

TRACES OF THE PEAR-TREE CULT IN THE CAUCASUS

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Tree cult of the Turks has been practised for centuries, but cult under fruit trees like pear-tree has not been noticed. In this article traces of the pear-tree cult in the Caucasus is outlined.

The Karachay–Balkar Turks living in the Caucasus denote pear with the word *kertme*, while it is not so in the majority of Turkic languages. This word was borrowed by Hungarians most probably around the Kuban river north to the Caucasus before the conquest of the Carpathian Basin, their later homeland. Hungarians might also have acquired the worship of the pear-tree that time and in that area, because already in the first written sources (in the form of family- and place names) it is well documented. Hints of the pear cult can also be seen in the children’s songs in connection with the ‘pear-tree’.

We can state that the pear-tree cult was known in the Kuban region before 680–700 A.D., for the Hungarians left for Etelköz in those years and did not return there ever after.

Key words: pear-cult, *kertme*, Karachay–Balkar and Hungarian traditions.¹

In the Karachay–Turkish dictionary there is an entry that set me on the way of my research concerning the traditions in connection with pear. This is *Ravbazi*² ‘Mal-kar’da şamanizm döneminde kutsal olduğuna inanılan bir armut ağacı’ – [‘the sacred pear-tree in Balkar during the shamanistic period’] (Tavkul 2000, p. 322). The word is also present in the Karachay–Russian dictionary, Tenişev takes it for a Balkar word: *rawbazi* balk. ‘raubazi (derevo pokloneniya balkarcev v period jazyčestva)’; tž. *džaniz terek* karač. (Tenişev – Sujunčev 1989, p. 525).

In Karachay there is no entry for ‘pear’, there is no word like *armut*³ or *ah-*

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² *Ravbazi* does not seem to be a Turkic word, but it may be Iranian, or originate from a Caucasian language I have not been able to solve yet.

³ *Armut* is supposed by several Turkologists to be a Persian loan word originating from P. *amrūd* ‘pear’. It occurs in several Turkic languages in its new form (Eren 1999, p. 18; Tenişev 2001, p. 139). Middle Turkic data: Chagatay *ārmūd* ‘pear’ (Bodrogligeti 1969, p. 202), Kıpçak *armut* ‘armut’ (Toparlı–Çögenli–Yanık 1999, p. 101), *armut* ‘armut’ (Toparlı–Çögenli–Yanık 2000, p. 88), Ottoman T. *armut* ‘Farişiye Yunanıden. Armut güllâbı. Envai akça, boz doğan, kış armudu.

*lat*⁴ which we have in different Turkic dictionaries, instead they have *kertme* ‘gruša || gruševoj’ (Tenišev – Sujunčev 1989, p. 328), *kertme* ‘armut’, *kertme terek* ‘armut ağacı’ (Tavkul 2000, p. 256), *kertme* ‘armut’ (Karça–Koşay 1954, p. 133). It also exists in other Turkic languages of the Caucasus.⁵ It was also mediated to non-Turkic languages spoken in the Caucasus, e.g. into Osetic *kærdo/kærttu* ‘gruša’ (Abaev 1958, p. 584).

Since the word occurs in Hungarian, it is probable that the Hungarians borrowed the word in that region. Ligeti stressed the importance of the word *kertme* from an area-linguistic point of view (Ligeti 1986, p. 292). *Kertme* cannot be found in Old Turkic, while it is attested in some Middle Turkic sources as *kertme* ‘pear’; both *kertme* and *armut* occur in Turkmen [= Middle Oghuz] (Toparlı–Çögenli–Yanık 2000, pp. 8, 117), *kertme* ‘Birne’ in the dictionary of Codex Cumanicus (Grønbech 1942, p. 141). Most probably the word *kertme* ‘pear’ belongs to the lexical stock of the region north of the Caucasus.

Tree cult is a well researched topic of the folklore of Turkic peoples. Tree worshipping is observed among pagan Turkic peoples e.g. the Old Turks who emerged from the legendary *Ötüken yış* – the holy forest of the Turks.⁶ There are certain big old lonely trees considered to be ‘holy’. Holy trees have a long tradition, one example is *adak ağacı* ‘saint votive tree’ in Turkey. Turks approach the *adak ağacı* with their secret wishes written on a piece of paper that they hang on the branches of the votive tree. Though this habit considered as pagan was banned with the conversion to Islam, it survived in heterodox Islam also nowadays especially among the Alevi and Bektashi communities in Turkey (see for details Er 1996).

