy bread;
2. "li-mzir" – prayer, sacred ritual;
3. "la-mzèr" – grace, received through prayer;
4. "la-mzèr" – place of worship, temple;
5. "me-mzir" – worshipper.

These five words derived from "mzir" collectively create an organized system of faith and worship: we have deity ("mzir"), we have sacrifice ("lemzir"), we have place of sacrifice ("lamzèr"), we have sacrificer ("memzir") (Çerediani, 2023, pp. 429-473).

Before three lezmirs are placed upon a round, flattened bread, it is food bread ("diar"); once placed, it becomes "le-mzir" (sacred bread). It is precisely the three pieces placed upon "diar" that distinguish it from other bread. "Lemzir" literally means "for-mzir," that is, created for, dedicated to, and intended for "mzir." It exhibits particular diversity, among which is "kut/kutv" – khachapuri, cheese-filled bread.

**Methods.** To demonstrate that humans in the Georgian territory used plant-based rennet before animal enzymes for curdling milk, an experiment was conducted. Through Ms. Nino Tserediani's experiment, it was confirmed that cheese production using plants is possible and that humans in the Georgian territory used plant-based enzymes before animal rennet for curdling milk. In analyzing the names, we employed linguistic, extralinguistic, and etymological methods.

**Discussion.** In Svan, varieties of khachapuri ("kut") are distinguished by filling. As Al. Davitiani notes, "k̄vax" (empty) bread is baked on ordinary days. Whatever it may be filled with, it is called the same. When specified, the name of the grain from which it is made is stated along with the bread: wheat bread, corn bread, barley bread, millet bread... Even more diverse is filled bread in Svaneti, or "kut." According to the type of filling, we have differently named khachapuri ("kut") in Upper Svaneti... Khachapuri ("kut") primarily refers only to cheese-filled bread, and subsequently whatever else is added: potato, beans, beets and other ingredients are also called khachapuri, but such khachapuri's designation necessarily includes the name of the filling (Gazdeliani & Çkadua, 2015, pp. 9-10).

"Kut lemzir," sacred khachapuri, is primarily baked for women's festivals, during "uçenalebi" – the day when only women perform the ritual. "Kut lemzir" is an offering to "Lamaria" and "Dal leşxuamisa", to whom people pray for abundance of all things, plentitude of dairy livestock, and the well-being of the women who care for them. "Kut lemzir" is an offering to the creator of the universe, a sacrifice to "dabdaba" (creator) Lamaria, a supplication to "gimži" (earth) Lamaria and "ķeri" (hearth) Lamaria. All these deities are connected to feminine essence – expressed through earth, sky, human, or livestock. "Kut" is not intended for male deities; theirs is "ķubdi lemzir," as ethnographic material also confirms.<sup>51</sup>

As Merab Chukhua observes, that the khachapuri tradition is genuinely Georgian is evident from the fact that the synonymous word "kada" (containing cheese; cheese-filled bread) is attested in the language, whose regular equivalent is Svan "kadaar." Tsova-Tush "kořar" (pie with some filling) and Chechen "kodan" (meat pie) must be regular equivalents of Kartvelian "kada/kadar." According to the researcher, Svan "kutv" (khachapuri) stands separately and appears to be a word of pan-Kartvelian origin. It finds correspondences in Dagestania languages as well: North Dagestania "ku(r)tu" (cheese, bread); Lezgian "kut" (type of

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Kabardian "maza," Abkhazian "amza"... suggests the idea that the name of the sun was originally indeed a general designator of the quality of luminosity, i.e., a participle or adjective, and only later became a term designating the sun in Georgian, and a term designating the moon in Abkhazian-Circassian (Žavaxišvili, 1979, p. 169).

<sup>51</sup> Bz. ķubdar, bk. ķubdar, lshkh. ķuřtar, ķuřaři diar, Int. ķuřatar//ķuřaři diar. (li-ķbad-i "striking") (Çerediani, 2023, pp. 15, 187, 302, 303.).

bread). Regular correspondences of Svan-Dagestanian isoglosses are not evident in Nakh and Sindic group languages (Čuxua M. , 2021, p. 140).

How should cheese itself have been created, the filling of "kut" and one of the significant attributes of ritual culture? According to scientific estimation, cheese history counts four millennia, while cheese vessels found in Georgia are eight thousand years old. Thus, cheese-filled food must indeed be an ancient product.

Ms. Nino Tserediani was convinced that the cheese-making process must necessarily have been connected with plants. The investigation began precisely because of this belief. In the process of searching for answers, she found information that in Latali and Tskhumi, plantago is called "kut-ḳvax", "kut" – female, broad-leaved, and "ḳvax" – long-leaved, male, that is, the plant bears the name of bread, khachapuri – "kut-ḳvax" ("kut" – khachapuri, "ḳvax" – only bread, without filling).

To demonstrate that humans in the Georgian territory used plant-based rennet before animal enzymes for curdling milk, Nino Tserediani extracted plantago from her own yard in May 2023 and placed it in a jar filled with half a liter of milk; then placed it on the windowsill, toward the sun; two days passed and on the third day whey separated from the milk; then she placed it in a pot filled with warm water and produced cheese; she also added other plants to milk and all produced cheese, although cheese produced with grass did not mature sufficiently to make sulguni from it. Accordingly, this must have occurred only as a result of using animal stomach rennet (dèr).<sup>52</sup> Why animal stomach? Because fermentation of all plants occurs precisely in animal stomach.

