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ONOMATOLOGY OF THE CATAWBA RIVER BASIN

By ALBERT S. GATSCHET

The Indian geographic names of the South Atlantic states are of great interest. During historic times this section has undergone many changes in population as well as in its physical characteristics, the former being due chiefly to the advent of Europeans who, after increasing in strength, recklessly displaced the aboriginal inhabitants who had either to flee elsewhere or to conform themselves to the new conditions.

The aboriginal appellations which the physiographic features have preserved to the present time in the region south of Ohio river (its rivers, mountains, plains, and islands), are reducible to the languages of six linguistic families—the Algonquian, the Iroquoian-Cherokee, the Siouan or Dakotan, the Yuchean, the Muskogean, and, to a slight extent, the Timuquanan, or Atimokan, historical traces of which survive about the coast of the Florida peninsula.

Of the streams that flow southward from the Appalachian range, draining the Gulf states and mingling their waters with those of the Atlantic ocean, Catawba river is one of the most important, and with its tributaries forms a basin of considerable magnitude. The Catawba Indians call this stream *Is'wa*, "the river," in the sense of "main river," for they seem to have no specific river names as we have. The entire length of Catawba, or Great Catawba, river is nearly three hundred miles, and its main course is northwest-southeast. Like other large rivers of the region, the Catawba changes its name: first, below Rocky Mount, South Carolina, where it becomes Wateree river, and again after its junction with the Congaree, where it becomes Santee river. The Catawba grape attained its celebrity from vineyards extend-

ing along this river in North Carolina, and it still maintains its fame for the mild wine manufactured from it.

Of the twenty-eight Indian tribes which James Adair¹ mentioned as forming the body or unity of the Catawba "nation," the most important were the Sara or Cheraw, the Sugaree or Shocoree, the Catawba proper, the Wisack or Waxhaw, the Wateree, Congaree, Santee, Sewee, and Pedee. Other tribes farther eastward may not have been of strictly Catawba lineage, though they were members of their confederacy.

Wateree originally was not a tribal, but a local name, for the Catawba verb *watërá*" means "to float in the water." Santee river derives its name from *sá'ta*, *só'ta*, "to run"; *yáye sonturé*, "the water is running." Sewee, the name of a tribe once settled at the outlet of Catawba river, is from the Catawba *sāwé*, "island," from the fact that it once resided on an island in that stream. The Kayaways, a tribe formerly inhabiting the coast, are so called from *kádia*, the Catawba name of a species of turtle. All these local appellations, and probably many more, are terms from the Catawba language, which belongs to the eastern division of the great Siouan stock.

As to the name of the river, no Catawba term can explain it, nor can the people now point out its origin and signification. It is very probably derived from a word of the Choctaw or Chá'hta dialect of the Muskogean family, which intruded far to the east, and parallels to it may eventually be discovered. The name seems to be traceable to the Choctaw transitive verb *katápa*, "to divide, separate, break"; when used as a participle, *katápa* signifies "divided, cut off, interrupted, stemmed, withheld, headed or headed off," as cattle separated. All these vocables are extracted from Rev. C. Byington's manuscript Chá'hta Dictionary in the Bureau of American Ethnology, which adds the following derivatives: *katápa*, "a division"; *katápoa* and *ikátápoa*, "to divide"; *ikátapa*, "he cuts off," and "he is cut off, interrupted, precluded";

¹ *History of the American Indians*, 1775.

katapó'hli and *ikatapó'hli* (with plural of object), "he cuts them off, intercepts, or heads them off."

The same derivation was reached by Mr H. S. Halbert¹ who takes it to be a Chickasaw word: Catarpa, the name of a creek in Oktibbeha county, Mississippi, means "dammed, obstructed," and is so called because the waters at the mouth of the stream were once or repeatedly gorged by driftwood. The country along upper Catawba river is rather low and level, hence such obstructions might easily have taken place in early times as they do today. When John Lawson² traversed the region in 1701 the bayous had combined with the main stream, forming a large lake. Lawson says:

The Indians ferried us in a little vessel over Santee River, four miles and eighty-four miles in the woods, which the overflowing of the freshets had made a perfect sea . . . there running an incredible current in the river, which had cast our small craft and us away. . . . Santee River at this time (from the usual depth of water) was risen perpendicular thirty-six feet, always making a breach from her banks about this season of the year.

Local names from the Creek language are extensively applied along the coast and about the lakes of Florida, such as Palatka, Alachua, and Homosassa, and there is also a sprinkling of Hit-chiti or Mikasuki terms, as Okeechobee, Oklawaha, Micanopy. These are relics of the time when the Yamassi and subsequently the Seminole held the country, and there is no doubt that at least the language of the Upper Creeks (the Creeks as popularly known today) also was extensively spoken on the peninsula. Fontanedo's report of 1575 contains Creek words, like *seletega* (*silitiga*, from *isilitkäs*, "I run up to"; *litkäs*, "I run," *is-*, reflective prefix).³

¹ *Publications* of the Alabama Historical Society, III, 72.

² *New Voyage to Carolina*, p. 31.

³ "Mémoire sur la Floride," in Ternaux-Compans, *Collections*, xx, p. 22. Fontanedo wrote in 1559. *Silitka* is a personal name among the Creeks even at the present time.

Testimony of the considerable spread of the Mobilian trade language may be found in Dr Sibley's report to the President in 1805¹ and in Woodward's *Reminiscences*.² Although Jeffreys³ compared this "jargon" in its uses with the *lingua franca* of the Orient, Mr J. N. B. Hewitt, of the Bureau of American Ethnology, justly remarks that neither Jeffreys nor any other known author presents specimens of it, consequently it is not positively known whether the Mobilian trade language may be considered as a real dialect form of Choctaw. At any rate it cannot be compared with the Chinook jargon of the Columbia River region, so far as the relations of the latter to the Upper and Lower Chinook are concerned, for it consists largely of Lower Chinook with the inflectional forms dropped.

The Catawba language, as I recorded it among the remnants of the tribe in 1881, seems to be homogeneous in its lexicon, and of southern loan-words I recall only *haksup*, "shirt, garment, coat," which appears in the same form in Creek and in other Muskogean dialects. The largest accession which the Catawba received within the historical period was probably that of the Sara, or Cheraw, but it remains to be seen whether their dialect has influenced that of the Catawba. Other lexical influences may have been derived from the neighboring Cherokee. On upper Savannah river, in northwestern South Carolina, at the place now called Seneca, is the site of a Cherokee town called by them *Isánika*. This term was corrupted to "Seneca," which gave origin to "Isundiga," the Catawba name of Savannah river.⁴

The Gulf states have been the home of other aboriginal languages and dialects, but what their influence upon or contact with one another may have been will perhaps ever remain a mystery. The Yazoo and the Koroa on the Mississippi are known to have been *sui generis*, like the Tonika, Naktche (Natchez), and Shetimasha

¹ *American State Papers*.

² Thomas S. Woodward, *Reminiscences of the Creek or Muscogee Indians*, 1859.

³ *History of the French Dominion in North America*.

⁴ Information from Mr James Mooney.

(Chetimasha), and the same may be said also of the Tiaoux or Tíhiu. But the local names applied in the southern end of Florida and recorded by Spanish explorers at the close of the sixteenth century, exhibit foreign elements and may have been imported from the West Indies.