Armut gibi nâ-puhte, ahlât’ (Toparlı 2000, p. 22). New Turkic data: Karaim *armut* ‘gruša (plod i derevo)’ (Baskakov–Zajončkovski–Šapšal 1974, p. 74), Kyrgyz *almurut* ‘gruša (obščee nazvanie)’ (Judahin 1965, p. 52), Karakalpak *almurt* ‘gruša’ (Rkklp), Azeri: *armud* ‘pear’, *a. ağacı* ‘pear-tree’ (Musaev 1998, p. 29), Kazakh *almurt* (Sarybaev 1993, p. 79), Turkish *armut* ‘pear’ (Redhouse 1974, p. 74), Turkmen *armut/armüt* (Öztopçu et al. 1999, p. 108), Khalaj *armut* (Doerfer – Hesche – Scheinhardt 1971, p. 290). In Uzbek we have another word for it: *nok* ‘pear’ (Öztopçu et al. 1999, p. 108), though we have the Uzbek datum in the shape of *âlmurut* in Eren’s etymological dictionary (1999, p. 18). In Turki we find *amurt* and *almurt* (Shaw 1880, pp. 216–217) and in Eastern Turki there are also *amrud*, *a:mut*, *armut* ‘pear, pear-tree’ (Jarring 1964, p. 22) and *a. dræxti* ‘pear-tree’ and *a. jayacı* ‘pear-wood’ (Jarring 1964, p. 26). I have not found any datum in Volga-Kipchak or Siberian Turkic languages in the meaning ‘pear’. Just like Doerfer, Eren is not sure of the word’s Persian origin.

⁴ All three of them: *kertme*, *ahlât* and *armut* may justly be considered as loan words, as we have no data in Old Turkic for any of them. *Ahlât* is considered to be of Greek origin already in the Redhouse (1974, p. 24) dictionary, in Räsänen (1969, p. 9), and later also by Eren’s etymological dictionary < ἀγλάδι (Eren 1999, p. 6).

⁵ New Turkic: Kumyk *gertme* ‘gruša (lesnaja)’ (Bammatova 1969, p. 98), Kumyk *gertme* ‘Holzbirne’ (Németh 1911, p. 113), Karachay *kertme* ‘armut’ (Tavkul 2000, p. 256), Balkar *kertme* ‘Birne, Birnbaum’ (Pröhle 1914/15, p. 228).

⁶ Hungarians also had a sacred forest called *Igyfon*. The name is a compound of two elements: *igy* (< *id*) ‘holy’ + *fon* ‘densely woven’, and belonged to a dense forest in eastern Hungary, somewhere between the rivers Maros and Szamos (Róna-Tas 1999, p. 366).

In the second tale of the Dede Korkut Kitabı⁷ the son of the Oghuz lord Salur Kazan called Uruz escapes his death speaking to a tree in the following way:

...	...
<i>Er olsun, avrat olsun, korkusu ağaç;</i>	Let it be man or woman tree is threat for them;
<i>Başını alıp bakacak olsam, başsız ağaç;</i>	Let me look at your leaves, leafless tree;
<i>Dibini alıp bakacak olsam, dipsiz ağaç;</i>	Let me look at your foot, rootless tree;
<i>Beni sana asarlar, taşma ağaç!...</i>	They hang me on you, don't sustain me tree!

The Turkmen *Karakoyunlu* tribe used to organise its worship ceremony putting down candles in a big circle around a selected big tree. Among others *Tahtacı* and *Yörüük* minorities also adore lonely trees (Ocak 1983, pp. 88–94). Noğays living in the North Caucasus also revered the tree. The Uyğurs believed that their Xans were created from a tree (Golden 1980, p. 92).

As for *džanjiz terek* 'lonely tree' – mentioned above by Tenišev, as a custom of the Karachays – 'étn. derevo na beregu reki Hurzuk⁸ (*kotoromu v period jazyčestva i daže prinjatija musul'manstva poklonjalis' karačaevcy. Srublenu v 30-h godah XX-go v.*)' (Tenišev – Sujunčev 1989, p. 227) – the tradition was banned and the tree was cut down in the 1930s.

We have some other data in the Caucasus. There is a prayer preserved in Karachay that used to be cited under the 'lonely tree' (Tavkul 1993, p. 241).

