

## Does Mother Earth Have a Beard? The Word *beard* in Bashkir Incantations

Edina Dallos\*

In many of the incantations of the Bashkirs living in the Volga region, the mother of earth and the mother of water appear in connection with the word *beard*, for example: “mother of earth, red beard, mother of water, cold beard”. Bashkir Turkologist Firdaus G. Hisamitdinova interprets these collocations to mean that the mother of earth has a red beard and the mother of water has a cold beard (2011–2012 II: 19–20). This interpretation, supplemented by her regarding the earth as something of fundamentally feminine nature (after all, the collocation ‘the mother of earth’ is much more common than ‘the father of earth’) prompts the conclusion that there must be some very ancient, bipolar (masculine and feminine at the same time) concept in the background. As I find this supposition dubious from several aspects, in my paper I try to examine exactly what function the word *beard* may have in these incantations.

First of all, however, I must briefly describe the Bashkir concepts ‘mother of earth’ and ‘mother of water’. In Bashkir folk faith, there were several local spirits, such as the spirit of the stable, the house spirit, the spirit of the mill or the forest. These were not usually harmful creatures but still had to be appeased with a sacrifice. The mother (in fewer cases, father or master) of earth and water had a different place among beliefs, as these do not occur in mythical stories; therefore, their existence, at least in this form can only be deduced on the basis of incantations. According to old beliefs of the Bashkirs, one could catch diseases when coming into contact with earth or water, but such accounts are never about the mother of the earth and water but about the earth or water “having grabbed” or “holding” the person. Such diseases could be caught for example from falling down onto the ground or bathing in water.

Most of the incantations cited in this paper were used to heal diseases caught from the earth or water, but the mother of earth and water also appear in the case of some other diseases such as bone-ache. Different versions of the collocations cited above “mother of earth, red beard, mother of water, cold beard” also appear in a prayer-incantation pleading for rain and in a blessing-incantation (also a mixed-genre text) chanted at the time of sowing.

I have gathered all the incantations including the word *beard* from three anthology volumes (BXI 1995; BDH 2009; Hisamitdinova 2011–2012) and two other

---

\* ELTE-SZTE Silk Road Research Group, ELKH

publications of texts (Torma–Hisamitdinova 1992; Torma 1997). First of all, I present their original Bashkir version along with an English translation.

1. BDH 2009, 339-340<sup>1</sup>

<i>Ер инәһе</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>Ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>Һыуған һакал</i>	cold beard;
<i>Мине тотма</i>	Do not grab me,
<i>шуны тот!</i>	grab that one!
<i>Ер кендеге</i>	Navel of earth,
<i>бары бер</i>	only one.

2. BXI 1995, 91<sup>2</sup>

<i>Ер эйәһе</i>	Master of earth,
<i>ерән һакал,</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>Һыуған һакал</i>	cold beard;
<i>Уны (ауырыған кешене) тотма!</i>	Do not grab (N. N)!
<i>Ен кендеге</i>	Navel of earth,
<i>бары бер</i>	only one.

3. BDH 2009, 320<sup>3</sup>

<i>Ер анаһы</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу анаһы</i>	Mother of water,
<i>көрән һакал</i>	brown beard;
<i>Мине тотма</i>	Do not grab me,
<i>быны тот!</i>	grab this one!

4. Hisamitdinova 2012, II, 42<sup>4</sup>

<i>Ер анаһы</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу анаһы</i>	Master of water,

1 Incantation to alleviate a disease caught from earth; here, the disease was sent onto an *osoq* doll. The text is also cited by Hisamitdinova 2012 II, 19, 21.

2 Incantation to heal the throbbing pain of the hands and feet, which was accompanied by the so-called ritual of “placing into the earth”, when the nails and hair of the sick person, as well as eggs and ashes, were placed into the earth. The text is also cited by: Torma 1997, 116.

