

**ESSAYS IN THE HISTORY
OF LANGUAGES
AND LINGUISTICS**

**Dedicated to Marek Stachowski
on the occasion of his 60th birthday**

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SOME ETYMOLOGICAL REMARKS ON WORDS *SQUIRREL* AND *SABLE* IN KHAKAS

The paper presents some new etymological notes on the Khakas names of the squirrel and the sable. Because of a taboo character, Khakas has four different designations for ‘squirrel’. One of them *tīn* has a stable Turkic etymology, while the other three forms are of unknown origin. The second Khakas word, *saxīl* ‘squirrel’ is probably a metathetical form of Turkic *salīq* ‘tax’. The third form *tabīrġan* ‘flying squirrel’ was possibly borrowed from Mongolic *tarbayan* ‘marmot’. The last word *sarbox* may be connected with the Mongolic verb *sirba-* ‘to wag the tail’. There is only one form, *albīġa*, with the meaning ‘sable’ in Khakas, which is also possibly borrowed from the Mongolic *alban* ‘tax, impost, tribute’. The etymological analysis confirms the peculiarity and diversity of the Khakas language.

Khakas, Turkic-Mongolic contacts, borrowing, etymology, taboo

I am pleased to offer Professor Marek Stachowski, on the occasion of his 60th birthday, some etymological notes on Khakas words meaning ‘squirrel’ *tīn*, *saxīl*, *tabīrġan*, *sarbox* and ‘sable’ *albīġa*. The choice of this topic was suggested to me by Professor Stachowski’s interest in Khakas and taboo names (Stachowski 1995; 1996).



1. Khakas *tīn* ‘squirrel’ (KhR 224b; Butanaev 1999: 141b)

The first word clearly has a Common Turkic pedigree. The word is present in almost all Modern Turkic languages, with the lexical meaning ‘squirrel, sable, lizard’. It also has an additional meaning of ‘a small coin’, which is explained by the fact that squirrel skins were used as currency in early Russia during the period when coins were scarce (Clauson 1972: 569a). It is interesting that there are two different forms in Old Turkic source Mahmud Kashgari: *teyiñ* is ‘squirrel’, while *tegiñ* is ‘sable’ (Clauson 1972: 569a).

Below, the Siberian Turkic forms are given:

Old Turkic *täyiñ* ‘squirrel’; Yenisey Turkic: Sagai, Koibal, Kachin *tīn* ‘squirrel’ (Radloff 1893–1911 3: 1360); Kyzyl *tīn* ‘squirrel’; Shor *tīñ* ‘squirrel’; Altay Turkic: Altay *tīyiñ* ‘squirrel’; Quu *tīyiñ* ‘squirrel’; Teleut *tīñ* ‘squirrel’ (Radloff 1893–1911 3: 1355); Sayan Turkic: Tuvan *dīñ*; Tofan –; Chulym Turkic *tīñ* ‘squirrel’ (Radloff 1893–1911 3: 1355); Yakut *tīñ* ‘squirrel’ (Pekarskij 1907–1930 10: 2675); Dolgan *tīñ* ‘squirrel’; Siberian Tatar *tīñ* ‘coin’; Fu-yü –; Yellow Uyghur –.

For details on this, all the data on Turkic, etymological background and the semantic change ‘squirrel’ → ‘small coin’ of the Turkic word, see Ščerbak (1961: 142), Doerfer (1963–1975 2: 1013), Clauson (1972: 569a), Rassadin (1971: 173), Severtjan (1980: 180–181) and Stachowski (1993: 61).

2. Khakas *saxil* ‘squirrel’ (Butanaev 1999: 111b)

The second form is lacking in the *Khakas-Russian Dictionary*. The origin of this word is unknown. Among the Turkic languages, it appears only in some Yenisey Turkic and Altay Turkic dialects (Tenišev 2001: 165):

Yenisey Turkic: Sagai, Koibal, Kachin, Kyzyl –; Shor *sagil* ‘chipmunk, ground squirrel’; Altay Turkic: Altay *saqil* ‘squirrel’ (Jaimova 1990: 112); Tuba-kiži *sakil* ‘squirrel’ (Radloff 1893–1911 4: 249); Quu *saqilla-* (< *saqil* +*LA-* [Turkic denominal verb suffix]) ‘to hunt for squirrel’ (Baskakov 1985: 193); Teleut –.

