

About Some Hydronyms Mentioned In Beruni's "Monuments Of Ancient Peoples"

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Abstract: The article provides information on the etymology of certain hydronyms mentioned in Abu Rayhan Beruni's work "Monuments of Ancient Peoples." It presents the dictionary meanings of these hydronyms, their origins, and the views of scholars regarding them.

Keywords: Toponym, term, place names, ancestors, Mazdubast, Balkh, hydronym, Ptolemy, Jurjan.

Introduction: Hydronyms, a type of toponym, are closely connected with the history of a people. They represent a linguistic layer and a treasure that reflects the unique aspects of a nation's language, social life, culture, and spirituality. The term hydronym (from Greek *hudor* – water + *onoma* – proper name) denotes the proper names of any water bodies, whether natural or artificial, and represents a type of toponym. Like place names, hydronyms are a priceless part of cultural and spiritual heritage passed down from our ancestors.

Hydronyms — the names of rivers, seas, lakes, canals, springs, and other water bodies — represent one of the oldest and most stable layers of human linguistic heritage. Water sources have historically been central to human life, agriculture, migration, trade routes, and religious beliefs. For this reason, hydronyms have been preserved for millennia and often carry traces of ancient cultures and languages as unique linguistic sources.

The origins of hydronyms can be diverse. They may reflect natural characteristics of water — its color, temperature, flow rate, or location. In other cases, hydronyms derive from the names of tribes, peoples, or rulers. Sometimes religious beliefs, mythology, or sacred associations also influence the naming of a water body. Therefore, each hydronym encapsulates valuable information about geography, history, ethnology, and linguistics.

Hydronyms are especially important for historians and linguists. They provide insights into where ancient

peoples lived, the routes of their migrations, and the languages with which they had contact. In some cases, hydronyms preserve traces of languages that are now extinct. Even when political systems, states, religions, and ethnic groups change, hydronyms often remain stable for thousands of years. For this reason, they are sometimes called "living linguistic monuments" or "linguistic fossils."

Beruni cites the writings of Ptolemy, who lived 800 years before him, regarding the Amu Darya. According to Ptolemy, the river flows from above the city of Omuyya into the Balkh River, and then near the city of Bolqon, it empties into the Caspian Sea. The river then turns along the edges of the Oghuz lands. At a place called Fam al-Asad, water accumulates, and part of the river flows through an old riverbed in the desert, known as Mazdubast, located between Khwarazm and Jurjan, reaching Sariqqamish.

The Nile (Al-Nīl) is a major river in northeastern Africa that flows from north to south. If the increase in the Nile's water comes from rainfall, the waters do not stop after the rain but continue flowing into the Nile; if it comes from springs, their waters increase during winter. Therefore, the Nile rises in the summer.

The English names White Nile (Bahr al-Abyaḍ) and Blue Nile (Bahr al-Azraq) indicate the sources of the river. These names originated from Arabic terms that were previously used only for the regions of Sudan where the two rivers meet in Khartoum. Arabs associate the name Nile with the indigo plant growing along the Euphrates,

which historically was one of the most widely used natural dyes in the region. When Arabs first observed the river from a distance, the indigo color appeared as a serpent-like shape winding through the yellow desert.

In ancient Egyptian, the Nile River was called Ḥgawpy (Hapy) or Jtrw (Iteru), which means “river.” In Coptic, this word is pronounced piaro (Sahidic) or phiaro (Bohairic), meaning “river” or “great canal,” and it derives from the same ancient name. According to H. Hasanov, the name Nile is connected to the common word for “river.” He notes that the names of other rivers, such as the Nile, Dnieper, Dniester, Danube, and Don, also originate from the simple word for “river”.

The English name Nile and the Arabic an-Nīl are derived from the Latin Nilus and the Ancient Greek Νεῖλος. The etymology of the name Nile is considered controversial. Homer referred to the river as Aigyptos, but later Greek authors called the lower course of the river Neilos, a name that eventually came to denote the entire river system. Some written sources mention the word lilu meaning “water” in ancient Libya, and in Semitic languages the word nahal also means “river.” These sources indicate how deep into the past the history of this hydronym goes. The hydronym is also mentioned in the commentary to al-Biruni’s work Saydana, where the name appears in the form al-Nil.

