The paper examines the mysterious term al-wark, which – according to Maḥmūd of Kāşgārī (11th century AD) – denotes a small animal similar to a badger (Turk. borsmuk) in the Xakani language. This animal was treated as a symbol of fatness. It is suggested that the term in question was borrowed from a Tocharian source. The Indo-European term *wṛkʰos (m.) ‘badger’ (originally ‘fat animal’, cf. Hittite warkant- adj. ‘fat’) is reconstructed on the basis of Indic, Greek and Anatolian lexical data.

Key words: historical-comparative linguistics, Tocharian languages, animal names, oriental borrowings, Turkic languages.

In his Turkic–Arabic dictionary entitled Dīwān Luġāti ‘l-Turk Maḥmūd Kāşgārī regist ers the Turkic term borsmuk denoting ‘badger, Meles meles L.’. This dictionary, dating from the third quarter of the 11th century AD (hereafter cited as Kaş.), is the earliest and by far the most important source for the Xakani language. Maḥmūd of Kāşgārī describes the Eurasian badger in the following way:

borsmuk (vocalised: borsuma/uk) duwaybba mitļu ‘l-wark (sic), wa bihi yuḍrabu ‘l-maṭal fi ‘l-siman ‘badger – a small animal like al-wark, used as a metaphor for fatness’.

(Kaş. III 17, quoted after Clauson 1972, p. 369)

In his short commentary, Gerard Clauson emphasises that Arabic al-wark “means ‘hip-bone’ and seems to be corrupt, perhaps read al-wabr ‘marmot’, al-waral

1 Most scholars believe that Maḥmūd Kāşgārī’s dictionary was written ca. 1072–1074, see e.g. Nadelyaev – Naslov – Tenishev – Shecherbak (1968, p. xxviii); Karpat (2004, p. 441). However, Dankoff – Kelly (1982, p. 7) and Kocaoğlu (2004, p. 165, fn. 2) even go so far as to state precise dates (from 25 June 1072 to 9 January 1077).
‘large venomous lizard’, or *al-wadak* which properly means ‘fat’ but may also have been used as the name of some fat animal” (Clauson 1972, p. 369). The editors of Mahmūd Kāšgārī’s dictionary also think that the term *warq* should be treated as a scribal error instead of *waral* ‘monitor lizard’ (Dankoff–Kelly 1982, p. 281; 1985, p. 364). The badger can hardly be likened to a monitor lizard in terms of bodily appearance (particularly fatness), colour, or behaviour. The former animal is the familiar furry mammal belonging to the *Mustelidae* family, the latter one is a venomous reptile that inhabits the desert regions of Asia and Africa.

No animal called *wark* (*warq*) is known from the extant Arabic or Turkic sources. One may infer that the term included in the 11th-century Turkic–Arabic dictionary actually stems from another local language. It seems to denote ‘an animal similar to a badger’ or perhaps ‘a kind of badger’.

To the best of my knowledge, Xakani was a Turkic language “closely related both to Türkü and to Uyğur, but sufficiently distinct from both to be regarded as a separate language. It was certainly not directly descended from the latter, indeed it existed side by side with Uyğur for two or three centuries, and was perhaps not quite directly descended from the former” (Clauson 1972, pp. xvii–xviii). It is obvious that the Xakani language of the 11th century was used in the same area which had earlier belonged to the Tocharian tribes; Kashgar, the native town of the Turkic author, was one of the earlier centres of the Tarim Basin, where the Tocharian languages were spoken. If the Arabicised form *al-wark* represents a local lexical item, then we should perhaps consider a Tocharian hypothesis. Note that “the badger’s territory extends across all of Europe with the exception of the northern part of Sweden, and across central Asia into China” (Bonner Bellquist 1993, p. 333). The badger *Meles* occurs eastward through Korea and on some of the Japanese islands (excluding Hokkaido). It also reaches northern Burma and the northern borders of India (Long–Killingley 1983, p. 76).