The absence of the word in other Turkic languages suggests its foreign origin. In the *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Jenissej-Sprachen* (see Werner 2002 2: 162) a possible connection with Turkic forms is mentioned: Common Yeniseian **saʔq* ~ **saga*: cf. Assan *šagá* ~ *šaha*, Arin *sava*, Pumpokol *tak*, Ket *saʔq*, Yugh *saʔχ*. In such a case the final *-l* in the Turkic forms is not clear.

The Yeniseian forms look tempting, but more likely the solution to the etymology is to be found in the Quu dialect of Altay Turkic, which has *saliq* ‘a kind of squirrel’ (Baskakov 1985: 194). I assume a metathetical change in the Khakas *saxil* and Altay Turkic *sakil* forms. This change is peculiar to Khakas, e.g. *asxıldım* ‘sour spice for soups’ < **aškiltim* < **akšiltim*, cf. Old Turkic *äkši-* ‘to be sour, acid, tart’ (Stachowski 1995: 147).

Perhaps the Quu word is related to Old Turkic *saliğ* ‘form of tax, tax in the Golden Horde’ (Clauson 1972: 826a), which is derived from the verb *sal-* ‘to lay, to put into’¹ and the productive deverbal noun suffix *-(X)G* (for details of this function in the Old Turkic form, see Erdal 1991: 200). Clauson claims that the original form should be *saliğ* rather than *saliq* (Clauson 1972: 826a). With the meaning ‘tax’ the word is preserved in the Turki Taranchin dialect as *selik* ‘tax, duty’ (Radloff 1893–1911 4: 359). The word also existed in Middle Turkic: Chagatay *saliğ* ~ *saliq* ‘a government assessment imposed on a country for the pay of a mercenary army; a sign of a mark; weapon of a war’; Osman *saliq* ‘news, information; some kind of weapon’ (Clauson 1972: 826a; Radloff 1893–1911 4: 359).² The original Old Turkic meaning ‘tax’ has a connection to the Khakas word ‘squirrel’ as the pelt of the animal was a tax paid to Siberian Russians.

3. Khakas *tabirğan* ‘flying squirrel’ (KhR 212a):

The origin of this Khakas word is unknown. Perhaps it is related to another Khakas animal name, *tabirğa*. This is the Sagai dialectal form (KhR 212a), while the Khakas form is *tarbağan* ‘*Marmota sibirica*’ (KhR 218b). The Sagai form probably underwent a metathetical change *tabirğa* < *tarbağa*. The possible connection between the animal name ‘marmot, Lat. *Marmota*’ and ‘flying squirrel’ may be explained by the similarity of the animals. Zoologically, both of them belong to the same Sciuridae family. Perhaps because the word’s meaning is surrounded by taboo the semantic change occurred.

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- 1 The verb *sal-* ‘to lay, to put; to hang down’ appears in almost all Turkic languages. Cf. Yenisey Turkic: Khakas, Shor *sal-*; Altay Turkic: Altay, Quu, Tuba-kizi, Teleut *sal-*; Sayan Turkic: Tuvan; Tofan *sal-*; Chulym Turkic *sal-*; Yakut, Dolgan –; Siberian Tatar *sal-*; Fu-yü *sal-*; Yellow Uyghur *sal-*. For more Turkic data and etymological background, see Rassadin (1971: 225), Dybo (2003: 173–177).
 - 2 There is the Kirgiz form *salim*, with the lexical meaning ‘tax’ (Judaxin 1965: 629), which is derived from the same verb *sal-* ‘to put’ and the productive deverbal noun suffix *-(X)m* (Dybo 2003: 176).

Besides Khakas, among Turkic languages the word appears in Altay Turkic, Tuvan and Yakut (Ščerbak 1961: 148):

Yenisey Turkic: Sagai, Shor *tabirğa* ‘musk deer’ (Radloff 1893–1911 3: 971); Altay Turkic: Altay *tarbagan* ‘marmot’; Quu *tarbagan* ‘marmot’; Teleut *tarbagan* ‘marmot’; Sayan Turkic: Tuvan *tarbagan* ‘marmot’; Toju *tarbiğan*; Tofan –; Chulym Turkic –; Yakut *tarbağan* ~ *tārmayan*, cf. *tārmān* ~ *tarbān* ‘marmot; northern raccoon’; Dolgan –; Siberian Tatar –; Fu-yü –; Yellow Uyghur –.

