

Karok *mákkay* < Scottish *McKay*

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THE KAROK INDIAN LANGUAGE, spoken on the Klamath River in northwestern California, has a word *makáyva-s* "cloth."¹ Since textiles (other than baskets) were unknown to these Indians prior to contact with the white man, this term is probably a nineteenth-century neologism, and in fact is explained by informants as a compound of *mákkay* "white man" plus *va-s* "blanket" (i.e., a native covering made of deerskin or the like).² The usual word for "white man," however, is *'apxantínnihic*, literally "flat-hat," referring to the brims characteristic of European headgear; *mákkay* "white man" (morphophonemically *mákkay*) is apparently an archaic or unusual word, with no obvious etymology. An informant suggested a derivation from homonymous *mákkay* "mange mite" and a connection with the denominative verb *mákkay-ha* (morphophonemic *mákkay-hi*) "to be numerous" (as mange mites are on dogs, or, presumably, as white men are in California).³ Being unconvinced by this, however, I have also suggested a borrowing from Yurok, the language spoken downstream along the Klamath; in this language, the word *wo-gey*, originally meaning "supernatural being," was extended to mean "white man" as well.⁴ The phonetic equations assumed here, however, are highly unusual.

Both of the above etymologies must now be retracted. Mrs. Shirley Silver, who has done extensive field work on Shasta, the language spoken upstream from Karok on the Klamath and its tributaries, reports a word *mákkay* "white trapper," together with

¹ The term also occurs in the compounds *makayvase-kívrá-m* "cloth house," i.e., "tent," and *makayvasyukúkkuh* "cloth shoes," i.e., "sneakers."

² W. Bright, "Linguistic Innovations in Karok," *IJAL* XVIII (1952), pp. 53-62; see pp. 60, 62.

³ W. Bright, *The Karok Language*, University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 13, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957; see p. 366.

⁴ W. Bright, Review of *The Yurok Language*, by R. H. Robins, *Language*, XXXV (1959), pp. 100-04; cf. p. 104.

her informant's statement that the term was originally a man's name. This is confirmed by local histories, as in the following account:

Rich peltries of the north and gold in the south, especially the latter, gave birth to a vast domain known as Siskiyou County. Jean Baptiste McKay entered the area in 1825, the earliest record of a white man, camped near Sheep Rock in Shasta Valley, and demanded of his men a trustful and equitable association with Indians. In turn he was accepted by the Indians as the greatest of Boston men.⁵ A tradition of his fitness and virtue was provided, and twenty-five years later Indians approached white migrants to know if they were 'McKay men.'⁶

It remains only to note that the prototypical *mákkay* probably pronounced his name not as [mækí], but as [mækéí], as do many people of that surname even yet. It would be interesting to know if there are cases in other parts of the world in which a personal surname has become the label for an entire ethnic group.

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⁵ "Boston" is the Chinook Jargon term for a white American, borrowed into Shasta as *pá·stin* "white man."

⁶ J. Roy Jones, *Saddle Bags in Siskiyou* (Yreka, 1953), p. 2.