

TURKIC ETYMOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ENGLISH BIRD NAME *TEREK* ‘*TRINGA CINEREUS*’

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This paper deals with the Turkic background of the English ornithonym *terek* ‘*Tringa cinereus*’. Despite a large number of works devoted to different aspects of bird names, the origin of the English ornithonym *terek* or *terek sandpiper* ‘*Tringa cinereus*’ has not been studied sufficiently. The English name of the bird *terek* originates from the name of the Terek river in the Caucasus, which, in turn, is a Turkic word meaning ‘tree’ and ‘poplar’. The etymology of the word *terek* is expounded along the lines of linguistic, historical and geographical data as well as the role of mythology.

Key words: origin of words, Turkic etymology, borrowings, semantic derivation, semantic model.

Researchers of different languages are particularly interested in names of birds that for the most part belong to the ancient layer of vocabularies resistant to alien elements.

Thus, L. Bulaxovskij devoted a number of articles to the Slavic names of birds (Bulaxovskij 1948a, 1948b). The Ukrainian scholar utilised new methods and approaches in the research of these appellations. He dealt with the role of onomatopoeia, the connection among the names of birds with interjections, the motivation of their appellations and the derivation of bird names. A. Nepokupnyj (2005), on the basis of the material of Germanic and Baltic languages, investigated the problem of secondary denominations in the names of birds, derived from those of Christian priests. J. Strutyński (1972) analysed the origin of Polish names of birds. He studied Polish ornithonyms of Common Slavic and West Slavic origin, formed on Polish ground, as well as those borrowed from Slavic and non-Slavic languages. H. Suolahti (1909) investigated German ornithonyms from the diachronic aspect. In his work a detailed description and the characteristics of bird names are given, with ample etymological data. The origin of puffin, smew, pochard and the related British bird names were studied by W. Lockwood (1974). C. Swainson (1885) scrutinised dialectal names of British birds, while P. Kitson (1997) analysed the Old English terms related to birds.

Despite the large number of works devoted to various aspects of bird names in the English language, the origin of the English ornithonym *terek* or *terek sandpiper* has not yet been subject to a separate and detailed investigation. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyse the origin of the English ornithonym *terek*. The origin of the word is elucidated by linguistic, historical and geographical data.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides information on the time of occurrence of the aforementioned bird name in English (18th century) and its origin from the name of the river *Terek* (*OED* 1933, vol. 11, p. 199). The etymology of the English word *terek* was put forward also by T. Carnaby: ‘Terek = Sandpiper, of the Terek river, western shore of the Caspian Sea where the bird was first described’ (Carnaby 2009, p. 77). Indeed, it is well known that these birds are found near the Caspian Sea, in the vicinity of the mouth of the *Terek* river. The meaning of the name of the *Terek* river has not been occasionally transferred to that of the bird, as it points to the distribution area and the place of origin of the bird.

However, it will be worthwhile tracing the meaning of the word *terek* in its original language.

Linguistic Data

According to A. Superanskaja (1969, p. 191), *terek* designated water, cf. river names *Terek* and *Čerek* (the Caucasus), *Bešterek*, *Tereklav* (Crimea). The Turkic element *terek* as a part of geographical names is often interpreted as ‘poplar’, but it seems unlikely, especially if the size of the river and the widespread occurrence of the lexeme *terek* in hydronyms are taken into account: *Ak-Terek*, *Kara-Terek*, *Üč-Terek* (Kirghizia), *Iš-terek*, now *Tereška* (the Middle Volga Region).

In the Balkar Toponymic Dictionary the word *Čerek* in the Balkar language means ‘river’ (Kokov–Šaxmurzaev 1970, p. 143). But in the Russian–Karachay-Balkar Dictionary the words *suu*, *koban* and *bargan suu* are used in the meaning of ‘river’ (Sujunčev–Urusbiev 1965, p. 546).

According to M. Vasmer (Fasmer 1973, p. 47) the river name *Terek* comes from Balkar *terk* and means ‘quick, violent’.

V. Bušakov (2003, p. 218) states that *terek* in Crimean Tatar and Nogay means ‘tree, fruit tree’, in Turkish *direk* is ‘column’, *direk ağacı* is ‘poplar’ and derives from Old Turkic *teräk* ‘poplar’: cf. the village of *Terekler*, gully *Kami-Derek*, *Yüzüm-Drek*, the rivers’ names *Bešterek*, *Tereklav*.

R. Ageeva (1985, p. 29) points out that in Yakutia there are a lot of rivers named *Tirekhtyah* ‘poplar river’ (from the Yakut *tirekh* ‘poplar’). She says that in all Turkic languages, as well as in Yakut, the name of poplar sounds similar: *täräk*, *terek*, *terak*. Besides, the word *terek* is polysemantic and can have several meanings, in Yakut, for example, *tirekh* means not only ‘poplar’, but also ‘fir tree’.

In most Turkic languages *terek* means ‘poplar’ or is used in the broader meaning ‘tree’, see Crimean Tatar and Karachay-Balkar *terek* ‘tree’, Karaim *t'er'ak* ‘fruit

tree', Tatar *tirek*, Khakas *tirek*, Kirghiz *terek*, Kazakh *terek*, Turkmen *derek* 'poplar', Uzbek *terak* (1) 'poplar'; (2) adj. 'poplar', Uigur *teräk* and Chuvash *tirek* 'poplar'.

