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On the origins of the name for the 'Black Sea'

Osman Karatay

Ege University, Institute for the Turkic World Studies, Bornova – İzmir, Turkey

Abstract

The name 'Black Sea' is widely attributed to the Anatolian Turks, due to their habit of referring to the South as 'white' and North as 'black'. However, the appellation first appeared in a Hungarian document and later in sources originating further to the North, including Icelandic sagas and other Nordic narratives. The Turks themselves have a small and secondary role in using and spreading the name. Some scholars have suggested that the Cumans, a Turkic people once occupying regions to the North of the Black Sea, are the likely source. However, in medieval times Khazarian traditions seem to have used the term 'Black Sea' as well as 'Great Sea', though the relationships between the two terms require clarification. This essay seeks to reconcile these two traditions, and offers a conjectural Bulgar source for the Black Sea denomination.
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The first use of the 'Black Sea' appellation is found in Hungarian documents dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century. The history of the Hungarian people prior to their settlement of the land currently bearing that name is full of uncertainties. Moreover, the scarcity of sources for the early history of Eastern Europe in general makes it difficult to find additional evidence from elsewhere concerning the origins and development of the name for the Black Sea in order to support or challenge the Hungarian case. What can be done at this point, therefore, is to make an overall comparison of the names used for the Black Sea by a variety of other peoples, and this will constitute a significant part of this essay. But first we should examine the history of the use of the adjective 'Black' in connection with the sea.

It is clear that sea names like the Black Sea, Red Sea, Yellow Sea or White Sea did not originate simply from the colours of their waters.[1] Amongst all the accounts of the denomination of the Black Sea, two approaches stand out. The first is the 'hospitality' approach of the ancient Greeks; and the second is the so-called Turkic 'black' variant which Georges I. Bratianu suggests is identical with the ancient Greek name (which was in turn borrowed by the Greeks from the Iranic 'dark').[2] According to the latter view (based on a somewhat restricted view of Turkish influence), the Anatolian Turks invented metaphoric names for geographical directions – black is north, white is south, etc. – so that for example the Mediterranean, literally the sea between lands, was known simply as *Akdeniz*, or 'White Sea'.[3] However, there is no evidence in the Turkic language to show such a direct semantic connection.[4] Moreover, as we shall see in this paper, the documentary evidence suggests that Anatolian Turks started to call the sea 'Black' much later than the peoples to the north, notably the Magyars and the Scandinavians.

In Hungarian, which is closely related to the Turkic language, there appears to be a direct semantic relation between the terms for 'dark' and 'north'. The words for north, 'észak', and night, 'éjszaka', are thus the same, as are those for the south, 'dél', and noon, 'dél' (Mong. *düli*, ultimately going to Turkic *tüš*).[5] This seems to

E-mail address: karatay.osman@gmail.com

[1] R. Schmidt, Considerations on the name of the Black Sea: what can a historian learn from it?, in: W. Leschhorn, A.V.B. Miron, A. Miron (Eds), *Hellas und der griechische Osten. Studien zur Geschichte und Numismatik der griechischen Welt*, Saarbrücken, 1996, 219–224.

[2] G.I. Bratianu, *La mer Noire: des origins à la conquête ottomane*, Munich, 1969, 43, 45. Rüdiger Schmidt portrays the Turkic 'Black Sea' as essentially a revitalized form of the Greek name: Schmidt, Considerations on the name of the Black Sea (note 1), 221.

[3] For instance, von Gabain, who attributes the denomination 'Black Sea' to the Anatolian Turks, locates Turkey at the centre and then refers to the location of the Black Sea to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Red Sea to the south in order to attribute directional meanings to those colour names: A. von Gabain, Renklerin Sembolik Anlamları, tr. S. Tezcan (from her essay in *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 1962), *Türkoloji Dergisi III-1* (1968) 107–113 [110].

[4] Prof. Éva Nagy, personal communication.

[5] Gy. Németh, *A Honfoglaló Magyarság Kialakulása*, Budapest, 1930, 86.

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parallel the relevant case in Chinese.[6] It is possible to pass from night to dark and from dark to black, though the last two words, respectively *sötég* and *fekete*, are unrelated in Hungarian. There may, of course, be other semantic and phonetic relations concerning this group of words, though we need more evidence concerning their origin and development.

There are no direct equivalents of such close semantic relations in the Turkic case, though similar metaphoric usages can readily be reconstructed thanks to the abundant use of colours in depicting social, political or geographical phenomena. The Chinese also seem to have had metaphoric matching between colours and directions, as in *red: south*, *black: north*, *blue: east*, *white: west* and *yellow: center*. According to O. Franke, J. de Groot and then A. Alföldi, the peoples of the Eurasian steppe also had a similar custom. Von Gabain, W. Bang and R. Rachmati found evidence of its existence in Old Uighur texts,[7] originating ultimately in Buddhist cosmology, though such correspondences should not necessarily be extended to all Turks.

Turkic, on the other hand, provides further material to reconstruct a relationship between the terms 'great' and 'black'. In his examination of the dynastic name *Qara Khan*, Pritsak claims that the Black Horde belonged to the greater khan. In what was a dual territorial system, he suggests, the black and northern half formed the essential ('Haupt' & 'Gross') part of the realm.[8] However, the evidence suggests that the Qarakhanid realm extended in the east–west direction, on the Samarkand (and Taraz) –Balasagun (and Kašgar) line: thus we can disregard the 'northern' element, but keep the 'greater' one. There is no doubt, especially in historical contexts, about the usage of the Turkic adjective *qara* to refer to 'great', amongst its fourteen meanings.[9]

For a variety of reasons, the case of the Anatolian Turks will not detain us further here. The Saljukids tried to conquer the Crimea under Alaaddin Keykubat (in the Sugdaq expedition in the late 1220s), one and a half centuries following the conquest of Anatolia by the Turks, but the relations of the Anatolian Turks with the Black Sea had been very weak for a long time. They reached the coastal region of Anatolia too late, and so much of the Black Sea's shores remained under Byzantine or Italian domination. The Saljukids encountered a strong Persian literary influence in the region, and, according to the extant written sources, they do not seem to have given the sea their own name.[10]

The ancient name for the Black Sea

Scholars working on the ancient/Greek name(s) of the sea have speculated on its origins. According to Fasmer, writing in 1922 and later incorporating the argument into his great Russian etymological dictionary, the Greek name of the Black Sea – *Pontos Euxinos* ('Hospitable Way') – stems from a change to the 'original' name *Pontos Axinos* ('Inhospitable Way'). The earlier term was coined, according to this theory, after the Greek colonists heard the name for the Black Sea used by the Iranic peoples in the north the word (*αχšaĕna*,'dark colour'), and adapted it for their own language as ἄξεινος ('inhospitable, hostile'), referring to the danger of sailing there. The later version, with its 'positive' meaning, is said to have emerged after the Greeks had extended their influence in the region after establishing many colonies along its coasts.[11] This account was challenged by Moorhouse:

> 'The dark sea' is a reasonable name; 'the dark way' is a fantastic name for the Black Sea or any other sea. It is a big assumption that the speakers of Avestan had close connection with the Black Sea. The standard forms used were ἄξενος, εὔξεινος. If that is so, the Avestan *αχšaĕna* is ruled out on phonetic grounds, for the Greek form with closest resemblance to it is ἄξεινος, and that form would have been preferred if the loan had occured.[12]

I would make three points concerning this argument:

(1) Although it is widely assumed, there is actually little evidence for significant Iranic settlement to the north of the Black Sea in ancient times, except for the Alans and their immediate kinships. In fact, the so-called Iranic identity of the Scythians has not yet been demonstrated to any convincing extent. All we can say with confidence is that the Greek colonists encountered local people there, though they were not necessarily of Iranic stock.
(2) It is implausible to suggest that the Scythians – or any other peoples whose Iranic identity is by no means certain – used a word found in the language of the most distant Iranic peoples. Although Schmidt showed that the adjective is found in Avesta, can one apply the vocabulary of Avesta to all Iranic languages?
(3) It is a big assumption to claim that the people in the north, whose Iranic identity is uncertain and whose possession of the

[6] Gabain, Renklerin Sembolik Anlamları (note 3), 117. This feature is not unique to the Hungarian and Chinese languages: it is likely to be a universal case, since 'noon' is determined only according to the sun's peak point, which happens in the south everywhere in the northern hemisphere. The essential problem here is the link between night and black, rather than between night and north.