It goes like this:

<i>Sen tarkaymagan⁹ terekse</i>	You are a tree that never dries out
<i>Kögergenley, sargalmagan terekse</i>	Evergreen, that never becomes yellow
<i>Senden kesingča uzun ömür tileybiz</i>	Please give us long life like that of yours
<i>Uzun čuppa¹⁰ tiley kelgenbiz</i>	We came for much help ¹¹ to you
<i>Adamlarini ongdurğan terek</i>	Tree making people happy
<i>Kesin kimge da süydürgen terek</i>	You made everybody love you

⁷ When the infidels wanted to hang him on a tree, Uruz started to speak to it. His friends arrived while he was speaking, and they rescued him (Gökyay, O. Ş., *Dede Korkut Hikayeleri* p. 37).

⁸ The river Khurzuk flows from the Mount Elbrus down to northwest until it reaches the river Kuban. There is a small town as well called Khurzuk (some 15 km from Mount Elbrus) that is situated by the river Khurzuk.

⁹ The verb is not found in Old Turkic. Middle Turkic has *tarqa-* 'rashodit'sja, rasseivat'sja' (ACHagB149), PdC 197, *tarkal* 'dağıtma (kalabalığı), (ordunun) çözümlmesi, gevşemesi' (Barutçu Özönder 1996, p. 46). As for New Turkic: we see it in Karachay: *tarkay-* 'suyun azalması, suların kuruyup çekilmesi; azal-, eksil-, tüken-, bit-' (Tavkul 2000, p. 379), Balkar *tarqay-* 'abnehmen, fallen' (Pröhle 1914/15, p. 257), Noghay *tarqan-* 'sich zerstreuen, razdatvat'sja' (Halén 1991, p. 165), Kyrgyz *tarka-* 'razojtis', rassejat'sja' (Judahin 1965, p. 707), – (Kklp), < Mo. *tarqa-* 'to scatter, to spread, to be dispersed' (Lessing 1960, p. 782), TMEN I, p. 127.

¹⁰ There is no entry like this either in Tenišev's or Tavkul's dictionary, but Tavkul translated *čuppa* as 'yardım'. We find it in the following form: *-čuppa* parn. k *uppa-* (Tenišev – Sujunčev 1989, p. 738) ~ 'poceluj' (Tenišev – Sujunčev 1989, p. 684).

¹¹ *Uzun čuppa* is translated by Tavkul into Turkish as 'bol yardım' (Tavkul 1993, p. 241). I have not found it in other Turkic dictionaries. It is worth mentioning that there is another word for 'help, helper' in the next part of the text: it is *boluş* to be seen already in Old Turkic (Clauson 1972, p. 345). Its verb forms are to be found in Middle Turkic *boluş-* 'yardımlaş-' (Toparlı–Çögenli–Yanık 2000, p. 95), *boluş-* + Dat. 'to help' (ARabg686). It does not survive in Oghuz languages.

<i>Adamlaga boluřhan terek</i>	Tree helping people
<i>Altın apırakla kimildaydıla toppengde</i>	Golden leaves motionless on top
<i>oppa¹² etedile seni togeregingde¹³</i>	Feast is organised around you.

One of the songs collected by us among Turks in 1999 in Thrace, belongs to the so-called *Hıdrellez* songs – a tradition to be held around the 40th day after the spring equinox. It used to be repeated with the name of seven different fruits. It normally accompanies a circle dance or in another variant people queue up in two long lines (boys and girls, or little ones and big ones separated) face to face and sing it in question-answer form¹⁴:

Ahlat ađacı ahlat vermiř daller ekemez	Wild pear grew on the wild pear-tree, its twig
Hoy hoy dallar ekemez	broke down, alas! They broke down
Yeřil yaprak, yeřil yaprak kervan kırmıř	Caravan broke its green leaves
Yađmur geemez hoy hoy yađmur geemez.	Rain cannot pervade, rain cannot pervade

Not only the word but also the tradition was borrowed by the Hungarians before the conquest of the Carpathian Basin. It was recorded in the 22nd paragraph of the 1st part in Corpus Juris that the Hungarian king St. Ladislaus (1046–1095) inflicted a punishment on those offering sacrifice in the vicinity of wells, rocks, springs and trees, and since there was prohibition there must have been practice.

