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AN INTERNATIONAL GLOSSARY OF LOCAL
GEOGRAPHIC TERMS

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AN INTERNATIONAL GLOSSARY OF LOCAL
GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS

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Local, or folk, geographical terms are at present being extensively studied by the linguist and the geographer. It is not pure chance. Geographical terms carry wide information both of linguistic and geographic nature that can't be ignored by the cartographer who systematizes geographical proper names. It is often the folk term that reveals the meaning of a geographical name being either an ingredient part of a name or turning into a proper name.

Natural conditions and surroundings, the specific character of material culture and the economic orientation of a country give origin to geographic terminology, determine its detailing and specification. The Slavs have a detailed "swamp" terminology; the Turkic-Mongolian peoples possess a host of terms to classify pastures or elements of microrelief that are of importance to nomadic tribes when they have to orientate on flat plains; the inhabitants of deserts who as a rule suffer from a constant shortage of fresh water have a detailed terminology for water sources. According to R. Capot-Rey they are about twenty words to designate different kinds of wells. Nations with a well-developed irrigated agriculture have a detailed irrigation terminology, e.g. in the ancient agricultural oases of Middle Asia, even in the places where a Turkic-speaking population prevails the terms which are connected with irrigated farming are mainly inherited from the Iranian languages.

The changing of natural conditions, landscapes and economic systems may affect the meaning of a geographical term to such an extent that one and the same term may acquire opposite meanings in two neighbouring districts, e.g. it may mean a swamp and an upland place in a marshy area, i.e. one and the same term may indicate both a positive and a negative form of relief. The meaning of a geographical term may undergo change even in the same language; and the knowledge of its narrow local meaning will enable us to understand better the original meaning of a geographical name as a whole, the folk term being often a component of it.

It is common knowledge that the words "forest" and "mountain" are synonyms in the Slavic languages, the words "taiga" and "woodless mountains" are synonyms in the Turkic languages. The mountain-names Schwarzwald, Thüringer Wald, Bayrischer Wald in Germany contain the term "wald" the meaning of which does not correspond to the

nature of the feature. The matter is that these lexical synonyms have been brought into existence by the geographical conditions, by the natural features that are behind these words.

A great number of geographic names are originally elementary geographic terms. Their behaviour in various languages is different. In some Indo-European languages the connection between the name and the term is much weaker than in the Finno-Ugrian, Mongolian and Tungus-Manchurian languages, where the overwhelming majority of toponyms include generic terms. In a number of cases local terms themselves have turned into proper names. Different is the role of geographical terminology in forming various categories of names: hydronyms, oronyms, names of populated places.

In Belorussia local terms enter only 10% of hydronyms and 60% of names of towns, villages, farmsteads etc. What are the reasons for the difference? Might it lie in the remoteness of some and the newness of others? In the course of time the terms (a) may be dropped, e.g. "Москва" instead of "Москва-река", "Вахш" instead of "Даръёи Вахш" where "река" and "Даръёи" mean "river", "Архангельск" instead of "Архангелогородок" where "городок" means "town". Elliptical names of this kind occur more often than we are aware; (b) may lose its own meaning and become a toponymic suffix.

Many, but not all, of the toponymic suffixes are modified terms whose meaning is forgotten but may, in a number of cases, be traced upon special linguistic investigation. We may say with a considerable degree of certainty that frequent repetition of a toponymic suffix in names of identical features speaks of its being originally a term. Moreover, in modern geographic terminology there are forms intermediate between terms and suffixes. The local population in Kirghizia is not aware that "kol" in hydronyms (e.g. Karakol, Ulakol etc.) is a generic term meaning "river" which has become a toponymic suffix. But in Central Asia where people speak Mongolian the local term "gol" is widely used for "river". This example is a graphical illustration of the existence of intermediate links in the chain "term-suffix".

Local geographic terms fall into two categories depending on the spread of the terms and their functions in the language: (a) generic terms designating landscapes, great relief features and hydrographic features, e.g. plain, forest, river, lake, swamp, mountain(s), range, highland etc.; and (b) specific geographic terms which are narrower in meaning, e.g. terms that designate types of landscapes but not their zonal

structure. To the latter category may be referred the Slavic "bor" - a pine forest on a sandy soil, "golets" - a bald mountain peak beyond the forest boundary; the Turkic "sirt" - a flat highland; the Mongolian "gobi" - a kind of desert territory; the Iranian "dasht" - an open (or desert) plain; the Arabic " 'ain" - a spring (the original meaning was "eye"), etc.

Among the specific geographic terms a special group is made up by the endemics which are restricted to limited areas and are not used anywhere else. The collection, systematization and comparative investigation of these terms is of the greatest significance to the toponymist. As a rule, the comparative linguistic analysis makes it possible to disclose kindred forms and archetypes showing the ancient linguistic ties between the contemporary populations who have retained these terms, and their remote ancestors.

The fascinating problem of tracing the primary meaning of the simplest geographic term requires a thorough investigation of the mass of toponymic material. Might we equalize the Hindi term "ganga", the Indochinese "kong" the "kiang" of South China, the Korean "kang", all of which mean "river", and the "kan" of South Siberia which can be traced to its original meaning of "river"? Only ten years ago this question would have seemed meaningless and groundless.