[7] See O. Pritsak, Qara: Studie zur Türkischen Rechtssymbolik, *Zeki Velidi Togan'a Armağan. Symbolae in Honorem Z. V. Togan*, İstanbul, 1950–1955, 239–263, esp. 249, 255. Gabain (Renklerin Sembolik Anlamları, 111, note 3), for example, suggests that the Mongols call the Yellow River *Qara Müren* ('Black River'), for it is the northern one of the two great Chinese rivers, while the Chinese call it 'yellow' for its situation in the centre of the country. While these are plausible reconstructions, but one may find other clues in support of opposite claims, at least in Turkic, which does not necessarily follow Chinese or Mongolian culture in this respect.

[8] Pritsak, Qara: Studie zur Türkischen Rechtssymbolik (note 7), 254, 259.

[9] For *qara* as 'great', see I. Laude-Cirtautas, *Der Gebrauch der Farbbezeichnungen in den Türkdialekten*, Wiesbaden, 1961, 33–34; Z.M. Əliyeva, Türk Dillərində «Qara» Sifətinin Semantik Təkamülü, *Türkologiya* 1 (1994) 52–57 [54]. I am grateful to Prof. Zeki Kaymaz for his help on the issue of colour.

[10] According to Ibn Bibī (İbn Bibi, *El-Evamir'ül-Ala'iye fi'l-Umur'il-Ala'iye (Selçukname)*, I, tr. M. Öztürk, Ankara, 1996, 325–326), an essential Saljukid source from the late thirteenth century, the Black Sea was called the 'Khazarian Sea'. This name was unlikely to have been borrowed from classical Islamic geography literature, since there it was reserved for the Caspian Sea (together with the 'Gurgān Sea'). Current Turkish/Turkic usage also follows suit ('Hazar Denizi'). This Saljukid denomination is totally foreign to the Medieval Islamic and Turkic names for the sea. Just as the Italians continued to refer to the Khazars in Crimea after the demise of the Khazarian polity, so too the Saljukid army attacking Sugdaq fought with people referred to as 'Khazars', despite the fact that their state had disappeared three centuries earlier. The Saljukid denomination for the sea thus seems to be of local significance, the name being based on that of their rivals on the opposite side, the so-called 'Khazars' (or rather Cumans) in Crimea.

[11] For explanation and defence of this theory, see W.S. Allen, The name of the Black Sea in Greek, *The Classical Quarterly* XLI/3-4 (1947) 86–88, in reply to A.C. Moorhouse, The name of the Euxine Pontus, *The Classical Quarterly* XXXIV/3–4 (1940) 123–128. Allen tries to prove that the Avestan cultural milieu was not unaware of the Black Sea, as claimed by Moorhouse, by referring to a Middle Persian script known as *Bundahišn*, which reads: '… of salt seas there are 3 principal, 23 small, of the 3 principal one is the Pūtīg, one the Kamrōδ, and one the …'. Allen defines the two named seas as the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea and suggests that the third should be the Black Sea (The name of the Black Sea, 86–87). This explanation is inaccurate. Clearly, the script is concerned with salt-water seas, and the Black Sea is not a salt-water sea. Moreover, on this account the author would appear to have excluded the Mediterranean. In his recent essay (Considerations on the name of the Black Sea (note 1), 219–220, 222), Rüdiger Schmidt accepts that the Iranic evidence is insufficient, but relies heavily on the Fasmer thesis. In this view, rather than the Scythians it was other Iranians to the south of the sea who called it 'black', as a synonym of the designation 'north'.

[12] Moorhouse, The name of the Euxine Pontus (note 11), 125.

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word *αχšaĕna* is open to question in the absence of documentary evidence, denominated the Black Sea in that way.

An equation with three unknown factors could hardly lead to a known result in mathematical terms. If the first Greeks sailing into the Black Sea had been able to communicate with the supposedly Iranic inhabitants and asked for the name of the sea they had just crossed, then they would probably have translated its meaning rather than having borrowed it directly in order to find a phonetic resemblance in their language.

Moreover, the word *Pontus*, meaning 'way', is the cause of still more complexity. There is a relationship in Indo-European languages between 'way' and 'water' only in cases where the water can be passed through.[13] Thus, Moorhouse claims that the Phrygians, who passed from Thrace in the Balkans to Anatolia via the Straits in preference to the more arduous Black Sea route, called the Straits 'the Easy Way': on this account, the Black Sea became 'the Difficult Way', and this usage was passed to the Greeks through the mediation of the Ionians just to the west of the Phrygians in Western Anatolia.[14] Though hypothetical, this suggestion seems more plausible. At least for now, there is no more logical explanation for 'Pontus'.

In sum, there is little evidence for the origin of the 'Black Sea' name among the ancient Greeks. Under Greek influence, Muslim geographers of the early middle ages called the sea *Buntûs*, or in accordance with nations around it: thus *Gurziyyah* (Georgian), *Arminiyyah* (Armenian), *Rūm* (Roman) or *Rūs*.[15] However, new and non-ethnic names (great, black and northern, as discussed below) emerge only in the non-Islamic literature of the late medieval period.

Locating Khazar traditions

The case for the Magyar origin of the Black Sea denomination rests on two significant points. First, the oldest written record in which the sea is described as 'black' is a medieval Magyar chronicle, in Latin script. The second and more important point is that Eastern components of Magyar cultural traditions (the Khazaro-Bulgar milieu in our context) offer very valuable evidence about the early medieval world of Eastern Europe, for which sources are otherwise very sparse. One can in fact trace the influence of ostensibly Bulgar and Khazar traditions among early Magyars, as has already been done in the case of both linguistic relations (specifically the so-called Bulgar–Turkic loanwords in Hungarian)[16] and political inheritance (including the possibility of Magyar dual-kingship, and some titles).[17] Thus, the Magyar form of the name of the Black Sea could shed light on older Turkic customs.

P. Váczy has claimed that the Magyars learned the name or denomination 'Black Sea' from the Cumans living just to the east of their dominions in what is today South Ukraine. The anonymous *Gesta Hungarorum*, a text from the beginning of the thirteenth century, is the first to document its usage. In this account, Dominican missionaries sent to Christianize the Cumans brought that name to Hungary.[18] However, this thesis can be disputed on the basis that it was unlikely that the Magyars, who had come to the coasts much earlier and who had long lived on the Black Sea steppes, would have learned the name of the sea from the Cuman newcomers. The problem, essentially, is how to differentiate between the Cuman and the Khazar legacies in the north of the Black Sea at the beginning of the second millennium. Although the Khazar state disappeared in 965 its name and culture survived the Cuman age. We know of it thanks to the contacts made by the Italian maritime bourgeoisie with Khazar remnants in Crimea (Fig. 1).

The Khazar Empire, founded on the core of the westernmost province of the Türk Empire, which claimed all the plains to the north of the Caucasus up to the Black Sea coast, was therefore a properly Black Sea polity. Khazar rule lasted more than three centuries until 965, when the Rus' and Oğuz overthrew the empire. The Khazars governed all coastal regions between Abkhazia and Bessarabia and owned most of Crimea. Though they were engaged in uninterrupted and century-long wars with the Muslim Arabs in the south during the first century of the state's existence, the Khazars did not abstain from fighting with Byzantium, their so-called premier ally against the Arabs, over Crimea. Even at the end of the seventh century, just after decline of the Great Bulgar, they seem to have attempted to seize the peninsula.[19]

Direct documentary sources concerning the Khazar consist only of a few letters in Hebrew. An anonymous Khazar letter from the mid-tenth century contains some clues that are useful for our purposes.[20] Known by scholars as the *Cambridge Document* or *Schechter Letter*,[21] the source mentions some seas, among which should be the Black Sea:

> [Our country, Khazar] is to the right of the sea which comes from [yo]ur land, by which came your messengers to Constantinople. It appears to me the Great Sea does it extend. Our city is distant from the sea by two thousand one hundred and sixty rīs.[22]

[13] Moorhouse, The name of the Euxine Pontus (note 11), 123.