In Old Turkic *teräk* means 'poplar': *bir tizig teräk* is 'a row of poplars' (Nadeljaev et al. 1969, p. 553). In Maḥmūd al-Kāšgarī's dictionary *tiräk* is explained as 'the poplar-tree' (Clauson 1972, p. 543).

Historical Data

Turks have been living in Northern Caucasus since the earliest times. This is also proved by the analysis of toponyms of the area, which have Turkic roots.

There can be no doubt that the word *Terek* is of Turkic origin. The early presence of Turks in the Terek area is also confirmed by the ruins of the ancient town called *Tatartup*. The ruins are placed on the left bank of the Terek river and relate to the times of Tatar domination. The name is derived from the ethnonym *Tatar* and Turkic *tüp* 'bottom' or *tepe* 'hill' (Tverdyj 2006).

Geographical Data

Landscape analyses of the Northern Caucasus region point to the spread of poplar species in the Terek River Valley.

White poplar '*Populus alba L.*' is widely spread in the Stavropol', Mozdok and Kizljar regions of the Northern Caucasus. Hybrid poplar '*Populus hybrida*' occurs in the Kabardian, Mozdok, Checheno-Ossetian, Kizljar and Caspian regions of the Northern Caucasus. Aspen '*Populus tremula L.*' is well known in the Kabardian, Central Pre-Caucasian, Kizlyar and Dagestan regions. Finally, black poplar '*Populus nigra L.*' grows in the Kabardian and Caspian regions (Galuško 1978, p. 191).

M. Adži (2006, p. 23) states that the hydronym Terek means 'woody river' because in ancient times both sides of the Terek river were covered by woods. He also points out that once beech woods alternated with woods of nut trees, but nowadays there are no such woods since they were chopped down.

Mythological Aspects

A special role in Turkic mythology is given to tree cult, namely to nature worship. Tree (e.g. poplar) is considered to be a sacred symbol for Turks. It is well known that *bayterek* (synonyms: *beyterek*, *beğterek*, *begterek*, *begtereg*) 'sacred' or 'world tree' is the axis of the world for them (Beydili 2004; Bisenbaev 2008; Karakurt 2011).

The three worlds, i.e. the Heavenly, the Earthly and the Underground World, are connected by the Bayterek tree. Its crown, trunk and roots correspond to the three worlds. Bayterek is the axis of the worlds. Its roots are in the Lower World while its top reaches the Upper World and rests opposite the Pole Star. The sacred tree was called

tur-tur and symbolised the journey from the world of men to the world of the gods. Bayterek is not just a Great Tree. Its leaves are sprouts of children and cattle. When the time comes, the souls of children fly away as stars to the Middle World which is the world of people. On the branches of Bayterek a wise and immortal raven teaches the souls of future shamans. At the roots of the Great Tree there are life-giving springs, the source of Great Rivers. Those rivers that flow to the north, the country of darkness, cold and death, carrying with them the souls of the dead. At the top of Bayterek there is a nest of a double-headed eagle that watches over the different parts of the world to make it sure that gods and men followed the will of Tengri, the supreme being. It was the nest where an eagle-hen would hatch a sacred egg, from which the world would be reborn. From the Lower World the malicious Erlik disguised as a snake tried to sneak up to the sacred nest to steal the egg of the universe. But Tengri was on the alert, and with the thrust of his gold staff he threw the snake from the tree to the underground world. The Great Bayterek grew on the primordial world mountain Kök-töbe. The Great Mountain was in Altay. That is why the Turkic peoples worship mountains, rivers, and trees, which remind them of Bayterek, the Great Mountain and the Sacred River (Bisenbaev 2008, p. 43).

In Turkic folklore the tree “brings up” (“gives birth to”) children. It is a symbol of life and a pledge of the welfare of the tribe. In epic works the world tree is often described as a poplar. In the Altaic world model the sacred tree (a poplar or a birch) is growing nearby the lake. The poplar symbolises peace and happy life of the people. Turks applied to the trees with a request of sending harvest, wealth, welfare to the children, and recovery from sickness.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt was made to investigate the origin of the English ornithonym *terek* (*sandpiper*) ‘*Tringa cinereus*’. The English name of the bird is derived from the name of the Terek river in the Caucasus, which in turn is of Turkic origin, used in the meanings (1) ‘tree’ and (2) ‘poplar’.

In Turkic languages the word *teräk* means ‘poplar’, moreover, it is attested in a wide range of meanings of different trees or a tree in general. Therefore, Max Vasmer’s version of the etymology of the word *terek* from Balkar *terk* ‘quick, violent’ is unacceptable.

All linguistic, historical, geographical data and bearings of Turkic mythology attest to the fact that the name of the river is evidently based on the name of the tree. Obviously, the river was first called *Terek suv* meaning ‘wood river’, then the second component (*suv* ‘water’) dropped in the course of time.

The spread of the Turkic lexeme *terek* in several hydronyms, especially in the Crimea and Caucasus, can be explained by the one-time presence and ancient contacts of the Turkic-speaking population of the above territories.

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