The Turkic forms were borrowed from Mongolic (Kałużyński 1962: 26; Räsänen 1969: 463b; Rassadin 1980: 36, 67; Khabtagaeva 2009: 159). The Common Mongolic word ‘marmot’ appears in almost all Mongolic languages from the Middle Mongolic period (Nugteren 2011: 512):

Middle Mongolic: Pre-classical Mongolian *tarbayan*; “Secret History” *tarbaqan*; Literary Mongolian *tarbayan*; Modern Mongolic: Khalkha *tarwaga(n)*; Buryat *tarbaga(n)*; Kalmuck *tarwlyn*; Dagur *tarbəy*; Eastern Yugur *tarğwan* ~ *tarğuan* ~ *taβarğan*; Monguor *tōrğa* ~ *tarbuğa* ~ *tarbagà*.

For the Eastern Yugur and Monguor forms the metathetical change *tarwagan* ~ *tarwargan* is also peculiar (Nugteren 2011: 512). Possibly the base of the Mongolic word is **tarba* and the productive Mongolic denominal nomen suffix *+GAN* (Khabtagaeva 2001: 99; 2009: 280), cf. also Literary Mongolian *tarbalji* (< **tarba+ljin* [Mongolic denominal noun, see Poppe 1964 §128]) ‘sparrow hawk; tawny eagle’ (Khabtagaeva 2009: 159). According to Anikin (2000: 535), the root of the Mongolic word may be **tar*, cf. Buryat *tarlai* ‘variegated, colourful; speckled’.

The Mongolic word was also borrowed by the Tungusic languages (Cincius 1979 2: 167b; Rozycki 1994: 203). What is more, the source of borrowing was Mongolic directly for Solon or Yakut for Ewenki and Lamut:

Northern Tungusic: Eastern Ewenki dial. Zeya, Khingan *tarbayā*; Tommot, Uchur *tarbayan* ‘Marmota sibirica’; Solon *tabxa* ~ *tarbaxa* ‘Marmota sibirica; the “tail” of shaman’s belt’; Lamut *tarbaxan* ‘marmot’; Southern Tungusic: Manchu *tarbaki* ~ *tarbahi* ~ *tarbixi* ‘marmot; otter’; Sibe *tarbaga* ~ *tarbagan* ‘marmot’.

In the Siberian Russian dialects, the word *tarbagan* ‘marmot’ possibly has other sources, such as Buryat, Siberian Turkic or Northern Tungusic (for details, see Anikin 2000: 535–536).

4. Khakas *sarba* ‘squirrel’ (KhR 182a; Butanaev 1999: 109a):

Besides the lexical meaning ‘squirrel’, the word also denotes ‘the fabric material, which equals to one squirrel fur’. The etymology of the Khakas word is unknown. The word appears in some Siberian Turkic languages (Ščerbak 1961: 143):

Yenisey Turkic: Sagai, Koibal, Kachin –; Shor –; Altay Turkic: Altay *čirbak* ‘squirrel’; Quu *čirbiq* ‘squirrel’; Sayan Turkic: Tuvan *sirbik* ‘squirrel’; Tofan –; Chulym Turkic –; Yakut *sārba* ‘sable; marten; bunch of sable pelts’; Dolgan –; Siberian Tatar –; Fu-yü –; Yellow Uyghur –.

Ölmez (2007: 249a) connects the Tuvan word with Yakut *sārba* ‘sable’; subsequently, Räsänen relates it to Samoyedic (for details, see Räsänen 1969: 403a).

I assume that the Turkic forms have a connection with the Common Mongolic verb *sirba-* ‘to wag the tail’ and are derived with the Turkic productive deverbal noun suffix *-(X)K*. This suffix is productive in almost all Siberian Turkic. Usually it derives nouns with resultative meaning or names of tools.³ Due to a taboo associated with the name, the semantic change ‘animal, which wags the tail’ > ‘squirrel’ is possible.

The Mongolic verb *sirba-* ~ *širba-* ‘to wag the tail’ is found in non-archaic Mongolic languages:

Mongolic: Middle Mongolic –; Literary Mongolian *sirba-* ~ *sirbe-* ‘to wag the tail’; Khalkha *šarwa-*; Buryat *šarba-*; Kalmuck *šarw^a-* ~ *širwə-*; Khamnigan Mongol –; Dagur –; Eastern Yugur –; Santa, Baoan –.