[14] Moorhouse, The name of the Euxine Pontus (note 11), 127. The attributes 'easy' and 'difficult' here are mine; the author uses the words 'hospitable' and inhospitable'.

[15] For all these versions, see Bratianu, *La mer Noire* (note 2), 44–45, 148.

[16] Loanwords are words from one language borrowed by another. There is a rich literature on loanwords in Hungary through the Vámbery-Gombocz-Németh-Ligeti line, to which hundreds of researchers have contributed. But unfortunately there is still no a collection of Turkic correspondences in Hungarian; and the projected *Etymological Dictionary of Turkic Loanwords in Hungarian*, proposed by A. Róna-Tas and A. Berta, has not been completed (see A. Berta and I. Vásáry, Old Turkic loanwords in Hungarian). For now Lajos Ligeti's book *A magyar nyelv török kapcsolatai a honfoglalás előtt és az Árpád-korban*, Budapest, 1986, remains the ultimate study in this area. It is likely that there are some other phonetic regularities between the two languages suggesting further correspondences. In collaboration with A. Marcantonio, I plan to make some contributions to the relevant word list.

[17] Although the early Hungarian polity is generally regarded as a by-product of the Khazarian political and cultural milieu, the key question should be whether the Khazarian diarchy was indeed a reflection of the Eurasia-wide phenomenon setting sacral kings against executive regents and grand viziers. For the latest study, see P.B. Golden, Irano-Turcica: the Khazar sacral kingship revisited, *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* LX/2 (2007) 161–194.

[18] P. Váczy, Kunok és vlachok Anonymusnál, in: *A magyar történelem korai századaiból*, Budapest, 1994, 71–76. I am very grateful to Prof. Éva Nagy, who informed me about this essay, for her comments.

[19] The best accounts of Khazarian political history may be found in D.M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton, 1954, and M.I. Artamonov, *Istorija Xazar*, Leningrad, 1962. For a useful outline of their (foreign) political relations see also T.S. Noonan, Why Dirhams reached Russia: the role of Arab-Khazar relations in the development of the earliest Islamic trade with Eastern Europe, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 4 (1984) 151–282. The Crimea is revisited by Noonan in: The Khazar-Byzantine World of the Crimea in the early Middle Ages: the religious dimension, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 10 (1998–1999) 207–230.

[20] Another contemporary Khazarian letter, written by their ruler Joseph to Hasdai ben Shaprut, the Jewish counsellor of the Andalusian court ca. 960, clearly refers to the Black Sea as the 'Sea of Kustantina' (Constantinople): P.K. Kokovtsov, *Jevrejsko-Xazarskaja Perepiska v X veke*, Leningrad, 1932, 82, 102.

[21] The letter was first published by Solomon Schechter: see S. Schechter, An unknown Khazar document, *Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 3:2 (1912/1913) 182–219. A newer and critical edition was published by N. Golb and O. Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, Ithaca, 1982.

[22] Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents* (note 21), 119.

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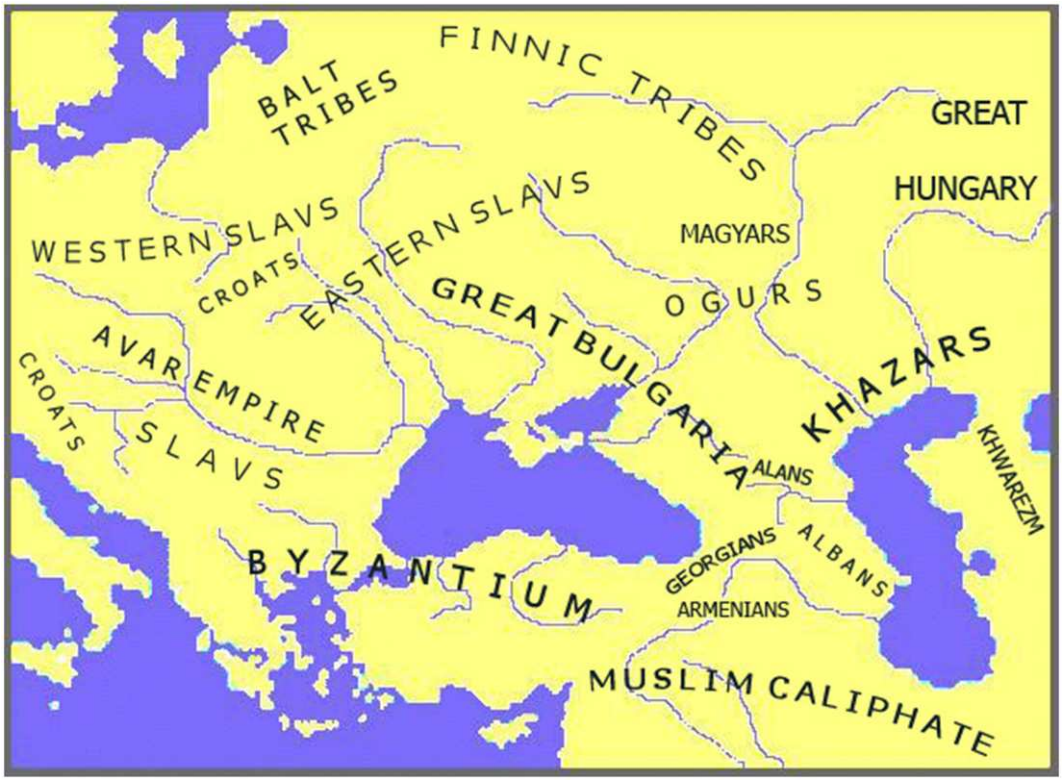


Fig. 1. Eastern Europe and Western Asia, c.650.

Schechter interprets the first part of this phrase as 'it is to the south of the sea' instead of 'right'.[23] On this reading, the sea would turn out to be the Baltic. This does not seem convincing, since a maritime journey from the Baltic to Istanbul was not possible, unless we suppose that the embassy of the letter's recipients (Andulusian Jewry, or perhaps some other Mediterranean Jewish community) had accompanied the Swedish Rus' along the '*put' iz Varjag v Greki*'. There is more textual evidence to suggest instead that it is the Mediterranean and the Black Sea that are being referred to here. Were the addressee in Spain, for example, 'the sea which comes from your land to Constantinople' would surely be the Mediterranean. The Atlantic plus the Baltic (together being the 'Great Sea') thus extends from the Mediterranean Sea, as does the Black Sea. The real problem is that Khazaria, when considered from a Spanish perspective, is neither to the 'south' nor to the 'right' of the Mediterranean, but rather to its north and left. Alternatively, were the addressee of the *Letter* located in Egypt, a distinct possibility since the document was found in Cairo in the Kenizah collections, then the Mediterranean would be the sea coming from Egypt, and Khazaria would be on the right. This location would reconcile the orientations contained in the *Letter*.

On this basis, we may reconstruct the content of the *Letter* as follows:

> Khazaria is to the right of the Mediterranean which comes from Egypt, by which your messengers came to Constantinople. It appears to me the Black Sea does it extend. Our city is distant from the Black Sea by two thousand one hundred and sixty rīs.

The indications of distance here are very precise and appear to be a reliable guide to relative location. If we are to believe the measure, then 2160 rīs, or 475 km, would take us from Khazaria to the Black Sea coast. The second closest sea is the Mediterranean, at a distance of about 1500 km. Although in Judaic tradition the term 'Great Sea' was usually reserved for the Mediterranean,[24] and although the author is Jewish by birth (from the Symeon tribe, in contrast to the contemporary khaqan who described himself as of Turkic origin), the term is used differently in the *Letter*, because the anonymous author qualifies the Mediterranean as 'the sea which comes from your land to Constantinople', and the Great Sea is different from that. This is reinforced by the next sentence, according to which it would take 90 days (by sea) and 28 days (by land) to travel between the Khazarian capital and Istanbul.[25] The sea referred here is clearly the Great Sea, as the author mentions it twice in the final two sentences, and never means any other sea.[26] The rationale for the Khazar description of the Black Sea as the 'greater one' perhaps lies in its comparison with the smaller Azov Sea. This again points to a local, Khazarian usage.