3 Incantation against a disease caught from the earth (*yer zäxmät*).

4 Incantation against the disease *Sarpü*.

<i>һүлтән һакал</i>	limp beard;
<i>(ауырыған кешене) тотма!</i>	Do not grab (N. N)!
<i>Енде тот!</i>	Grab the <i>yen</i> (demon)!
<i>Ер кендеге</i>	Navel of earth,
<i>бары бер</i>	only one.
<i>/Йәки:/</i>	/variation on the last two lines:/
<i>Ергә йәшел яузык</i>	A green kerchief for the earth,
<i>миңә иҫәндек-һаузык!</i>	health for me!

5. ВХІ 1995, 89<sup>5</sup>

<i>Елдән килһәң</i>	If you came from wind,
<i>елгә кит</i>	go to wind;
<i>Ерзән килһәң</i>	If you came from earth,
<i>ергә кит!</i>	go to earth;
<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>һыуған һакал</i>	cold beard;
<i>Ер инәһе</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Кайзан килһәң</i>	Whence you came,
<i>шунда кит!</i>	thither you go;
<i>Кабат килеп йөрәмә!</i>	Never return hither!

6. ВХІ 1995, 92<sup>6</sup>

<i>Ер анаһы</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу анаһы</i>	Mother of water,
<i>көрән һакал</i>	greyish-brown beard;
<i>Мине тотма</i>	Do not grab me,
<i>быны тот!</i>	grab this one!

7. ВХІ 1995, 91–92<sup>7</sup>

<i>Ер инәһе</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>Ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>һыу инәһе</i>	mother of water,
<i>һыуған һакал</i>	cold beard;
<i>Ерзән тейһәң</i>	If you came from earth,

5 Incantation against so-called *näḡtä* ('something' the name of a disease). The text is also cited by Hisamitdinova 2012 III, 12.

6 Incantation against the disease called *yer zäxmät*, caught from the earth.

7 Incantation against the disease called *yer zäxmät*, caught from the earth. During healing, nails, hair, ashes and coals were put into the earth. The text is also cited by BDH 2009, 321.

<i>ергә кит!</i>	go to earth!
<i>Елдән килһәң</i>	If you came from water,
<i>елгә кил!</i> <sup>8</sup>	go to water!
<i>Бына һиңә яулык,</i>	Here is a kerchief for you,
<i>Сәлимгәгә бир һаулык!</i>	grant (N. N.) health!

8. BXI 1995, 92–93<sup>9</sup>

<i>Ер инәһе</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>ерән һакал,</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>һары һакал</i>	blond (yellow) beard;
<i>Мине тотма</i>	Do not grab me,
<i>уны тот,</i>	Grab the one over there!
<i>Аҡһакаллы картты тот!</i>	Grab the old one with the grey beard!
[...]	[...]
<i>Ерзән килһәң</i>	If you came from earth,
<i>ергә кит</i>	go to earth;
<i>һыузан килһәң</i>	If you came from water,
<i>һыуға кит</i>	go to water!
<i>һиңә (ауырыған кешене) һаулык,</i>	Health for (N. N.),
<i>Калған кешегә яулык...</i>	kerchief for the rest of the people.

## 9. Torma–Hisamitdinova 1992, 197

<i>Ер эйәһе</i>	Master of earth,
<i>ерән һакал,</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу эйәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>һыуған һакал</i>	cold <sup>10</sup> beard;
<i>(ауырыған кешене) тотма!</i>	Do not grab (N. N)!
<i>Ене тот!</i>	Grab the <i>yen</i> ! <sup>11</sup>
<i>Ене кендеге</i>	Navel of <i>yen</i> ,
<i>бары бер</i>	only one.

8 Probably an *-л* for *-т* typographical error in the original.

9 This incantation was used when the water had “grabbed” a person (that is, in case of diseases caused by water).

10 Torma mistakenly translates it as ‘tousled’.

11 According to the authors, the informant may have been wrong here and originally, the word *yer* ‘earth’ appeared instead of the word *yen* ‘devil’.