The word ‘pear’ is well documented in early Hungarian sources. We consider it as a Turkic loan word from the pre-conquest time (before 896 A.D.). Its first occurrence is *krtvly* ‘pear’ from 1055 and Hungarians had used it in this longer form for some four centuries before it gained a shorter form *krte*. (Further occurrences are *kurtuel* fa [‘pear-tree’] < **kertβeli* < **kertmeli* < **kertmeliğ* < **kertmelik* | Middle Turkic *kertme* ‘pear’, Turkic **kertmelik* ‘pear-tree’.)

The pear(-tree) is well represented in the text of Hungarian folksongs, old place-¹⁵ and family names¹⁶ alike in many forms: *krtvly*, *krtve*, *krtvny* ‘pear’,

¹² As for a proper name it is *oppa* ‘ziraatiliđin tanrıřı’, whereas *oppayir* ‘Karaay mitolojisinde dnyanın bulunduđu orta alem’ (Tavkul 2000, p. 178) – perhaps there is a connection between them, but it is not clear yet. We also have *dzoppu* in Karachay, meaning as much as ‘(1) Topluluk, grup; (2) Salkım’ (Tavkul 2000, p. 157). This latter noun together with the word *etedile* is translated as ‘organised a feast’.

¹³ Karachay *togerek* ‘yuvarlak; evre, etraf’ (Tavkul 2000, p. 405), *togerk* ‘rund, Runde, Kugel’ (KrchP), *togerek*, *togerek* ‘Umkreis’ (Blk), *togerek* ‘krug, kruđok’ (Kklp), Kumyk *dogerek* ‘kruglyj, krug, polnyj’ (Bammatova 1969, p. 127), Noghay *dyđlk* ‘rund’ (Haln 1991, p. 150). Middle Turkic *togerik* ‘deđre olan řey, deđirmi, teker’ (Atalay 1945, p. 262) < Mo. *togerig*, *togurig* (Lessing 1960, p. 832). The word seems to be a Middle Mongolian borrowing in Karachay. It was also considered to be an old Turkic loan in Hungarian, but Ligeti (1986, p. 319) pointed out the problems in connection with the latter.

¹⁴ The song was collected in a village called Kılavuzlu in Tekirdađ province from Mrvet Engin (40).

¹⁵ The Hungarian historian Gyrgy Gyrffy elaborated our place-names until the end of the rpád-era (1301), and there it is witnessed from the whole Carpathian Basin either as an independent word or as part of a compound word. There is a place-name *Krtvlyes* in Baranyavrmeđe in 1093 (Gyrffy 1963, p. 332), there is a *Krtvlyes sziget* ‘K. island’ in Biharvrmeđe in 1313 (Gyrffy 1963, p. 655), there is *Krtvlyestelek* in Komromvrmeđe in 1321 (Gyrffy 1987, p. 434), a *Krtvly(es)telke* in Kkllvrmeđe in 1301 (Gyrffy 1987, p. 555), a *Krtvly(es)* in

körtvefa, körtövefa, körtélyfa, körtvélyfa (these compound words mean ‘pear-tree’ where the second part: *fa* stands for ‘tree’), *körtesliget* (another compound word, where the second part means ‘grove, garden’, the first part means ‘with pear’)¹⁷.

In connection with *körtéfa* ‘pear-tree’ M. Igaz writes in the Hungarian Encyclopaedia of Folklore (Ortutay 1980, p. 309), that it is a singing child-game in the shape of circle dance. It is sung in several variations: *körtvélyfa, körtifa, körtvéfa*. Péter Bornemissza makes mention of this child-game with the name of *körueyles* in his work *Diabolical spirits* written in 1578.

Z. Kodály collected the following song in Ghymes (Nyitra) in 1906 (Bartók 1991, p. 706):

Körtéfa, körtéfa,	Pear-tree, pear-tree
Gyöngyösi körtéfa	Pear-tree in Gyöngyös
Sok gyalog katona	Many a foot-soldier
Megpihen alatta.	Rests underneath.

Hungarian children sung *Körtéfa* in the following way in the 1960s in Vásárhely in the school-yard, while dancing in a circle:

Körtéfa, körtéfa, kőrösi, kerepesi körtéfa	Pear-tree, pear-tree, pear-tree in Kőrös, Kerepes
Városi gazda, gyöngyösi tánc,	Farmer in town, dance in Gyöngyös,
Könnyűjárom kismenyecske dobszerda ¹⁸ .	Easy going young wife, drum Wednesday.