It is highly probable that the term *al-wark* ‘an animal similar to badger’ was borrowed from a Tocharian language, spoken in the Tarim Basin before the Turkic conquest. It is believed that the Tocharian A texts date from ca. 700 AD to ca. 1000 (Adams 2006, pp. 382–383), i.e. from before the conquest of the Kashgar region in 1000 AD by the Turks (Bailey 1985, p. ix). It is worth emphasising, however, that the recent carbon-14 dating of the Tocharian B (West Tocharian) manuscripts gave a very interesting result, showing clearly that “the youngest manuscript designated as B-296 is dated between AD 1178 and 1255” (Blažek–Schwarz 2008, p. 49; Blažek 2011, p. 116; Adams 2006, pp. 382–389). In other words, it is ascertained by radiocarbon dating that late Buddhist texts in Tocharian were still being created in the 12th and 13th centuries AD (Adams 2006, pp. 381–389; Schwarz–Bläžek 2008, p. 33; Blažek 2011, p. 84), i.e. two centuries after the Turko-Islamic conquest of the Tocharian Kingdom in the Tarim Basin (1106 AD). It is obvious that the Tocharian–Turkic contacts in the Tarim Basin were more complex than it was believed until recently.

The original Tocharian appellative, probably registered as *al-wark* by Maḥmūd of Kāšgārī, can be reconstructed as Toch. A *wärk* (= Toch. B *warke, as if from PIE *wṛkos) or perhaps *wark* (= Toch. B *werke, as if from PIE *workos), cf. Witczak
There are two possible sources for the name al-wark from PIE *wṛkos (m.) ‘badger’ (Kaczyńska – Witczak 2005, p. 114; Witczak 2011, p. 245), seems more promising. The former possibility, which derives the suggested source of al-wark from PIE *wṛkos (m.) ‘badger’ (Bonner Belquist 1993, p. 336) and Ancient Greek ἀρκός (m.) ‘badger, Meles meles L.’ (different from ἄρκτος m. ‘bear’) < PGk. *ϝάρκος (m.) ‘badger’, cf. Witczak (2013, p. 181, footnote 28). Reflexes of the same proto-form are attested in other Indo-European languages, especially in Sanskrit vṛśa- (m.) ‘a particular small animal’ (Monier-Williams 1999, p. 1011), Nepali bharsia ‘(honey) badger’ (Bonner Belquist 2013, p. 181), and in other Indo-European languages, especially in Sanskrit vṛśa- (m.) ‘a particular small animal’ (Monier-Williams 1999, p. 1011), Nepali bharsia ‘(honey) badger’ (Bonner Belquist 2013, p. 181).


The derivation of the Indo-European term *wṛkos (m.) ‘badger’ from the Indo-European adjective *wṛk- ‘fat’ (cf. Hittite wark-ant- adj. ‘id.’) seems acceptable from the semantic point of view. According to Mahmūd of Kāšğarī, the term al-wark, as well as borsmuk ‘badger’, was used as a metaphor for fatness. The metaphorical sense may be connected with the real etymology of the Tocharian word. Badgers are commonly regarded as omnivores and very fat animals, especially in the autumn, when they “put on a thick layer of fat under the skin” (Dobroruka 1998, p. 74). What is more, badgers have been frequently named after their fatness (Kaczyńska – Witczak 2007, pp. 300–301) and compared with pigs on account of their grease, e.g. Norw. svintoks ‘badger’, literally ‘sow-badger/Schweinedachs’ (Klugé–Seebold 2002, p. 106); Mod. Gk. γουρυνοασβός m. ‘badger’, liter. ‘pig-badger’, cf. Alb. dosë f. ‘pig’ (Demiraj 1997, p. 97; Witczak 2011, pp. 245–246).

The suggested Tocharian A form *wärk is exclusively an additional piece of evidence for reconstructing a possible Indo-European name for ‘badger’ (PIE *wṛkos),
as well as an adjective *wṛḵ- ‘fat’, cf. Hittite warkant- adj. ‘fat’. As the Tocharian evidence is not direct, Mahmūd Kāşgārī’s al-wark cannot be treated as the basic source for reconstructing the Proto-Indo-European proto-form.

It should be concluded to a reasonable degree of certainty that the early Tocharian–Turkic contacts (involving a number of reciprocal borrowings) provide a solid basis for the hypothesis that the Arabic(ised) term al-wark represents a loanword from East Tocharian via an Old Turkic intermediary.

References


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