## 10. Torma–Hisamitdinova 1992, 196

<i>Ер инәһе</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>һыуған һакал</i>	cold beard;
<i>Күк инәһе</i>	Mother of sky,
<i>күк һакал</i>	blue beard;
<i>Ене кендеге</i>	Navel of earth
<i>бер юл.</i>	[is] a road.

11. BDH 2009, 339<sup>12</sup>

<i>Һыузан сыккан һары һакал</i>	Blond beard that came out of water,
<i>Ерзән сыккан Ез һакал</i>	Copper beard that came out of earth,
<i>Мине тотма</i>	Do not grab me,
<i>шуны тот!</i>	grab this one!
<i>Ай кайтты</i>	The Moon has gone away,
<i>көн кайтты</i>	the Sun has gone away,
<i>Әйзә инде, хин дә кайт!</i>	Lo, off you go, too!
<i>Иртә тиһәң</i>	If you say it in the morning,
<i>кис етмәк</i>	it's already evening;
<i>Һыузан килһәң</i>	if you came from water,
<i>һыуға кайт!</i>	go into water;
<i>Ерзән килһәң</i>	if you came from earth,
<i>ергә кайт!</i>	go into earth;
<i>Кайзан килдең</i>	whence you came,
<i>шунда кайт!</i>	thither you go!

12. BXI 1995, 271<sup>13</sup>

<i>Күк инәһе</i>	Mother of sky,
<i>күк яулык,</i>	blue kerchief;
<i>Ер атаһы</i>	Father of earth,
<i>ерән һакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Түбә туклыктары бир!</i>	Give plenty to the roof/peak!
<i>Илгә-миргә именлек бир!</i>	Give completeness to country and world!
<i>Йәнгә-тәнгә аманлык бир!</i>	give wholeness and health to soul!

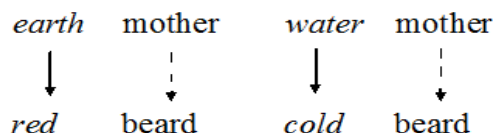
12 Incantation used against diseases caused by earth.

13 Blessing-incantation text recited at the time of sowing.

13. ВХІ 1995, 120<sup>14</sup>

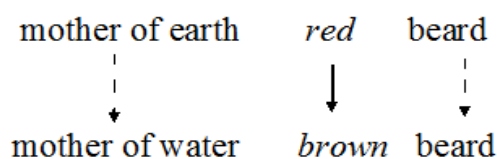
<i>Ямғыр, яу, яу!</i>	Rain, fall, fall!
<i>Әй, илаһым, яу, яу!</i>	Oh, lord, fall, fall!
<i>Күк инәһе</i>	Mother of sky,
<i>күк яулык</i>	blue kerchief;
<i>Ер атаһы</i>	Father of earth,
<i>ерән һакал,</i>	red beard;
<i>Тужлыктар бирһен Хозай!</i>	Plenty for us, Lord God!
<i>Мал-тыуарзар имен булһын!</i>	Farmyard may be plentiful!
<i>Ямғыр, яу, яу!</i>	Rain, fall, fall!
<i>Без йәшәрбез һау, һау!</i>	Let us live, hey-ho!

About half of the 13 incantations cited here include the permanent collocation consisting of two parallel structures: “mother of earth, red beard / mother of water, cold beard” (№ 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 10). The first fact worth mentioning in relation to this is that in both cases, the attribute of the noun *beard* reflects on the first part of the collocation: in Bashkir, the pair ‘earth’ and ‘red’ are *yer – yerän*, whereas the pair ‘water’ and ‘cold’ are *hiu – hiugan*. Thus, the attribute of the beard is not meant to determine its quality. We can conclude that they can be paralleled with the words ‘earth’ and ‘water’, and thus the two second parts (mother and beard) must be related in some way.