There are several variants of this song preserved in the archive of the Institute for Musicology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (under No. 45.015), and apart from this kind of songs there is another kind called ‘counting the fingers’. The latter is played with the fingers of babies, holding them on the lap, while mothers are singing the following verse:

Hüvelykujjam körtefa,	My thumb is a pear-tree,
Mutatóujjam megrázta,	My forefinger shook it,
Középső ujjam felszedte,	My middle finger picked up.
Gyűrűsujjam hazavitte,	My ring finger carried them home,
Kisujjam megette.	My little finger ate them up.

(Collected in Pákozd in 1971 from Andrea Papp, 10 years old)

Mosonvármegye in 1208 (Györfly 1998, p. 155), a *Körtvélyestelek* in Nógrádvármegye in 1327 (Györfly 1998, p. 262), and a *Körtvélyes* in Nyitravármegye in 1257 (Györfly 1998, p. 415).

¹⁶ The word occurs in family names as well in the following forms: *Körtvély* (1461), *Körtvélyes* (1420), *Körtvélyesi* (1542), *Körtvélyfái* (1632) (Kázmér 1993, p. 642).

¹⁷ We do not see the etymology of the Hungarian word *körte* clearly. The problems in connection with it are enlarged in (Ligeti 1986, pp. 291–292). It is possible that we borrowed it in two different forms: (a) *körtve* and (b) *körtvély*. We suppose that a Turkic *kertme* > became a Hungarian *körtve*. The *-m-* > *-b-* was an early Old Hungarian development that took place after we parted with our Ob-Ugrian relatives, for *-m-* is preserved there (Hajdú 1966). Clusters of consonants are to be avoided in Hungarian, therefore *-rtv-* became *-rt-*, but we have traces of *-v-* in the forms with suffix: *körtén* ‘on a pear’, *körténk* ‘our pear’, *körtéről* ‘about the pear’ etc. resulting in a long vocal *-é-*.

¹⁸ In Hungarian folklore *szerda* ‘Wednesday’ is often mentioned as *dobszerda* ‘drum-Wednesday’.

It is not more than a hypothesis that there was a pear cult practised by Balkars in the Caucasus. The word *rawbazi* (see above) makes me think so. We also know about the cult of *Džaŋız Terek* ‘Lonely Tree’ the cult of trees. There are theories of shamanism claiming that the type of shamanism practised in the western part of the steppe region is somewhat transitional (Voigt 1975, p. 211). It is seen among people who are not so much forest dwellers but rather nomads breeding animals and wandering with herds.

Mention was made in 681 by Moses Dashuranci of the religion of the North Caucasian Huns [= Khazars]. He clearly complains of their filthy heathen cult including fire-, water- and tree-worshipping, *tengrism*, which they themselves consider as a great religion (Golden 1980, p. 90). They adored the Sun God¹⁹ and the God of Heavens²⁰. Dashuranci speaks of the holy tree of the Khazars which they consecrated to the God of Heavens. After they had been converted to Christianity, their old holy tree was also converted: they carved out a cross of the holy tree (Róna-Tas 1999, pp. 151, 366).

Conclusion

The tree cult of different Turkic peoples includes the cult of the pear-tree. This was a living tradition in the region north to the Caucasus.

The Hungarians had lived in the area before they migrated to Etelköz. They brought to their present land different traditions they had adopted from the Khazars or other Turks and neighbours. These traditions are represented by the first layer of Turkic loan words in Hungarian. There are certain names of plants that were borrowed by the forefathers of the Hungarians around the Kuban river and the northern shores of Black Sea region, because these plants grow in that area. They are *som* ‘cornel cherry’, *alma* ‘apple’, *dió* ‘nut’ and *körte* ‘pear’ among others. The latter word was borrowed together with a tradition for we must have learnt about pear cult in the same area. And just because we know the approximate date of the Hungarians’ migration from the Kuban region to Etelköz (sometime between 680 and 700 A.D.), we can offer this date as a chronology to the presence of the pear cult in the Caucasus.

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¹⁹ There are two words in Karachay for the ‘Sun God’ *Kün Teyrisi*, *Kayırnar* / *Kaynar* (Tavkul 2000, pp. 287, 250).

²⁰ There are two words in Karachay for the God of Heavens: *Čuppahan* ‘the Goddess of Heaven, Heaven-Mother’, *Goylusan* ‘the Goddess of Heaven’ (Tavkul 2000, pp. 180, 207).

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