The author of the *Letter* often uses Ptolemaic vocabulary, probably in order to ease communication with the addressee. However, his reasoning in using a local denomination in the case of the Black

[23] Schechter, An unknown Khazar document (note 21), 219.

[24] D.N. Freedman, A.C. Myers and A.B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Michigan, 2000, 527–528.

[25] The maritime journey would have included the Black Sea, the Azov Sea, and several hundred kilometers on the Don river by the Khazar fortress Šarkel. From Šarkel to the Khazarian capital on the Volga delta would take about 28 days. This was the traditional trade route used especially by the Rus' coming via Dnieper, as related by Ibn Khordadbih (İbn Hurdadbih, *Yollar ve Ülkeler Kitabı*, tr. M. Ağarı, İstanbul, 2008, 130–131). See also R.K. Kovalev, What does historical numismatics suggest about the monetary history of Khazaria in the ninth century?, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 13 (2004) 97–129 [102–103].

[26] This point was first made in the Turkish edition of the *Schechter Letter*: O. Karatay, Hazarların Musevileşmesine Dair Bir Belge: Kenize Mektubu, *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 18 (2008) 1–17 [14].

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Fig. 2. Eastern Europe and Western Asia, c.900.

Sea, instead of the more universal and understandable Greek name, is more difficult to explain. Logically, it may reflect the widespread, or at least regional, usage of the adjective 'great' for the sea, in implicit opposition to the claims of Byzantine culture, a usage which might plausibly have extended well beyond the Khazars to include groups such as the Bulgars, Alans, Slavs, and the peoples of the Crimea and Western Caucasia. Italian traders and colonists from the later period provide further evidence on this point: they called the sea simply *Mare Maggiore* ('Great Sea').[27] Italian records start with the thirteenth century. The Syriac author Matthews of Edessa, who wrote much earlier than the Italian travellers, uses the term 'Great Sea' for the Caspian, but not consistently, since he soon changes his mind and begins referring to the Caspian as the 'Gasp Sea'.[28] Even this may include a reflection of the afore-mentioned northern usage (Fig. 2).

When the Italians came to the northern shores of the Black Sea, there were only small remnants of the Khazars, or perhaps Jewish communities associated with the Khazars, especially in Tmutorakan; and they never saw an independent polity of Khazars proper. Non-Judaic Turkic Khazars would have been assimilated among the Oğuz and Cumans, their co-nationals, by that time, and the less Judaic Khazars probably unified their destiny with the Jews, especially in and around Crimea. The Khazars referred to occasionally after the decline of Khazaria in 965 were most likely to be these remnants. Yet this did not prevent the Italians from referring to the Crimea and the eastern shores of the Azov as 'Casaria/Gasaria', even as late as the sixteenth century.[29] The Italian travellers thus witnessed and documented many influences of the Khazar legacy, including the denomination 'Great Sea' for the Black Sea. Italian traders, based in the Pera quarter, just 200 m from Istanbul on the opposite side of the Golden Horne, were surely very familiar with Byzantium. Interestingly enough, however, they rarely used the Byzantine name of the sea, instead preferring a name that the Byzantines never used. This also suggests very widespread usage of the name 'great' in the North, in contrast to the Byzantine 'Pontos'.

Mordtmann, writing well before Váczy, also suggests that the Northern Turks used the term 'Black Sea' in the thirteenth century. Contemporary Western authors perceived it as 'great'. The Turkic 'qara' in this context meant 'great, mighty, terrible'.[30] We rely increasingly on linguists to elaborate these semantic relations in Turkic and other languages, though the case at hand poses further difficulties. If 'Nordic' Turkic people (Hun, Bulgar, Oğur, Avar, Pečeneg, Oğuz, Cuman, etc.) called the sea 'qara' largely due to its size, then why would the name be translated into Slavic and Nordic languages as 'black' rather than 'great'? If the Turks had called the sea 'qara' on this basis, and after a while this essential meaning of the word was forgotten, then we are dealing with Turks inhabiting the region from time immemorial, because the known history of the Turkic language does not provide any evidence for such a development, except for hypothetical semantic reconstruction. If there is any possibility of such an earlier presence of Turks to the north of the Black Sea, then we must go further into history to search for origins of the river and country names *Oaros* (Herodotus, fifth century BC), *Var* (Jordanes, sixth century AD), *Varoukh* and

[27] C. King, *The Black Sea*, Oxford, 2004, 82.
[28] Mateos, *Urfalı Mateos Vekayi-Nâmesi (952–1136) ve Papaz Grigor'un Zeyli (1136–1162)*, tr. H. Andreasyan, 3rd ed., Ankara, 2000, 167, 171.
[29] The Anatolian/Saljukid Turks described Crimea as *Khazaria* in the thirteenth century, as mentioned above: İbn Bibi, *El-Evamir'ül-Ala'iye fi'l-Umur'il-Ala'iye* (note 10), 325.
[30] J.H. Mordtmann, Kara Deniz, in: M.T. Houtsma (Ed.), *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam 1913–1936*, reprint, Leiden, 1987, 730. See also Laude-Cirtautas, *Der Gebrauch der Farbbezeichnungen* (note 9), 34.

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Fig. 3. Eastern Europe and Western Asia, c.1100.

perhaps *Vrar* (Cons. Porphyrogenitus, tenth century), *Vār* (Al-Bīrūnī, eleventh century), and *Özü* (Ottoman ages, representing the Common Turkic *-z* form, in contrast to the other three in *-r* form), all of them signifying one and the same location. Interestingly, only the Turks have that name, and applying it to the Herodotian *Oaros* would be more plausible than supposing the presence of Iranic peoples in the region.[31]

Italian travellers and the Khazar heritage

The Italian denomination for the sea was not their own: they learned it from the inhabitants of the regions in which they travelled, including remnants of the Khazar people. Bratianu suggests that those sailors coming from the South, namely the Bosphorus, seeing an endless horizon in all directions came to call the sea 'Great'.[32] But this is unlikely since sailors from Genoa or Venice could themselves have hardly regarded the Black Sea as the 'greater'. The distance from Istanbul to Kherson is twice the distance from Istanbul to the Dardanelles. Even sailing from Mora to Dardanelles would take more time, while the distance between Genoa and Sicily is twice the distance between Istanbul and Kherson. They had enough reason and knowledge to compare the Mediterranean and the Black Seas in volume. The reasons for their insistent usage of *Mare Maggiore* therefore deserve careful examination. Rubruck acknowledges this fact by saying 'I entered the Sea of Pontus, which is commonly called Mare Majus, or the Greater Sea…'[33] His contemporary Plano di Carpini, too, implies it by referring to 'the Greek Sea which is called the Great Sea'.[34] Even according to the latecomer Barbaro, the sea was called by others (that is, by the inhabitants of Gazaria and Comania) *Mare Maggiore*.[35] These authors, especially Barbaro, lived and travelled in the region for a long time and were well-informed: their testimony is thus of great value. As a whole, this evidence surely suggests that Khazar traditions were alive in those days, notwithstanding the process of Cumanization and the subsequent Mongol invasions (Fig. 3).