Actually, Hisamitdinova also reaches the same conclusion, although in a different way. The other possibility is that, on the basis of the sameness of the first syllables, here we can see a rhetorical device whose primary function is lyricism, and their attributive function is secondary. This means that they are not necessarily related to the noun as an actual quality. To decide this question, let’s see the other seven incantations. In two of them, “mother of earth, red beard” is paralleled by “mother of water, (greyish-)brown beard” (№ 3, 6). Here, instead of the word *hiugan*, we have *körän*. In this case, the two adjectives *yerän* and *körän* rhyme with each other, thus breaking the previous order of the two different structures:

<sup>14</sup> Prayer-incantation pleading for rain.



In one incantation, the mother of water is followed by *hari* ‘blond (yellow)’ beard (№ 8), which does not rhyme with the word *yerän* ‘red’ but alliterates with *hiu* ‘water’ (and with *haqal* ‘beard’ as well). The adjective ‘blond’ (‘yellow’) is featured again in a structure somewhat different from the ones before, where, a yellow beard appears from the water and a copper one from the earth (№ 11). In these cases, the relationship is again between earth and water as well as between the adjective attached to the beard in the second part; but here, unlike previously, they have the same number of syllables and also alliterate with them. The structure including the word *hülpän* ‘limp’ in the fourth incantation is very similar.

There are two incantations in which the mother of sky (instead of the mother of water) occurs, in both cases as the first part of parallel structures and both followed by the collocation ‘father of earth’ (instead of earth) (№ 12, 13). In these cases, the mother of sky is not accompanied by the word *beard* but *kerchief*, whose attributive adjective is *kük* ‘blue’, reflecting the sky. (‘Sky’ and ‘blue’ are the same word in Bashkir.) I must add two more comments to these two incantations. When Hisamitdinova claimed that the beard is related to the given mothers of earth and water – when, in other words, she interpreted these creatures as having a beard – she did not specify how to interpret this at the grammatical level of the text. In Bashkir, the attribute precedes the noun. There are several incantations where the invoked harmful spirit is preceded by an attributive adjective, usually a colour or an adjective including a numeral.<sup>15</sup> In our texts, however, there is not a colour + adjective form (such as “brown bearded”) but a colour + noun form (“brown beard”). What is more, these do not precede the mothers of earth and water. Another solution could be if both parts were invocations related to each other, that is, having the same referent; in other words, one of the features of the mother of earth would have become an honorary invocation. In the Bashkir material, I have only found one example of a double invocation, but that is not exactly the same, either, having a name in the second part:

<sup>15</sup> Such, for example, is the beginning of the incantation against *büðer* (‘hernia’): “White *büðer*/black *büðer*/yellow *büðer*” (Hisamitdinova 2010: 15), or the beginning of the incantation against ‘tooth-worm’: “60-headed spotted worm/70-headed red worm” (BXI 1995: 99).

Hisamitdinova 2012, III: 38

<i>Һыу атаһы Сөләймән!</i>	Father of water, Söläymän!
<i>Һыу инәһе Һыубикә!</i>	Mother of water, Һiubikä!
<i>Һеззән һаулык</i>	From you, health,
<i>минән яулык</i>	from me, kerchief

My other comment relevant here has to do with the interpretation of the lines “mother of sky/blue kerchief”. As we have seen, this incantation has the same structure as the previous “mother of water/cold beard”. Nevertheless, neither Hisamitdinova nor anyone else has ever tried to explain it as if the mother of sky had a kerchief. A kerchief has a clear role in incantations: it is what is offered “in exchange” for health. In the incantation cited above, we can see the recurrent element “health from you, kerchief from me”. In the Bashkir language, these two words sound very similar, only differing in their initial consonant: *haulik* – *yaulik*.

