

A MYSTERIOUS ANIMAL CALLED *AL-WARK*

KRZYSZTOF TOMASZ WITCZAK

Faculty of Philology, Department of Latin Studies and Linguistics, University of Łódź
ul. Pomorska 171/173, PL-90-323 Łódź, Poland
e-mails: ktw@uni.lodz.pl, krzysztof.tomasz.witczak@gmail.com

The paper examines the mysterious term *al-wark*, which – according to Maḥmūd of Kāṣḡarī (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 **wr̥kos* (m.) ‘badger’ (originally ‘fat animal’, cf. Hittite *warkant-* adj. ‘fat’) is reconstructed on the basis of Indic, Greek and Anatolian lexical data.

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In his Turkic–Arabic dictionary entitled *Dīwān Luġāti’l-Turk* Maḥmūd Kāṣḡarī registers the Turkic term *borsmuk* denoting ‘badger, *Meles meles* L.’. This dictionary, dating from the third quarter of the 11th century AD (hereafter cited as *Kaṣ.*)¹, is the earliest and by far the most important source for the Xakani language. Maḥmūd of Kāṣḡarī describes the Eurasian badger in the following way:

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

(*Kaṣ.* 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 Kāṣḡarī’s dictionary was written ca. 1072–1074, see e.g. Nadelyaev–Nasilov–Tenishev–Shcherbak (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 Maḥmūd Kāšġarī’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 Arabised 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, p. 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–Blažek 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 Kāšġarī, can be reconstructed as Toch. A **wārk* (= Toch. B **warke*, as if from PIE **wṛkos*) or perhaps **wark* (= Toch. B **werke*, as if from PIE **workos*), cf. Witczak

(2010, p. 282). The former possibility, which derives the suggested source of *al-wark* from PIE **wṛ́kos* (m.) ‘badger’ (Kaczyńska–Witczak 2005, p. 114; Witczak 2011, p. 245), seems more promising. Reflexes of the same proto-form are attested in other Indo-European languages, especially in Sanskrit *vṛ́śa-* (m.) ‘a particular small animal’ (Monier-Williams 1999, p. 1011), Nepali *bharsia* ‘(honey) badger’ (Bonner Bellquist 1993, p. 336) and Ancient Greek ἄρκος (m.) ‘badger, *Meles meles* L.’ (different from ἄρκτος m. ‘bear’) < PGk. *ἄρκος (m.) ‘badger’, cf. Witczak (2013, p. 181, footnote 28). Mod. Gk. Cretan ἀρκάλος (m.) ‘Cretan badger, *Meles meles* ssp. *arcalus* L.’ represents a Doric lexical ingredient, derived by means of the suffix **-ālo-* from the basic Greek term (Kaczyńska–Witczak 2005, pp. 113–114; 2007, p. 297–300), see also Byz. Gk. ἀρκόμυς (m.) ‘marmot’², literally ‘badger-mouse’ (and not ‘bear-mouse’). It is not impossible that Arm. *goršuk* ‘badger’, as well as NPers. *barsū*, *barsūkh* ‘badger’, Kurd. *barsuk* ‘id.’ (as if from PIE **work-*), may be related to the same lexical set.

The Indo-European term for ‘badger’, **wṛ́kos*, undoubtedly derives from the Proto-Indo-European root **werk-* (zero-grade **wṛ́k-*) ‘to be fat’ (Kaczyńska–Witczak 2007, p. 300), which is attested in Hittite *warkant-* adj. ‘fat’, as well as in the Hittite verb *warkešš-* ‘to grow fat’, *wargnu-* ‘to make fat’ (Friedrich 1991, p. 245; Kloekhorst 2008, pp. 963–964).

The derivation of the Indo-European term **wṛ́kos* (m.) ‘badger’ from the Indo-European adjective **wṛ́k-* ‘fat’ (cf. Hittite *wark-ant-* adj. ‘id.’) seems acceptable from the semantic point of view³. According to Maḥmūd of Kāšgarī, 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’ (Kluge–Seebold 2002, p. 106); Mod. Gk. γουρνοασβός m. ‘badger’, liter. ‘pig-badger’ (Chorikov–Malev 1980, p. 226); Welsh *mochyn daear* ‘badger’, liter. ‘earth pig’; Albanian *baldošë* and *dosëbalë* f. ‘badger’, literally ‘pig with white spots on its forehead’, cf. Alb. *došë* f. ‘pig’ (Demiraj 1997, p. 97; Witczak 2011, pp. 245–246).

The suggested Tocharian A form **wārk* is exclusively an additional piece of evidence for reconstructing a possible Indo-European name for ‘badger’ (PIE **wṛ́kos*),

² According to Bonner Bellquist (1993, p. 332), Byzantine Greek ἀρκόμυς is glossed as Latin *meles* ‘an animal of the *Mustelidae* family’, esp. ‘badger’) in a 10th-century Vatican codex.

³ Julie Bonner Bellquist (1993, p. 339) reaches the same conclusion when discussing Sommer’s (1913, pp. 359–361) derivation of the Germanic term for ‘badger’, **pahsaz* (m.), from the Proto-Indo-European adjective **tegu-* (or perhaps **teḡu-*) ‘fat, thick, swollen’, cf. Old Irish *tiug*, Welsh *tew*, Cornish *tew*, Breton *teo* adj. ‘fat’ (< Celtic **tegu-*), OE. *dicce* ‘fat, thick’, E. *thick*, OSax. *thikki*, OHG. *dicchi*, G. *dick* adj. ‘id.’ (Pokorny 1959, p. 1057), Hittite *tagu-* adj. ‘thick, swollen’ (Neu 1995, pp. 1–5). She correctly emphasises that “[t]he *Benennungsmotiv* for badger, **tog-s-os*, based on an adjective that means ‘fat’ etc., is plausible: the scientific physical description of the badger lends itself quite well to this *Benennungsmotiv*” (Bonner Bellquist 1993, p. 339).

as well as an adjective *wṛk- ‘fat’, cf. Hittite *warkant-* adj. ‘fat’. As the Tocharian evidence is not direct, Maḥmūd Kāšġarī’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.

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