Through the Italians, the name of the sea was passed to other Western European languages. Briefly, Ramon Muntaner (d.1336), a Catalan veteran working in Byzantium, copied the name from the Italian travellers whose stories he told, as in the case of eighteen Genoese galeeres, who '*venaient à Constantinople pour de là entrer dans la mer Majeure*…'; similarly '*…leurs galères fussent entrées dans la mer Majeure*', and '*en un lieu qui est dans la mer Majeure*'.[36] Although the yearbook of the Villani family (1364) contrasts the 'vulgar' use of the term 'Great Sea' with the 'elegant' name 'Ocean Sea',[37] the Anglo-French narrative of de Mandeville's adventures satirises such usage by referring to the Black Sea as the 'Great Ocean Sea'.[38] Even the Byzantines had to accept this name, as in the case of

[31] The ancient Turkic name for the Dnieper calls for more attention: see O. Karatay, Dnyeper Nehrinin Türkçedeki Adı ve İzahi Gereken 2500 Yıl, *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 26 (2010) 17–26.
[32] Bratianu, *La mer Noire* (note 2), 45.
[33] W. van Ruysbroeck, in: W.W. Rockhill (Ed.), *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–55* (London 1900), reprinted New Delhi, 1998, 41.
[34] Friar Giovanni di Plan Carpini, *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars*, tr. E. Hildinger, Boston, 1996, 100.
[35] G. Barbaro and A. Contarini, *Travels to Tana and Persia*, in: W. Thomas, E.A. Roy, H.E.J. Stanley (Ed.), New York, 1963, 4.
[36] J.A.C. Buchon (Ed.), *Chroniques étrangères relatives aux expéditions françaises pendant le XIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1841, 437, 439, 448.
[37] Villani, *Croniche di Giovanni, Matteo e Filippo Villani*, *I*, A. Rachelli (Ed.), Trieste, 1857, 300.
[38] J. Mandeville, *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundeville*, J.O. Halliwell (Ed.), London, 1839, 256. See also (note 40).

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Georgios Codinus in the late fifteenth century, who calls the sea 'Megali Thalassi' (Great Sea), in addition to using the classical form 'Euxinus Sea'.[39] The French borrowed the term from Italy, often retaining its Italian form. Montaigne (1533–1592), for instance, uses the name of the sea in Italian: *Mare Maggiore*.[40] The classical (Greek) name thus coincides with *Mer Majeure* in French. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century did the term *Mer Noire* start to gain currency. According to a dictionary from 1761, *Mer Majeure* and *Mer Noire* were interchangeable terms.[41] Diderot's *Encyclopédie* mentions *Mer Majeure* once but essentially accepts *Mer Noire*.[42] By the mid-nineteenth century, *Mer Majeure* was only a nostalgic name.[43] Meanwhile English authors, like the French, did not need to translate the Italian name. In Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587), Theridamas thus tells Tamburlaine that he 'crossed the gulf called by the name *Mare Majore* of the inhabitants'.[44] Contemporary travel and geography books had to explain the Greek name by referring to the Italian style. According to Marlowe's contemporary Richard Hakluyt, who compiled narratives of travel in a brilliant edition, the 'Pont Euxine' was then called *Mare Maggiore*.[45] Robert Hues' geography book of 1592 repeats the same formula: 'The Euxine Sea is now called *Mare Maggiore*'.[46] As in the French case, English readers also started to learn in the second half of the eighteenth century that 'Pontus Euxinus: … at this day goes among the Italians by the name of *Mare Maggiore*… now called the Black Sea'.[47]

Khazar versus Cuman influences amongst the Hungarians

Our current problem is, as stated previously, how to differentiate the Cuman from the Khazar influences on the name for the Black Sea. In my view, the evidence does not confirm, as often assumed, that the former are the source of the Hungarian denomination 'Black Sea', while it is not clear that the Khazars actually used the term. The Italians in the Black Sea region interacted closely with the Cumans (recall the story of the *Codex Cumanicus*, the Italian part of which was written not much later than the previously mentioned Italian texts) and borrowed from them the form 'Great Sea', which also occurs in Khazar, too, as shown above. The incoming Cumans might themselves have adopted the Khazar denomination. And in some cases the Italians also borrowed the name 'Black Sea'.

The Magyars preceded the Cumans in the Caspian steppes, and it is thus possible that medieval Magyar denominations bear some traces of Khazar influence. In fact, I shall argue here that the earliest documentary evidence of Magyar names may provide the essential piece of the puzzle over the origins of the denomination of the Black Sea. According to Simon Kézai, writing in the late thirteenth century,

> [Scythia is] situated in Europe but extends towards the east. Far from the Torrid Zone, it is bounded on one side by the Northern Sea and on the other by the Riphean Mountains, while on the east it adjoins Asia. It is the source of two great rivers, one called Etul and the other the Togora…Farther, south of the course of the Don there is an impassable desert. The Don in fact rises in Scythia and is called Etul by the Hungarians, but when it makes its way through the Rifean mountains it is referred to as the Don; as it flows into the plains it crosses the lands of the Alans and then empties into the Round Sea by three branches. The river Togora rises in Scythia and passes through wild forests, marches, and snowy mountains where the sun never shines because of clouds; finally it enters Hyrcania, veering towards the Northern Sea.[48]

This text, copied by later Hungarian chroniclers, is very clear. It defines three regions of Scythia: north, south, and east. The Riphean or Ural ranges, on one side, cannot be in the south; they are in the north, while Asia is to the east. Therefore, the 'Northern Sea' is in the south, as also suggested by the course of the river Togora. *Hyrcania* is the Caspian Sea in Ptolemaic terminology: the source of this name, the Gurgān region, is to the southwest of the Caspian Sea.

While the *Khazar Cambridge Document* creates some difficulty due to its definition of Hyrcania, it also offers a solution to the naming of this 'Hungarian' Hyrcania rooted in Khazar traditions (which may have nothing to do with the Cumans): '… [the] name of our land, as we have found in books, [is] Arqanus, and the name of the imperial city is Qazar, while the name of the river passing through it is Atyl'.[49] The terminology of the *Letter*, as well as the confession 'we have found in books', shows that, as noted above, the sender of the *Letter* uses ancient terminology in order to communicate with his distant coreligionists. While this is understandable, what is more confusing is that he makes Hyrcania/Arqanus his own country, located to the northwest of the Caspian, while the true Hyrcania was in the southeast, just opposite Khazaria. The false denomination of Khazaria as Hyrcania should then be a well-known and settled tradition (based on official Khazar usage, derived from Jewish knowledge). Simon Kézai follows this tradition, which Magyars borrowed in the period under Khazar suzerainty, by directing the Volga (confusing it with the Don) towards the coastal region Hyrcania, beyond which is situated the Northern Sea. Kézai confesses that the Magyars were confused by those rivers. Everything is clear in the text; only the names should be replaced. The mentioned Alans are the Volga Bulgars, as expected, since the Caucasian Alans were in that period confined to the mountainous regions, not on the plains. *Alan*, the name of

[39] Georgius Codinus, in: B.G. Niebuhr (Ed.), *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae*, Bonn, 1843, 160.

[40] Montaigne, *Essays – Volume One*, tr. J. Florio, Alcester, 2007, 216.

[41] F. Morenas, *Dictionnaire portatif comprenant la géographie et l'histoire universelle VI*, Avignon, 1761, 348. This 'noire', however, was not a new import to Western Europe. For example, the Spanish monk Pascal of Vittoria, who travelled to Asia in 1338, calls our sea the 'Mare Nigrum' (H. Yule and H. Cordier, *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, London, 1915, 81). According to Mandeville's narrative, Chotaz (Caucasus) 'is between the See Maore (Gr. "black") and the See Caspy' (Mandeville, *The Voiage and Travaile* (note 38), 256). What is remarkable here is that the source is Byzantine, and the name was borrowed without translating. The author remarks that local people refer to 'the Great Ocean Sea' by the name 'the Maore Sea'.

[42] D. Diderot, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers XXI*, Lausanne and Berne, 1780, 530.

[43] As shown directly by the title of book of F.É. de la Primaudaie, *Études sur le commerce au Moyen Age: histoire du commerce de la Mer Noire et des colonies génoises de la Krimée*, Paris, 1848. The form 'Mer Majeure' was then about to be forgotten. However, some authors continued to use it several decades later. For example, Chateaubriand used the term in the mid-nineteenth century: F.-R. Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, Paris, 1856, 7.

