

Éhezik | koplal | böjtöl

Is it strange or is it understandable that not one of these three verbs should have a clearly determinable etymology? TESz. gives „bizonytalan” for the first and „ismeretlen” for the third and designates the second as a „szár-mazékszó”. All of these labels ultimately mean that the three roots in question deserve further attention.

The purpose of this note is to suggest an approach to the clarification of the origin of *böjt* and *böjtöl*.

First of all, we should note that the three verbs, as listed in the title, form a semantic series along an axis which describes an *increase in volition*. If *volition* or *will* is extracted,

	<i>éhezik</i>	<i>koplal</i>	<i>böjtöl</i>
<i>will</i>	-	-/+	+

then *éhezik* is completely independent of the individual's will and *böjtöl* is completely self-imposed; the middle member, *koplal*, can mean 'suffer hunger, fast' because of forces from the outside world or because of the subject's own, personal decision. This component of *will* also corresponds completely to the religious connotations of these three verbs: *böjtöl* is a thoroughly religious term while *éhezik* is thoroughly secular; *koplal* straddles the two. As many as three stems (*éh-*, **kop-l-*, *böjt-*) for the notions expressed, where most other languages in the same „Kulturkreis” would be content with two, suggest something, namely, that their meanings have displaced each other so as to form the series shown above.

Departing from (1) this abundance of three stems, (2) the inherently Christian content of the root *böjt*, (3) the absence of a Finno-Ugric etymon for *böjt*, and (4) the fact that its earliest occurrences are from the 13th and 14th centuries (see TESz. and EtSz.), we can safely assume that *böjt* is a loanword. Its present form, as the two sources mentioned make amply plain, suggests an earlier **bëxt*, **bixt*, or **büxt*. Assuming that the loan entered the language at a time when the sound [χ] (from FU **k*) was already pronounced [h] but when [γ] or traces of [γ] were still alive in the language, at least sporadically, we can interpret **bëxt* and the other two forms as having contained [γ], i.e., as **bëyt*, etc. The [γ] would eventually develop to *j*, as in *böjt* whose *ö* can be variously explained as dialectal *özés* or as the result of a *γ* which alternated with *j* and *w*: **bëyt* ~ **bëjt* ~ **bëwt*. See some of the older forms listed in TESz. and EtSz.

An unexpected Middle High German form comes to mind: MHG *bīht*, from Old High German *bigiht*, *bijiht*, etc. This is the Modern German religious term *Beichte*, *Beicht* (both feminines) 'confession'. Exactly at what point in history a MHG form such as *bīht*, which was on its way to diphthongization, entered Hungarian as *bēyt* or *bīyt* (with [γ] or [χ]) is impossible to determine, but the match between a MHG form such as *bīht* (with a long vowel and the graphic *h* representing [χ] or perhaps even [ç]) and a presumed early Hungarian form such as *bīxt* or *bēxt* (with a short vowel and with [χ] or [γ]) is quite good. One minor detail concerning this match is worth mentioning: The long *i* of the MHG form corresponds to the diphthong written *ei* today; it also corresponds to some Hungarian dialectal and older forms, cited by EtSz. (column 518) with long *ö*.

In the attempt to trace *böjt* 'jejunium' to MHG *bīht* 'confessio', the one seemingly insurmountable obstacle is the explanation of the presumed change of meaning from 'confessio' to 'jejunium'. If an answer to this problem can be found at all, it must be sought in theology. Early Christian doctrine required confession at least once a year, associated with *contritio cordis*, *confessio oris*, public and not auricular. We must therefore envisage the believer as giving concrete evidence of his penitence. The external act is called *exomologesis* by Tertullian (De paenitentia, 9 : 1); he describes it in detail (ibid., 9 : 3—4): „3. Itaque exomologesis prosternendi et humilificandi hominis disciplina est conversationem iniungens misericordiae inlicem de ipso quoque habitu atque victu: 4. mandat sacco et cineri incubare, corpus sordibus obscurare, animum maeroribus deicere, illa quae peccant tristici tractatione mutare; ceterum pastum et potum pura nosse, non ventris scilicet sed animae causa; plerumque vero ieiuniis preces alere, ingemiscere, . . .”¹ The sinner therefore made a public spectacle of his expiation, among other things, by ostentatious fasting — he was the man who fasted, the *böjtölő*. Before fasting, he had confessed (*gebeichtet*).