During incantation, a ritual act is usually performed, sometimes featuring objects. In healing rituals, some of the objects are those that the disease is sent upon (for Bashkirs, a typical example of this is the *osoq* doll), and some others are what is offered as a sacrifice (such as coins) or “in exchange”. On the text level, it is usually a kerchief and on the object level it can be hair, nails or threads. Here, because of the form ‘from me this – from you that’, I consider the kerchief to be the representation of a gift object even if it is not actually the object usually given. The text of the incantation must be concise and comply with a lot of language criteria (rhyme, alliteration, consonance) and it often only lists metaphorical and symbolic factors, which are suggestive rather than specific. We have a specific incantation text about giving the kerchief as a “gift”:

BDH 2009, 327.<sup>16</sup>

<i>Ер анаһы ер булыр</i>	Mother of earth will be earth,
<i>һыу анаһы һыу булыр</i>	mother of water will be water!
<i>Мине ашама,</i>	Do not eat me,
<i>мине эсмә!</i>	do not drink me!
<i>Минән бүләк – яулык</i>	A gift-kerchief from me
<i>һинән һаулык!</i>	health from you!
<i>Шуны аша, шуны эс!</i>	Eat that, drink that!

Besides possibly referring to the exchange-gift, the kerchief as an object is also an excellent choice language-wise, as it is consonant with *health*, a much-desired goal in healing incantations. But what about the beard, which only rhymes with itself in the

16 To alleviate diseases caused by earth, on Wednesday, after sunset, water is poured on the street in front of the gate while this incantation is recited.



texts cited above? It only alliterates with *water*, which is not enough reason for its appearance in the texts.

Human hair appears among the sacrificial or “exchange” objects in several places and several forms. A typical example of this is the giving of a hair (or a thread pulled from clothing) to water or the master or mother of water at the time of the first carrying of water or the first wash. Hair also appears in the case of staving off diseases caused by earth, when hair, nails, ashes and coins are placed in a small package and buried. This is not merely a way to alleviate a disease by sending it onto an object and then burying it, which is shown by the coins or pieces of lead placed in the package as well as by the fact that this package is called ‘food’ (BDH 2009, 321).

To illustrate the connection between hair and beard, I must first cite two incantations, where hair appears in the same position and function as beard in the examples above.

BXI 1995, 93<sup>17</sup>

<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>һарысәс</i>	blond (yellow) hair;
<i>Ер инәһе</i>	Mother of earth,
<i>ерәнсәс</i>	red hair;
<i>Минең кулым түгел</i>	Not my hand,
<i>Ғәйшә, Фатима кулы</i>	Ğäyşä-Fatima’s <sup>18</sup> hand;
<i>Мине тотма,</i>	Do not grab me,
<i>Ошоно тот!</i>	grab the one over there!

BXI 1995, 13

<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>һарысәс</i>	blond hair;
<i>Һыу инәһе</i>	Mother of water,
<i>һарысәс</i>	blond hair;
<i>Шәфкәтеңде</i>	Take me into
<i>һал миңә,</i>	your mercy,
<i>Зәхмәтең де</i>	put a stranger
<i>ситкә сәс!</i>	into your torment!

In order to clarify the relationship of hair and beard, let us take a side look at two other genres of Bashkir folklore: tales and sayings. A typical figure of Bashkir folk tales is “one-span with a thousand-span beard” (BNT 76, 101, 164). This character is a powerful, male, supernatural opponent living in the other world. When the hero first

<sup>17</sup> Incantation used for foot-ache.

<sup>18</sup> A name often appearing in incantations of Turkic peoples in the Volga region, coined from the names of the Prophet Muhammad’s wife and daughter.

defeats (but not kills) him, he always ties him to some wood (a live tree or the beam holding up the roof of the house). There is another typical character, a female, half-worldly witch-type, who sucks out the blood or bone marrow of young girls (BNT 11, 38, 42). The hero also defeats this witch by tying her to some wood (the edge of the bed) by her hair and beating her hard. Here, hair and beard clearly appear in the same function (tying the enemy) and also indicate gender. (Of the functions of beard, human and animal hair and feathers, I have written elsewhere in more detail: Dallos 2008.) The gender-indicating function of hair and beard can also be found in Bashkir sayings such as “man is adorned by beard and woman is adorned by hair” (BXI 2006, 315; 327).