[44] C. Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, J.S. Cunningham, E. Henson (Eds), Manchester, 1998, 154.

[45] R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, Vol. XII, E. Goldsmidt (Ed.), Charleston, 2008, 66.

[46] R. Hues, *Tractatus de globis et eorum usu* (London 1889), reprinted Boston, 2005, 69.

[47] A. MacBean and S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of Ancient Geography*, London, 1773.

[48] S. Kézai, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, L. Veszprémy, F. Schaer, J. Szűcs (Eds), Budapest, 1999, 19, 21; S.L. Endlicher (Ed.), *Rerum Hungaricarum Monumenta Arpadiana*, Sangalli, 1849, 87.

[49] Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents* (note 21), 119.

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heroes in Udmurt legends, in this context signifies Nogay-Tatars.[50] In Simon Kézai's story, Hunor and Mogor, legendary ancestors of the Magyars, marry two daughters of the Alan prince Dula in the *Belar* country.[51] Belar is nothing but the Volga Bulgar, and Dula (or Dulo) is the name of the Bulgar dynasty.

Thus, in Kézai 's terms, if not those of all Magyars at the time he was writing, the Black Sea is the Northern Sea. That said, it is somewhat problematic that in this story of the early deeds of the Magyars told in the legendary style, there is no mention of the sea by its more or less known names (Pontic, Russian, Georgian, Greater, etc.). There must be a (Black) sea in this story, and it can only be the Northern Sea referred to by Kézai, but why is it 'Northern'? In Magyar terms, after all, the Black Sea ought to be the 'Southern Sea'. One would expect only the Byzantines, or other peoples of the Middle East, to use the term 'Northern'. The Byzantine denomination was long-established, and was also crucial for Latin sources, used by the educated Magyars in the middle ages. When Simon Kézai completed his work (c.1282), Anatolia had already been a Turkish land for more than two centuries. While a Saljukid source for the word 'north' is plausible, there is no direct evidence for it. There was no room then for direct cultural interaction between Turkey and Hungary. And the first occurrence of the word *Kara* ('Black') among the Southern Turks was not earlier than Kézai. There thus seems to be no 'visible' source for the Hungarian 'north' except those accessible through the legacy of Khazar traditions.

The author of the *Cambridge Document* does not rely on ancient biblical or Ptolemaic traditions at this point; otherwise, he would not have applied the name 'Great', hitherto reserved for the Mediterranean, to the Black Sea. The latter term is thus not the property of the Judaic realm and must originate with some other people. Given its currency in the region, as witnessed by the afore-mentioned Italians, the most plausible origin seems to be the (Black and Great) Bulgars. The Köktürks/Khazars reached the Black Sea shores only after crushing the Bulgars in the Northern Caucasus in the 570s and once more in the 670s. It is highly probable that they borrowed the name 'great' from the Bulgars, well before the Judaisation of Khazaria.

On the other hand, the anonymous *Gesta Hungarorum*, which was written (by a certain Master P.) two generations earlier than Kézai and which includes the first unambiguous usage of the name 'Black Sea' — in both *Nigrum Pontem* and *Nigrum Mare* forms — has no mention of any 'Northern Sea'.[52] The anonymous *Gesta*, as big as Kézai's book, contains significantly fewer geographical definitions. Indeed the word 'sea' occurs only four times, two of which are the ones mentioned above. This apparent contradiction may present a solution. In contrast to Kézai, Master P. does not deploy an elaborate literary style. Comparing the first parts of the two books, it is clear that Master P.'s text contains more history and less geography than that of Kézai. The latter preferred the more literary Khazarian form, which was probably unpopular or out-of-date among the Magyars at the time,[53] while Master P. wrote in a form that was learned from the Cumans (if Váczy is right) or another source, and became widespread. As for why Simon Kézai did not write 'Greater Sea', he may well have been aware that the Black Sea is smaller compared to others, especially the Mediterranean; and Kézai, it seems, rightly believed that he had enough knowledge to correct the case.

As we have seen, the Italians described the smaller sea as 'greater', and the Magyars called the southern sea 'northern'. Such a story might better be described as a comedy rather than a puzzle. We are left with the question of why the Magyars did not use the term 'great', in spite of their close relations with the Black Bulgars and Khazars. Clues may be found by returning to the use of the term 'black'.

The Nordic connection

The evidence supporting Váczy's thesis that the Cumans used to call our sea 'Gara Tengiz' (Gara is Váczy's term) comes from a distant and isolated island, Iceland. Snorri Sturluson, who recorded Scandinavian sagas in c.1230, just 25 years later than the anonymous Magyar *Gesta*, left us a marvellous and mysterious book of history, called today *Heimskringla* due to its first two words. Sturluson is very sure of his geographical knowledge and calls the Black Sea, which he locates to the northeast of the Mediterranean, exactly so: *Svartahaf* or 'Black Sea'.[54] The sources he mentions for this term are totally Scandinavian: there is virtually no reference to any source in German, Latin, Frank, Greek, etc. There is not even any mention of Idrisī's book, written in the Sicilian court of the Norsemen just three generations earlier. Therefore, the place names in the *Heimskringla* are free of foreign influence. Africa is called 'Blaland', for example; Gibraltar is 'Narvesund', Poland is 'Vanaland' and Scythia/Russia is 'Great Swithiod' (Sweden).[55] All countries and regions have original names or denominations which are, to a great extent, unique to the Nordic context. The use of the word Swithiod for Russia refers to the Varangian case, in which the Rus' state was founded by some Swedes in the ninth century. This usage indicates that the Icelanders and the Norsemen in general knew some of the basic geographical and historical facts about the region, even from such a distance.

[50] M. Zəkiev, *Törki-Tatar Ətnogenezy*, Kazan, 1998, 200.

[51] Kézai, *The Deeds of the Hungarians* (note 48), 17; Endlicher (Ed.), *Rerum Hungaricarum* (note 48), 87.

[52] M. Rady, The Gesta Hungarorum of Anonymous, the anonymous notary of King Béla: a translation, *South and East European Review* 87/4 (2009) 681–727 [686, 716]; Endlicher (Ed.), *Rerum Hungaricarum* (note 48), 3, 41. In a recent discussion of this passage, László Holler questions the second occurrence of the word. Since Macedonia could not be located in the region between the Danube and the Black Sea, that is, could not reach the Black Sea, as stated in the original text ('ut totam macedoniam sibi subiugarent a danubio usque ad nigrum mare'), he claims that a later copier must have changed the original phrase 'ægæum mare' (Aegean Sea) to its present form (L. Holler, Anonymus és a Fekete-tenger, *Magyar Nyelv* CIV/3 (2008) 306–316 [307–308]. However, Macedonia would in no period have extended to the Danube. The context, especially the following passages, suggests that by 'Macedonians' the author means to refer to Slavs; therefore their lands, except for 'Greater Dalmatia', are referred to as 'Macedonia'. At play here, it seems to me, are memories of the Bulgaro-Magyar wars, won by the latter. When the gesta was written, 'Bulgar' was already in use as the name of a consolidated Slavic speaking people, rather than a Turkic people governing Slavic masses.

[53] The use of the name 'Round Sea' for the Caspian in Simon Kézai's terms can also be attributed to the Khazars, who probably borrowed it from earlier inhabitants of the region, since the same occurs in Jordanes, too, as pointed out by Veszprémy and Schaer (Kézai, *The Deeds of the Hungarians* (note 48), 20). It seems this denomination had little popularity then. Compare Ibn al-Faqih: 'This sea [the Caspian] is called wheel of Khorasan'. (Y.Z. Yörükân, *Müslüman Coğrafyacıların Gözüyle Ortaçağ'da Türkler*, İstanbul, 2004, 235).

[54] S. Sturluson, *Heimskringla: Sagas of the Norse Kings*, tr. Samuel Laing, London, 1961, 7.