On the phonetic side, the Mongolic syllable *si-* was adapted as *či-* in Altay and as *sī-* in Tuvan. In the Khakas form either the “breaking *i*” or regressive assimilation⁴

3 E.g. Khakas *čarix* ‘shine’ < *čarī-* ‘to shine’; *kirtik* ‘notch, incision’ < *kirt-* ‘to notch, make an incision’; *pölik* ‘partition’ < *pöl-* ‘to partition off’; etc. (Baskakov, Inkižekova-Grekul 1953: 404); Altay *bičak* ‘knife’ < *bič-* ‘to cut’; *tarak* ‘comb’ < *tara-* ‘to comb’; etc. (Baskakov 1947: 243); Tuvan *adirik* ‘confluent (of river)’ < *adīr-* ‘to separate’; *čoruk* ‘travel’ < *čoru-* ‘to travel’; *ižik* ‘swelling, tumour’ < *iš-* ‘to swell’, etc. (Isxakov, Pal’m-bax 1961: 153), etc.

4 The “breaking of vowel *i” in Mongolic languages means the regressive assimilation of the vowel *i* in the initial syllable into the vowel of the following syllable. E.g. Literary Mongolian *miqa* ‘flesh, meat’ > Khalkha *max* id.; Literary Mongolian *jada* ‘spear’ > Khalkha *jad*; Literary Mongolian *čida-* ‘to be able’ > Khalkha *čada-* id., Buryat *šada-* id., etc. (For details, see Poppe 1955: 36–41).

occurred: Mongolic *si-* changed to *sa-*. In most cases the Mongolic *si-* was preserved in Khakas (Rassadin 1980: 40): e.g. Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *sirege* ‘table’ → Khakas *sirē* ‘bench, chair, sofa’; Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *sirte-* ‘to follow with one’s eyes, look into, gaze at, stare, watch attentively, observe’ → Khakas *sirtei-* ‘to sit straight, to flirt’; Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *sibegčün* ‘maid servant’ → Khakas *sibekči* ~ *simekčün*; etc.

The change *si* > *sī* in Tuvan is not typical in Mongolic loanwords (Khabtagaeva 2009: 74–75). It happened only in one case in Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *siltayan* ‘cause, reason’ → Tuvan *sıldag* id. In Altay Turkic I found more examples, where the Mongolic *si-* changed to *čī-*, e.g. Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *čida-* ‘to be able, capable; to be able to overcome or vanquish’ → Altay *čida-* ‘to bear, to be able’; Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *čirai* ‘face; physiognomy; appearance’ → Altay *čiray* ‘face, appearance’; Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *čilbuyur* ‘long leather cord attached to the headstall of a halter or bridle; tether’ → Altay *čilbir* ‘bridle’; etc. The long vowel in the Yakut form *sārba* is unclear. The change of Mongolic *si-* > *sa-* in Yakut is not regular. The Mongolic syllable is usually preserved in Yakut (Kałuzyński 1962: 48–49): e.g. Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *siber* ~ *sibir* ‘dense shrubbery on a marsh; overgrowth on a river bank; hazel grove; dense forest, thicket’ (cf. Khalkha *šawar*) → Yakut *sibar* ~ *šimar* ‘thicket’; Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *siqa-* ~ *siya-* ‘to press, squeeze, squash’ (cf. Khalkha *šaxa-*) → Yakut *siğay-* ~ *šiğay-* ‘to knock together; to strengthen’; Mongolic: Literary Mongolian *sinala-* ‘to lament, wail, sob, whimper; to regret, repent’ (cf. Khalkha *šanala-*) → Yakut *sinaliy-* ~ *šiñaliy-* ‘to moan, scream’; etc. In the aforementioned Yakut form *sārba* regressive assimilation of the Mongolic vowel **i* happened as in Modern Mongolic.

5. Khakas *albīga* ‘sable’ (KhR 22b):

There is only one designation for the sable in Khakas. This word appears only in South Siberian languages, including Khakas, Shor and Altay Turkic varieties; in other Siberian Turkic languages it is lacking:

Yenisey Turkic: Koibal *albāga* ‘sable’ (Radloff 1893–1911 1: 432), Shor *albīga* ‘sable’; Altay Turkic: Altay *albuga* ‘sable’; Quu *albaga* ‘sable’; Teleut *albağa* ‘hunter’s booty’ (Radloff 1893–1911 1: 432); Sayan Turkic: Tuvan –; Tofan –; Chulym Turkic –; Yakut –; Dolgan –; Siberian Tatar –; Fu-yü –; Yellow Uyghur –.