Everything said up to this point now needs to be reconciled with the history of the verb *gyónik* 'confess'. The verb is attested since 1372/1448, but because of its Turkic origin it is presumably much older (TESz.). The Turkic root is thought to be **yona-* 'accuse'. Enlarged by means of a reflexive *-n-* (**gyó-n-*), it acquired a specifically Christian meaning when it became a deponent, *gyón-ik*. The following table is an attempt to integrate the units mentioned so far and to show their movements and mutual displacements from

¹ From: *Scriptores Christiani Primaevi*, vol. IV : Q. Sept. Flor. Tertulliani De Patientia, De Baptismo, De Paenitentia. Edidit J. W. Ph. Borleffs. Hagae: Daamen, 1948, pages 106—107. The following translation is from Tertullian: *Treatises on Penance — On Penitence and On Purity*, translated and annotated by William P. Le Saint. London: Longmans, 1959, pages 31—32: „(3) Exomologesis, then, is a discipline which leads a man to prostrate and humble himself. It prescribes a way of life which, even in the matter of food and clothing, appeals to pity. (4) It bids him to lie in sackcloth and ashes, to cover his body with filthy rags, to plunge his soul into sorrow, to exchange sin for suffering. Moreover, it demands that you know only such food and drink as is plain; this means it is taken for the sake of your soul, not your belly. It requires that you habitually nourish prayer by fasting, that you sigh . . .”

Further literature: Tertullian on fasting (De ieiuniis, also called De ieiunio adversos psychicos); Johannes Schümmer, *Die altchristliche Fastenpraxis nach Tertullian* (Diss., Münster ?1927); Paolo Frassinetti, *Tertulliano e l' "Apologetico"* (Genova: Tilgher, 1974, a useful, synoptic introduction).

the pre-Christian period to the 16th century, when *koplal* is first attested (1540—55):

	1 'anklagen'	2 'beichten'	3 'fasten'	4 'hungern'
Pre-Christian	* <i>gyón</i>	—	—	<i>éhezik</i>
Before ca. 1215			<i>böjtöl</i>	<i>éhezik</i>
Ca. 1215— . . .		<i>gyónik</i>	<i>böjtöl</i>	<i>éhezik</i>
16th Century . . .		<i>gyónik</i>	<i>böjtöl</i>	<i>koplal</i> <i>éhezik</i>

The table suggests that the purely religious meaning of *gyónik* began to be in use around the time when auricular confession was introduced (1215) and that *böjtöl* carried both the function under 2 and that under 3. The specific term *gyónik* is thus seen to displace *böjtöl* into the specific function which it has today — squeezing it to the right on the table. In the meantime, *éhezik* has held its own (column 4). For reasons which are at this time impossible to determine, *koplal* wedges it way into the space between *böjtöl* and *éhezik*, usurping some of the functions of both of these. TESz. suggests that the root **kop* in *koplal* is related to **kap* (as in *kapkod* and *kap*) and **kop* (as in *koppant*), that is, that the root is expressive. This adds a new, interesting dimension to the series *böjtöl—koplal—éhezik*: the first would be religious and ceremonial, the second expressive and perhaps even humorous, and the third purely physiological and sombre.

Finally, there are the expressions *Ennek is meglesz a böjtje* and *Lesz még böjtje a nagy vigadozásnak*. Országh (Magyar—angol szótár, s.v. *böjt*) translates the first as 'The reckoning is still to come; it will have to be accounted for' and Sauvageot (Magyar és francia nagy kéziszótár, s. v. *böjt*) translates the second as 'Après bon temps, on se repent'. Clearly, the meaning of *böjt* in both instances suggests repentance, but at a deeper level is this repentance closer to fasting or to confession?

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