We do not know exactly what language the first humans living in the Georgian territory spoke and on what basis, by what principle sounds were first adapted to objects, events, emotions, then their combinations, then words, and finally sentences. Ivane Javakhishvili explains that the first grass used for food in Georgia must have been called "diar." "Eating bread" and "marriage" in Kartvelian languages are connected with "diar" (Bregaḷe, 1987, pp. 3-8). From this it follows that it is not excluded that food created with plantago's help was also called "kut," considering the plant's nomenclature, just as happened in the case of "diar." Long-leaved, "male" plantago was probably later called "ḳvax" by metonymy. Why plantago and not another plant? "Kut" – plantago, grows at human footstep, while other plants grow where land has been cultivated. Accordingly, the function of cheese production initially probably fell to plantago. That this is so is also confirmed by its composite nomenclature, namely "kut-ḳvax," which means bread – both with cheese and without cheese.

The root attested in the Svan name for khachapuri may reflect pre-Greek *kuṭ-* and Kartvelian \**kuṭ-* root, which H. Fähnrich reconstructed at the pan-Kartvelian level.<sup>53</sup> This root, according to researchers' assumption, is the basis for forming the toponym "Kutaisi." This toponym is found in the most ancient versions of the Argonauts' legend and is not based on Greek etymology. *Κύταια*/*Κυταία* from the Hellenistic epoch onward is mentioned by various authors as both legendary and historical main city of Colchis, which is Medea's homeland. According to Stephanus of Byzantium: "...according to some, there are two *Κύτα* – local and European. There is also a city *Κύταιον* on Crete" (Steph. Byz. Ethn.). As appears, the city *Κύταιον* mentioned by Stephanus of Byzantium already existed on the island of Crete in the Mycenaean epoch, as its multiple mentions in Mycenaean Linear B documents confirm. R. Braun considers the geographical name *Κύταιον* pre-Greek and indicates that it must have a relationship with Colchian Medea's birthplace *Κυταία*, which is found in sources in several variants: *Κύτα*, *Κύτη*, *Κυταίς*, *Κυταΐς*, *Κύτηϊς* and others (Brown, 1985, pp.

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<sup>52</sup> If "dèr" is from a pig, cheese made from it is prohibited for sacred work, i.e., for prayer. Its "kut lemzir" is not offered to anyone. In such cases, only animal stomach is allowed, and only from a suckling calf.

<sup>53</sup> Georg. kurd-/kut (kut-n-a/ga-mo-kut-n-a); Megr. kvirt-i (kurdi); Svan. kvit-, kvit- (kurdi, i.e., curdling agent) (Fähnrich, 2007).

97-125). This toponym appears in Greek sources from the Hellenistic epoch, which might make us think it is of relatively late origin. However, as appears, the name of Aeetes' residence was not created in the Hellenistic epoch. This is presumably indicated by the name of Phrixus' son Κυτίσωπος (whom Herodotus already knew) and names of cities located in Anatolia: Κύτρωπος (Paphlagonia), Μασσί-κυτος (Lycia) and possibly Κότα (Caria). The toponym "Kutaisi" itself is attested in all three Kartvelian languages with regular correspondences: Georgian kutaisi / Megrelian kuteši / Svan kutaši, which gives us grounds to suppose that this settlement or residence already existed during the circulation of proto-Kartvelian (Čotališvili, 2019, pp. 227-246).

In R. Beekes' etymological dictionary, lexical formatives containing the κυτ- root are attributed to pre-Greek lexical fund, which does not submit to Greek etymology: κύτινο "pomegranate flower bud," κύταρον "ladle, spoon," κύταρος "jar," κύδαρος "small boat," κυττοί "nests, boxes" (Beekes, *Pre-Greek: Phonology, Morphology*, 2014). Braun, based on analysis of various formatives, concludes that the meaning of pre-Greek κυτ- root must be "hollow receptacle" (Brown, 1985, pp. 97-125).

The Kartvelian \*kurt-/\*kut- root, in M. Chukhua's opinion, must derive from Old Georgian root -\*kart-(a) / Zan -kurta/kuta (enclosed, bounded place > city) (Čuxua M. , 2000-2003). Therefore, κυτ-/\*kut- must have designated a hollowed, enclosed, bounded place, object: ladle / bud / vessel / jar / nest / box / ship (cf. Old Georgian "\*kurt" / Svan "kut-ul" – knee, kneecap, Svan "kup" – shelf, nest, vessel for storing strained cheese). Accordingly, proceeding from the root's etymology, it is not excluded that filled, hollowed bread was first called "kut," and then the plant, considering the peculiarity connected to its milk-curdling properties.

**Conclusions.** Thus, as the experiment confirmed, cheese production using plants, without animal stomach, is possible, and this plant is plantago, which bears the name of khachapuri – "kut."

Perhaps food created with plantago's help was called "kut" proceeding from the plant's nomen, just as happened in the case of "diar," or conversely, proceeding from the -kut root's etymology, filled, hollowed bread was first called "kut," and then the plant, considering the peculiarity connected to its milk-curdling properties.

In light of the root's semantic properties, one might venture to suggest that the designations for both the plant and khachapuri are linked to a shared -kut root, which could potentially correspond to the archetypal "image" and "function" of the world's creator, as expressed through feminine essence – "kut lemzir" is an offering to "Lamaria" and "Dal lešxوامisa"; it is primarily baked on the day when only women perform the ritual. In Svaneti, women held control over agricultural products, distribution and expenditure of grain reserves, their storage in "guem," baking of "lemzir," and conducting all ritual procedures of prayer. Sacred language and the initial layer of rituals are also connected to women; the essence of the hearth in Svaneti is sacrally identical to the essence of woman; accordingly, the symbolism of hearth, dwelling, family, land, and woman is also of identical nature. It should not be coincidental that "kut" represents the name of "female" plantago, while the suffix "t," "et," "ot" is considered an ending of feminine gender words (Mapp, 1908, p. 9). We believe the question requires special study, and future interdisciplinary research must provide answers to this.

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