[55] Sturluson, *Heimskringla* (note 54), 7. Maks Fasmer suggests that the Black Sea is referred to in some Russian dialects as *Svjatoe More* or 'Bright Sea' (*Etimologičeskij Slovar' Russkogo Jazyka IV*, Moskva, 1987, 345). It is difficult to find a logical explanation for this appellation. Given the many examples of names of the sea with ethnic references, including Rus', considerate is distinctly plausible that the sea was once named after Sweden, which ultimately became name of Russia in Nordic speech, as mentioned above: hence the 'Swithiod Sea'. Later, in Slavic speech, this term would turn into *svjatoe*, which is meaningful in their language (but not suitable for the sea). The Greco-Iranic thesis mentioned above also relies on such an assumption. These kinds of fabrications are common in any language. To give a few examples from Turkish: the Arabic *alāim'is-semā* for 'rainbow' becomes *eleğimi sağma*, 'do not milk my sieve!'; *kazāyā* 'rules and regulations' becomes *kaz ayağı*, 'leg of goose'; *āl-i Cengiz oyunu* 'trick of the Dynasty of Čingizzids' becomes *Ali Cengiz oyunu*, 'trick of Ali Cengiz'.

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Sturluson's book may not in fact be the first to use the name 'Black Sea'. Another Nordic source, the chronicle *Morkinskinna*, gives an exhaustive account of the whereabouts of the Norsemen, as well as their sources of information. According to this chronicle, which contains stories of Norwegian kings between 1030 and 1157, Prince Haraldr Sigurðarson, future king of Norway, started a long-running adventure in the 1030s. He went first to Sweden, then to Russia to work as a military commander under the kniaz Jaroslav; he passed to Francia via Poland, visited Rome, and came to Istanbul to join the special guards of the emperor. Then he resigned and visited Jerusalem, from which he returned to Istanbul once for a brief stay, and then sailed into the Black Sea and arrived in Kiev.[56] As mentioned above, he eventually became king of Norway. That is, the king personally saw almost all of the countries mentioned in the texts. In these circumstances, there is little room to doubt the quality and degree of the geographical knowledge given in the book. What is interesting for our survey is that *Morkinskinna*, too, refers to the Black Sea as 'Black Sea',[57] as does *Fagrskinna*, which was written immediately after *Morkinskinna*, and whose author made abundant use of the latter saga.[58] If *Morkinskinna* was really composed around the year 1220, as estimated, then this is chronologically the second source in which the name 'Black Sea' occurs.[59]

We need to interrogate further the evidence concerning Haraldr's activities and the content of the *Morkinskinna* saga. Haraldr stayed frequently in Istanbul and lived among the court personnel of high rank. If he is personally one of the sources of the saga, it seems he did not favour the Byzantine denomination for the Black Sea. He did not spend much time in the Black Sea and passed directly to Kiev, the main city of the Great Swithiod. He might have learned the form 'Black Sea' from the Varangians, who were continuously being slavicized in those days during their interactions with the local population and who were also in close relationships with the neighboring steppe Turks. The supposition that the Nordic knowledge of the name 'Black Sea' has its roots in the accounts transferred by the Varangians to Scandinavia would lead us to change the date of origin from the days of Haraldr and Jaroslav to earlier times. The Varangians (Norsemen in the broader or Rus' in the narrower sense, considering the fact that the word 'Varang' occurs only after the eleventh century), who started to see the Black Sea perhaps from the end of the eighth century, and who conducted much business along its shores over many centuries, undoubtedly knew the name of a sea used primarily by natives of the region. The Rurikids of Kiev were there from the mid-ninth century on and knew of the sea into which the Dnieper flows (other than that claimed by the *Russian Primary Chronicle*: 'Ponet'skoe more').[60]

If the Norsemen and Magyars learned the same forms, respectively, from the Varangians and Cumans, as claimed, then we should turn to a common source. The Cumans did not necessarily learn the name from the Rus', and the Rus' could not change their denomination after the arrival of the Cumans (mid-eleventh century). This is also crucial for the Pečenegs, who came to the Western steppes at the end of the ninth century to suppress the Magyars who were expelled to where they now live. The Rus' would surely have had a name for the sea that was adopted at least during the Khazaro-Bulgar days.

While these are only speculations, other explanations seem distinctly less plausible. The Cumans would hardly have had a role in such earlier interactions. A strictly empirical approach binds us chronologically to the fact that the form 'black' starts to appear in sources only in the thirteenth century, but it is clear that the term predated this usage. While the evidence suggests that some people might have called the sea 'Swithiod' or 'Rus', the Slavicized Rus' or Varangians eventually surrendered themselves to the popular 'black'. It is thus highly probable that the form 'Black Sea', reaching as far as Iceland in the middle ages, reflects an early Rus' tradition. This would take us directly back to the Bulgars, as stated above. The Bulgars were surely present in the Don and Volga basins (like their immediate neighbors, the Magyars) when the Rus' warrior-traders started to discover the paths towards Khazaria. The Scandinavian merchants encountered the Bulgars earlier and more often than the Khazars. The once-Bulgar realm is thus the most probable source of the name 'Black Sea' that subsequently spread among the Scandinavians, Slavs and Magyars, as well as the nearby Turkic peoples. One may think that the widespread Slavic use of the term 'Black Sea' also stems directly from the Bulgars, as the latter influenced the Slavs to the greatest degree. Even a Slavic mediation from Bulgar to Varangian can plausibly be reconstructed. However, this would not substantially alter the case for the origin of the denomination being amongst the Black Bulgars.

Bulgar origins of the name for the 'Black Sea'

As noted above, according to Muslim sources almost all peoples around the Black Sea gave their own ethnic names to the sea. It is somewhat problematic that we have no such term as the 'Bulgar/Burjān Sea' given that they (have) lived there longer than the Rus' and the Khazars did, for instance. The appellations 'Black' and 'Great' were used to signify the Bulgar people who lived to the north of the Black Sea. These people virtually disappeared from the scene after the Pečenegs arrived (during the late ninth century), partly by withdrawing to more secure lands in the north and partly by being assimilated among other peoples, including the native peoples of the Crimea.[61] We have few linguistic remnants of these groups, and their denomination for the Black Sea is totally unknown to us. Might the sea itself have been named by others after the 'black' or 'great' Bulgars? Might the word 'Bulgar' have dropped out of use in the course of time, leaving the two forms 'Black Sea' and 'Great Sea'? In all probability, it is likely that the Bulgars themselves had only one word for both meanings: Kara/Qara.

Written sources for the Slavic case are very useful on this point. In literary records, the first reference to 'black' is later than the first

[56] T.M. Andersson, K.E. Gade, (Eds), *Morkinskinna: the Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, Ithaca, 2000, 131ff.

[57] Andersson and Gade (Eds), *Morkinskinna* (note 56), 145; F. Jónsson (Ed.), *Morkinskinna*, København, 1932, 84.

[58] P.A. Munch (Ed.), *Fagrskinna: Kortfattet Norsk konge-saga fra slutningen af det 12. eller begyndelsen af det 13. aarhundrede*, Christiania, 1847, 112.

[59] Holler (Anonymus és a Fekete-tenger (note 52), 312) suggests that the word *latere* in the sentence '*ab uno latere Ponto, ab altero montibus Ripheis*' ('from one side to Pontos, on the other to the Riphean Mountains') in the chronicle of Regino at the beginning of the tenth century, can be read as *ater*, or 'black'. Such a case, though possible, is of restricted relevance and, in any case, the word *ater* is hard to mistake for *latere*. A reverse development is more probable since forgetting letters is more plausible than accidentally adding them.

[60] D.S. Lihačev, B.A. Romanov (Ed.), *Povest' vremennyx let po Lavrent'evskoj letopisi*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1950, 10.

[61] Thomas Noonan's essay on 'The Khazar-Byzantine World of the Crimea' is mainly concerned with the spread of Orthodoxy among the settled Bulgars, who were associated with the Saltovo-Majatskaja culture in the Crimea.