Bahr al-Qulzum (the Red Sea) is the name of the sea located between the continents and connected to the Indian Ocean. The hydronym is also mentioned in al-Biruni’s work Saydana, where the sea is recorded under the name “Bahr al-Qulzum.” Thus, we may conclude that al-Biruni used this historical name in his writings. However, in the Uzbek editions of Monuments of the Past Nations, the modern name “Red Sea” is used instead of the historical hydronym. According to Jewish chronicles, during their departure from Egypt to At-Tih—a desert located in the Hijaz—and later on their second journey toward Bayt al-Muqaddas, they crossed this sea, Bahr al-Qulzum. These accounts confirm the historical usage and significance of this hydronym in ancient sources.

The Red Sea is a literal translation of the Ancient Greek hydronym Erythra Thalassa. The sea itself was once referred to by Europeans as the Eritrean Sea. In Herodotus’s Histories, the hydronym also appears in the form Eritre. In Latin it was called Mare Rubrum (alternatively Sinus Arabicus, meaning “Arabian Gulf”), while the Romans referred to it as Pontus Herculis (“Sea of Hercules”). In historical sources, the Red Sea was known to Western geographers under the names Mare Mecca (“Sea of Mecca”) and Sinus Arabicus (“Arabian Gulf”). Some ancient geographers also used the term Arabian Gulf to describe what is now called the Red

Sea. From Alisher Navoi’s works, it can be understood that Qulzum is another name for the Red Sea.

Although the sea of love exceeds the river of separation,

Yet Qulzum, though smaller, is far more perilous.

H.Hasanov Qizil dengizni Bahri Axmar va Qulzum kabi tarixiy shakllari borligini yozgan .

There are several theories regarding the origin of the name Red Sea. Some sources explain the hydronym as resulting from a misreading of the three Semitic letters h, m, and r. From these letters comes the name of the Himyarites, a Semitic people who lived in southern Arabia before the region was conquered by the Arabs. In the ancient South Arabian script, short vowels were not represented graphically. For this reason, it is assumed that when Arabs later read texts written in the South Arabian script, the consonantal sequence h–m–r was interpreted as the Arabic al-aḥmar (الأحمر), meaning “red”.

According to a theory supported by some scholars, the name of the Red Sea is connected to one of the cardinal directions. The basis of this theory is that in the languages of certain Asian peoples, colors were used to indicate the main directions of the world. Herodotus, in one instance, uses “Red Sea” and “Southern Sea” interchangeably. In the mythological tales of many peoples around the world, cardinal directions are associated with specific colors. For example, red denotes the south, white the east, and black (among a number of Asian peoples) represents the north. Therefore, the name “Black Sea” does not mean “a sea with black or dark water,” but rather “the sea located to the north.” Hence the Turks and Crimean Tatars called it Qora deniz (Crimean Tatar: Qara deniz, Turkish: Karadeniz), while Iranian-speaking ancient tribes referred to it as Axshaena (“dark”), and the Scythians called it Tama, also meaning “dark.”

In our view, the hydronym may have originated from the seasonal blooming of the microscopic algae *Trichodesmium erythraeum* near the surface of the sea. Such algal blooms turn the water from blue-green to reddish-brown, which could explain the naming of the sea.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, hydronyms are far more than mere labels for rivers, seas, lakes, or other water bodies. They serve as enduring markers of historical memory, preserving traces of ancient civilizations, cultures, and languages that might otherwise have been lost. Beyond their linguistic value, hydronyms reflect the beliefs, myths, and traditions of the peoples who named them, offering insights into how societies understood and

interacted with their environment. Hydronyms also act as important geographic markers, helping historians, archaeologists, and geographers reconstruct past landscapes, settlement patterns, trade routes, and human migrations. In some cases, they even provide evidence of natural phenomena, such as seasonal changes in rivers or algae blooms in seas, which influenced naming practices. Moreover, these names carry symbolic or sacred meanings, connecting present-day communities with their ancestors' worldview and cultural identity.

Studying hydronyms allows scholars to bridge multiple disciplines—linguistics, history, geography, and ecology—offering a more comprehensive understanding of human civilization and its relationship with water. They not only document the physical presence of water but also capture the cultural, social, and environmental significance attached to it over millennia. Therefore, the study of hydronyms is essential for reconstructing ancient environments, understanding language evolution, appreciating cultural heritage, and recognizing the profound ways in which humans have related to water throughout history.

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