As we have seen, hair also appears in incantations – not only beards. According to a Tatar record, women placed a hair and men placed a strand of beard upon the water. The Tatar and Bashkir folklore and languages are very close to each other. Although I only have examples of the above rituals recorded in Tatar data, it must surely have been the case with Bashkirs as well. What is more, I think the difference is only a matter of the time of data collection. The Tatar records date from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> or the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at which time Bashkir incantations and rituals related to them were not at all collected. The methodical and scientifically-founded collection of Tatar data started as early as the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century against only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the case of Bashkirs. By this time, however, the rituals and texts of folk medicine, along with other texts and ritual acts (for example, the ones used when carrying water from a stream) were already few and far between. Torma’s collection during the 1960s proves this, as he saw that Bashkirs were only pretending to pull a thread from their clothes to place on the water. To give an actual example of the similarity of Tatar and Bashkir incantations, let me cite a part of a Tatar incantation, which was used against a disease caused by the master of earth:

Muh.187.

<i>Жир иясе</i>	Master of earth,
<i>жирән сакал</i>	red beard;
<i>Су иясе</i>	master of water,
<i>суган сакал</i>	onion beard;
<i>Күк иясе</i>	master of sky,
<i>күгән сакал</i>	sloe beard.

In the three nominal sentences of parallel structures, the attributes of the word *beard* (red, onion, sloe), in the same way as in Bashkir incantations, are used on the basis of their sound, reflecting the first part of the structure, and not their meaning: *džir – džirän, su – sugan, kük – kügän*.

Thus, unlike Hisamitdinova, I claim that the beard is not a characteristic of the mother of earth and water, but rather has been included in the text of the incantations as the object offered as a sacrifice or “in exchange” for the people themselves.

## References

- BDH 2009. = F. G. Hisamitdinova (red.) *Başqorttarđıy daulau häm qursalau magiyahı. Tekstar*. Öfö: Institut istorii, jazyka i literatury UNC RAN.
- BNT 1988. = N. T. Zaripov (red.) *Başkirkoe narodnoe tvorčestvo. Bogatyrskie skazki*. Ufa: Başkirkoe Knıžnoe izdatel'stvo.
- BXI 1995. = *Başqort xalıq ızadı. Yola folklorı* I. Öfö: Kitap.
- BXI 2006. = *Başqort xalıq ızadı. Mäqäldär häm äytemdär*. Öfö: Kitap.
- Dallos Edina 2008. Mesés tárgyak. A tatár varázsmesék testrészből lett tárgyai. In: Pócs Éva (szerk.) *Tárgy, jel, jelentés*. (Studia Ethnologica Hungarica IX.) Budapest: L'Harmattan, PTE Néprajz–Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék, 415–423.
- Hisamitdinova, F. G. 2010. *Mifologičeskij slovar' baškirkogo jazyka*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Hisamitdinova, F. G. 2011–2012. *Slovar' baškirkoj mifologii* 1–3. Ufa: Institut istorii, jazyka i literatury UNCRAN.
- Muhamedova, R. G. 1972. *Tatary-mišari. Istoriko-etnografičeskoe issledovanie*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Torma József 1997. „... A tűznek mondom!” *A baskír népi orvoslás mágikus elemeinek mai rendszere*. Budapest: Püski.
- Torma József – Hisametdonova, F. G. 1992. Baskír hiedelmi lények. In Novák László (szerk.) *Hiedelmek, szokások az Alföldön* 1–3. Nagykőrös, 195–209.