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Byzantine usage of it in 1265.[62] Fasmer is right to derive the Slavic denomination from Greek,[63] but only in chronological sense. Such an explanation would mean that the Slavs had no name for the sea near which they had lived for at least eight centuries by that time or that they changed their appellation under the Byzantine influence. If so, this happened when Byzantine influence was at its lowest degree. Indeed, cultural disconnection was in process; the Cumano-Bulgar uprising and independence created a new state in the Balkans; Byzantium was expelled from Illyria completely; Moravia no longer had anything to do with Istanbul. Furthermore, the Eastern Slavic population was under Mongol domination. These circumstances would not have favoured the sort of cultural interaction which might have led the Slavs to change the name of the Black Sea in their language and tradition. The Slavs could have had the 'black' form at least as early as the Scandinavians, well before Byzantine influence.

That the *Russian Primary Chronicle* insists on the primacy of the Byzantine usage reflects the concerns of its author, Bishop Nestor. He was under such a strong Greek influence as to list small Aegean islands as 'countries' to be shared among grandsons of Noah;[64] and he wrote the *Chronicle* with the help of Greek authorities like Georgios Harmatolos. The *Chronicle* often relies on Byzantine sources in its account of the Rus' history. It is as if the early Rus' were very poor at mastering their past, in contrast to the Nordic cultures from which a rich saga literature was born. Nestor knew most of the basic chronological facts of the early history of his own nation thanks to Byzantine sources, and local sources seem to have provided a more organized chronology only for the years beginning from the last days of Svjatoslav (the 960s). It is unsurprising to find Nestor referring to the sea as 'Pontos'. However, this is not necessarily representative of the popular or even official usage amongst the Rus'.

The Bulgar connection would explain why the Magyars first and most consistently used the word 'black' in naming the sea. While the Cuman explanation is possible, it is less likely as the Magyars saw the sea five centuries earlier than the Cumans. They lived in close proximity with the Bulgars at the approach of the Volga and the Don (the Etelköz lands, in my interpretation). The fact that the great majority of the early layers of Turkic loanwords in Hungarian are of Bulgaric character is indicative of the intensity of their interactions. It is plausible that one of the early loanwords to Hungarian was 'Qara Tenger' (from the Turk 'Qara Tengiz'), resulting in 'Fekete Tenger'. It is notable in this context that the only Magyar word for sea is a loanword from Turkic.[65] In this context, we should take the Onoğurs, the Turkic component of the Magyar tribal union, into consideration. They lived in the Lower Don basin from the mid-fifth century onwards and ultimately migrated to what is now Hungary together with the Magyars. They engaged in trade (in furs) from the very beginning of this period.[66] They probably welcomed the Rus' traders for a long time in the Don region. Thus, the Onoğurs could be a plausible source of the form 'black' in Hungarian.

One may find traces of the name 'Black Sea' even in the writings of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, the tenth-century Byzantine emperor.[67] Describing the Galician White Croats, he writes 'And the sea to which they come down after the thirty days is that which is called 'dark' (σκοτεινή)'.[68] We can assume that Constantine carefully recorded what he had heard from the envoys of other nations and made use of his notes in this book. It might seem, at this point, that he had assigned the name of the 'dark' sea to the Baltic. But, in the previous sentence, he discusses the Croats' lack of communication due to their distance from the sea, an issue understood from the Byzantine point of view, namely in terms of imperial interests. The story was possibly narrated by the embassy of the Dalmatian Croats, friends of the empire, who asked about their kindred in Galicia. The envoys added the 'unfortunate' information that they could not easily come to Istanbul since they had no ships as their country was thirty days from the coasts of … the Black Sea. Their journey to the Baltic was not Byzantium's concern. Istanbul was interested in their military might, which is narrated in the same paragraph. The Croat use of the name 'Black Sea' presumably reflected its adoption in the Slavic world (assuming the source is the Black or Danubian Bulgars), or at least have been brought to Pannonia by the Magyars some fifty years before.

Summary and conclusion

People in the ancient world did not necessarily copy place names from eachother simply in order to adopt a common form. This is a vital point in the historical study of place names especially in the case of the great seas, on whose shores many different ethnic groups might settle. Travellers from further afield, however, might more readily adopt one of the existing denominations. The origins and development of the name for the Black Sea is a good example of such a process. Ancient and medieval sources seem mostly to follow the standard Greek name, simply 'Pontus'. Alongside this name, such authors referred to the sea by the names of nations around it, as we can see in Islamic geographical texts. On contrast, we have very few documentary sources which provide evidence of how the peoples to the north of the Black Sea used to refer to it. As expected, they do not use the Greek form, and likewise they do not apply ethnic names to the sea. Instead, in the records of the Khazars, Magyars and Norsemen, we find a number of adjectives for the sea: Black, Great and Northern. The last of these seems to have been rather specific, and did not live long; the second was very influential in Eastern and Western Europe during the Middle Ages; while the first, of course, has gained universal currency, today being the only form in use.

As we have seen, some scholars have suggested that the name for the Black Sea is connected with the Turkish habit of referring to the North as black (and so, to the South as white). However, philological inquiry shows clearly that Turkish or Turkic has no any clear usage of colours for geographical directions, and, moreover, the Turks of Turkey were among the last to use the name 'Black Sea'. The name had been firmly established in the North well before the inhabitants of Turkey came to use it. Other scholars have suggested that the appellation 'Black' is connected with *Pontos Axinos* ('Inhospitable Way'), the opposite of the Greek term *Pontos Euxinos* ('Hospitable Way'). The former name is widely accepted as a sound reflection of the Old Iranic word *αχšaĕna* ('dark colour'), which,

[62] The first occurrence of the form 'Black Sea' in Byzantine sources is in an act between Michael VIII Paleologos and the Venetian authorities in 1265 (Váczy, Kunok és vlachok Anonymusnál (note 18), 71). In this interesting case, both sides seem to have abstained from using their own denominations for the Black Sea ('Pontos' and 'Great', respectively) and instead preferred a third alternative! On the logic of pure chronology, this would mean that the Anatolian Turks learned the 'black' form from the Byzantines, as claimed by Schmidt.

[63] This depends on his own theory of the Iranic association: Fasmer, *Etimologičeskij Slovar'* (note 55), 345.

[64] Lihačev and Romanov (Ed.), *Povest'* (note 60), 10.

[65] L. Benkő, L. Kiss and L. Papp, *A Magyar Nyelv Történeti-Etimológiai Szótára*, Vol. II, Budapest, 1970, 888.

[66] Jordanes, *The Gothic History of Jordanes*, C.C. Mierow (Ed.), London, 1915, 60.

[67] Notwithstanding the comments of F. Dvornik: see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administando Imperio: Vol II Commentary*, F. Dvornik, et al. (Eds), London, 1962, 130.

[68] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administando Imperio*, Gy. Moravcsik, R.J.H. Jenkins (Eds), Washington, 1967, 152–153.

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according to this argument, signified the sea. However, this thesis is purely hypothetical, and there is no direct evidence for it. As argued here, peoples to the North seem to have used their own denominations, irrespective of wider influences. Thus, as argued above, two Khazarian letters from the same period have different names for the Black Sea, and the two Hungarian annals from the same century refer to the sea using different names.

The source of this puzzle seems to be hidden in the semantic connection between the words 'Great' and 'Black'. In the early forms of the Turkic language, the word *kara* 'black' also meant 'great'. It seems the word was translated into Hebrew as 'great'; and this meaning gained currency in Khazaria, from which it was borrowed by the Italians in the medieval period. However, the word *kara* lost its meaning as 'great' during the same period, except for some restricted areas, and the 'black' meaning increasingly predominated. The translations used by travellers to the region in the latter part of the Middle Ages thus tended to reinforce and standardize the usage of the term 'Black Sea'. As the Khazars called the sea *Kara* 'Great', then we need to find another Turkic people calling it *Kara* 'Black', and amongst these peoples the best candidate seems to be the Bulgars. Some scholars suggest the Cumans played this role, but as they came to the region in the mid-eleventh century they can hardly have had any role in originating the usage. Of all peoples around the Black Sea, except for the tiny Caucasian tribes along the eastern shores, the Bulgars (altogether in their Turkic and Slavic phases) are the longest settled in the region. It is therefore very likely that they had a significant role in establishing the name 'Black Sea'.