In some cases the areas of geographic terms are surprisingly large, they do not coincide with the contemporary linguistic boundaries. Though they appear to be semantically clear and phonetically close or seem to be cognate, one should not take the seeming affinity of such terms for granted. With the passage of years we accumulate more facts that indisputably prove the affinity of language - areas which show the striking vitality of terms and the historic and geographic relations of ancient times throughout the vast territories of Euroasia. Examples are numerous: the Chinese "shan" (mountain) used throughout the area extending from South East China and Japan as far as Kirghizia and Karakhanstan; the term "gora" (mountain) and its variants "gar, gara" used in the areas extending from Siberia throughout East Europe and the Iranian - speaking countries as far as the Arab countries and the Sahara, as well as the above-mentioned hydronymic term "ganga"- "kang".

Thus, local geographic terms which are keys to the etymology of geographic names are not only important in cartography, but are themselves of the greatest interest for scientific investigation. Therefore, first and foremost, they should be collected and systematized. An exchange of information on the progress of this

research work in different countries would be most welcome. At present we can mention a number of works which are either entirely devoted to the analysis of geographic terminology or are glossaries of such terms. We should like to name here some of these works: "A Glossary of Geographical and Topographical Terms" by Alexander Knox, London, 1904; "Les termes de Geographie" by Lucien Hochsteyn, Paris, 1906. To my knowledge, these were the first great works aimed at showing the original meaning of geographic terms and those adjectives which enter geographic names most frequently. The latest is "A Glossary of Geographical Terms", New York, 1962, compiled by a group of specialists under the supervision of L. Dudley Stamp. This glossary contains both local, folk, terms and scientific terms. Among regional works I should like to point out "Le Glossaire de principaux termes geographiques et hydrogeologiques Sahariens", Alger, 1963, a splendid glossary of the geographical and hydrogeological terms of the Sahara compiled under the supervision of R. Capot-Rey. The Slavic geographical nomenclature is well detailed too. In 1921 in Lvov-Warsaw came out K. Moszynski's "Uwagi o s/owianskiej terminologii topograficznej i fizjograficznej. Oparte przewaznie na mazerjale bia/orusko-poleskim". ("Notes on Slavic Topographical and Physiographical Terminology based on the Belorussian-Polish Material"). Well known is the work on Serbo-Croatian terminology "Die geographische Terminologie Serbokroatischen", Berlin, 1967, by J. Schütz. Polish terms have been collected by P. Nitsche in his "Geographische Terminologie des Polnischen", Köln, 1964. The specialists of Krakow have detailed the Carpathian terminology (T. Golebiowska, 1964; S. Hrabes, 1950; L. Stieber, 1934). The list might be continued.

By way of information I should like to draw your attention to what is being done in this field in our multinational and multilingual country. In recent years the Soviet Union, too, has issued a number of works dealing with the systematization and comparative study of geographical terminology. Among them are the works on Kazakhstan by G.K. Konkashpaev (1951) and A.S. Titova (1960), F.K. Komarov's works on Yakutia (1964) and on Siberia and the Far East (1967), the work on West Siberia by A.P. Dulzon and his students (the Tomsk Pedagogical Institute); the work on East Siberia by M.N. Melkheev (1958); T.A. Marusenko's work on Ukrainian terminology (1967), etc. In 1959 there appeared "A Glossary of Local Geographic Terms" by E.M. Murzaev and V.G. Murzaeva in which the authors have made an attempt to show concisely the wealth and variety of geographical terms of the Soviet Union. There is a number of works

ready for publication. We should like to point out the work on the Iranian geographical terminology by V.I.Savina and on the Slavic geographical terminology by N.I.Tolstoy. A.K.Matveev and his students (Urals University) have collected the local geographic terms of the North of the European part of the Soviet Union and the Urals, most of which belong to the Finno-Ugrian languages. Almost ready for publication are glossaries of geographic terms and words that enter geographic names most frequently of the Komi ASSR (by A.V.Beliaeva), of the Gorno-Altai autonomous region (by Ju.I.Bochenkova), of the Buryat ASSR (by G.G.Kuzmina), of the Nenets and the Yamalo-Nenets national districts (by A.P.Aleksa), of the Khanti-Mansi national district (by Rosova L.I.) of the Khakass ASSR (by M.B.Volostnova and E.N.Bushueva), of the Touvinian ASSR (by M.B.Volostnova and S.A.Tyurin), of the Chukot and the Koryak national districts (by F.K.Konarov).

There is an extensive file of geographic terms throughout the territory of the Soviet Union collected by the Department of Geographic Names under the Chief Administration of Geodesy and Cartography of the USSR.

The time has come to join the efforts of the scientists studying geographical terms and to compile a comprehensive world glossary of such terms. It would be desirable if the Permanent Expert Committee on Geographic Names of the United Nations began preparing such a glossary. An editorial board might be elected at the present conference. The duties of such a board would be, first and foremost, to work out a programme, to distribute work among the countries-participants in the conference and to set a sign or page limit with the size of a territory and the number of languages spoken in the territory taken into account.

It is hoped it would be right to suggest that such a glossary should be issued in the official languages of the United Nations.

The collecting of all necessary material is likely to take two or three years, it will probably take another two years to compile all the material in one or two volumes, to render it into other languages and to publish it; so that the work might be completed within five years.