The etymology of the Turkic word is unknown. According to Räsänen (1969: 16b), the Turkic word consists of two words, *ala* ‘colorful’ and *buga* ‘bull’. Radloff

(1893–1911 1: 432), in his comprehensive dictionary, argues that the Teleut, Shor, Koibal forms were derived from the Turkic verb *al-* ‘to take’. Jaimova (1990: 109), in her monograph on taboo lexicon in Altay Turkic, considers it a compound word, consisting of the Altay Turkic word *al* ‘wild’ and the Mongolic word *bulaya(n)* ‘sable’. In my opinion the Siberian Turkic word may originate from the Mongolic word *alban* ‘official obligation; tax, impost, tribute’ and the Turkic denominal noun suffix *+GAn*, which forms nouns that designate the names of animals (for the details of this function, see Erdal 1991: 85–89). The Mongolic word possibly goes back to the Common Turkic verb *al-* ‘to take; to seize, collect (*a debt*), receive, accept’:

Turkic *albaga* ‘sable’ < *alba(n)+GAn* (Turkic denominal noun suffix forms nouns that designate names of animals and plants) ← Mongolic *alban* ‘compulsion, coercion; official obligation or service; tax, impost, tribute; corvée; public use’:

Mongolic *alban* ‘compulsion, coercion; official obligation or service; tax, impost, tribute; corvée; public use’: Middle Mongolic: Pre-classical Mongolian *alban*; Hua-Yi Yiyu *alban*; ‘Phags-pa *alba*; Literary Mongolian *alban*; Modern Mongolic: Buryat *alba(n)*; Khalkha *alban*; Kalmuck *alwa- alwn*; Dagur *alba*; Khamnigan *alba(n)*;

Mongolic *alban* ← Turkic *al-* ‘to take; to seize, collect (*a debt*), receive, accept; to take off (*a cap, saddle, etc.*); to marry’:

Old Turkic *al-*; NES Yenisey Turkic: Khakas; Sagai, Koibal, Kachin; Kyzyl; Shor *al-*; Altay Turkic: Altay; Tuba; Qumanda; Quu; Teleut *al-*; Sayan Turkic: Tuvan; To-fan *al-*; Chulym Turkic *al-*; NEN Yakut; Dolgan *il-*; NWN Siberian Tatar *al-*; NWS Kirgiz; Fu-yü; Kazak *al-*; SE Yellow Uyghur *al-*.

From Siberian Turkic, the word also was borrowed into Samoyedic Kamas: *albuya ~ alboya* ‘sable’ (For details, see Joki 1952: 61–62) and Yeniseian Kott *alpaka ~ alpuga ~ alpuka* ‘flying squirrel’ (Werner 2002 1: 27). In Kott⁵ the original meaning ‘sable’ changed to ‘flying squirrel’. The pelt of both animals was used as currency in tax payment to Russians by indigenous people.

5 Timonina (1982: 163), the researcher on Turkic elements in Yeniseian, links the Yeniseian word component **al-* to the religious beliefs of Yeniseian peoples, which can be connected with cults of Sun or Moon. In her opinion, some Kott names of animals as *alčip* ‘dog’, *altūma* ‘bird’, *alt^hax* ‘wild duck’, *alt^hitega* ‘ant’, Arin *ilti* ‘fish’ with the mentioned Kott word *alpaka ~ alpuga ~ alpuka* ‘flying squirrel’ are derived from the same component *al-*, which may connect with religion or taboo world. For details, see Timonina (1982: 165).

6. Conclusion

This paper deals with the names of the squirrel and the sable in Khakas. It seems that, due to its taboo designation, the word for 'squirrel' in Khakas has four different forms. While the first form *tīn* 'squirrel' is obviously of Turkic origin, the other three words under consideration are of unknown origin. According to my etymological analysis, the latter form a mixed picture: *saxil* 'squirrel' is a metathetical form of the Turkic *salīq* 'tax', *tabirġan* 'flying squirrel' was probably borrowed from the Mongolic *tarbayan* 'marmot', and *sarbax* 'squirrel' is a hybrid word, which derived from the Mongolic verb *sirba-* 'to wag the tail' and the Turkic deverbal noun suffix *-(X)K*. There is only one form, *albiġa*, for the designation 'sable' in Khakas, which is also possibly borrowed from the Mongolic base *alban* 'tax, impost, tribute' and derived with the Turkic denominal noun suffix *+GAN*.

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