

The Naming of Kazan River, Nunavut, Canada

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ABSTRACT. The Kazan River in Nunavut was designated as a Canadian National Heritage river in 1990, but the reasons for its naming and the meaning of its name are unclear. The Canadian Geographical Names Data Base gives a different definition for another Kazan River and lake located near Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan. There is also a Mont de Kazan, Quebec, named for the Kazan Cathedral in Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia. After examining the records of the Roman Catholic missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) and the autobiographical notes and journals of J.B. Tyrrell, who first mapped the Kazan River in 1894, I conclude that “Kazan” was intended to mean “kasba” (‘white partridge’ in the Dene/Chipewyan language). Kasba is also the name of the lake at the river’s headwaters. The reasons for the river name change from Kasba (on an 1892 Dene sketch map labeled by Tyrrell) to Kazan (on other Dene sketch maps labeled by Tyrrell in 1894) may be linked to the ministrations of OMI members who set up missions at Île-à-la-Crosse and Brochet in the mid-19th century. They likely named features near their missions to honour their faith and further their baptizing efforts. The similar sounds of Kasba and Kazan may have encouraged the naming. It is certain, however, that J.B. Tyrrell gave a new name to the river, and so changed the map of Canada.

Key words: Kazan, Kasba, Île-à-la-Crosse, Brochet, Tyrrell, Manitoba, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Canada, Russia

ОТРЫВОК. Река Казан [Kazan], протекающая по территории Нунавут [Nunavut], была внесена в список Канадского национального наследия [Canadian National Heritage] в 1990 году, однако причины, по которым она была так названа, а также значение слова «Казан» неясны. База данных географических названий Канады [Canadian Geographical Names Data Base] содержит объяснение названия другой реки с таким же названием, а также озера Казан, расположенных в районе местечка Иль-а-ля-Кросс [Île-à-la-Crosse] в провинции Саскачеван [Saskatchewan]. Также существует гора Мон-де-Казан [Mont-de-Kazan] в провинции Квебек [Quebec], названная в честь Казанского собора в столице Татарстана Казани.

Проанализировав архивы католического Ордена облатов непорочной Девы Марии [Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate] (ООНДМ), а также мемуары и дневники Дж.Б.Тиррелла [J.B.Tyrrell], который первым нанес на карту реку Казан в Нунавуте в 1894, можно прийти к выводу, что название реки связано со словом «касба», что в переводе с языка Дене/Чупевиан [Dene/Chipewyan] означает «белая куропатка». Возможно то, что река, обозначенная Тирреллом на схематических картах Дене как «Касба» в 1892 году, но в 1894 переименованная им же на других подобных картах в «Казан», было связано с деятельностью членов ордена ООНДМ, основавшими миссии в Иль-а-ля-Кросс и Броше [Brochet] в середине XIX века. С большой долей вероятности можно сказать, что миссионеры давали названия географическим объектам рядом с миссиями в честь объектов собственной веры, а также с целью продолжения миссионерской деятельности. Возможно, схожее звучание слов «Касба» и «Казан» привело к переименованию реки. При этом, достоверно известно, что именно Дж.Б.Тиррелл переименовал реку, изменив карту Канады.

Ключевые слова: Казан, Касба, Иль-а-ля-Кросс, Броше, Тиррелл, Манитоба, Нунавут, Саскачеван, Квебек, Орден облатов непорочной Девы Марии, Канада, Россия

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RÉSUMÉ. La rivière Kazan, au Nunavut, fait partie du Réseau des rivières du patrimoine canadien depuis 1990, mais les origines et la signification de son nom ne sont pas claires. La Base de données toponymiques du Canada confère une définition différente à une autre rivière Kazan et à un lac situés près d'Île-à-la-Crosse, en Saskatchewan. Il existe également un mont de Kazan, au Québec, nommé ainsi en l'honneur de la cathédrale de Kazan à Kazan, dans le Tatarstan, en Russie. Après avoir étudié les dossiers des missionnaires catholiques romains des Oblats de Marie Immaculée (OMI) de même que les notes et journaux autobiographiques de J.B. Tyrrell, qui a été le premier à cartographier la rivière Kazan en 1894, j'en conclus que le terme « Kazan » voulait dire « kasba » (« perdrix blanche » en langue dénée et chipewyan). Kasba est également le nom que porte le lac tributaire de la rivière. Les raisons expliquant le changement de nom de la rivière, qui est passé de Kasba (sur une carte des Dénés dessinée en 1892 et marquée par J.B. Tyrrell) à Kazan (sur d'autres cartes des Dénés marquées par J.B. Tyrrell en 1894) pourraient être attribuables aux ministères des membres de l'OMI qui établissaient des missions à l'Île-à-la-Crosse et à Brochet au milieu du XIX^e siècle. Ils nommaient vraisemblablement les caractéristiques géographiques situées dans les environs de leurs missions pour honorer leur foi et donner de l'ampleur à l'acte du baptême. La similarité entre les sons Kasba et Kazan pourrait avoir incité les membres de l'OMI à choisir ce nom. Il est toutefois certain que J.B. Tyrrell a donné un nouveau nom à la rivière, ce qui a eu pour effet de changer la carte du Canada.

Mots clés : Kazan, Kasba, Île-à-la-Crosse, Brochet, Tyrrell, Manitoba, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, Québec, Oblats de Marie Immaculée, Canada, Russie

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INTRODUCTION

The Kazan River of Nunavut (hereafter written “Kazan”) is one of 28 national heritage rivers in Canada (Fig. 1). The 2010 Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS, 2011) description does not explain the origin of the name “Kazan.” The Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) database records show that the name, which means ‘white partridge river,’ was accepted in 1910 (White, 1910:388). This meaning was later confirmed by Father (Fr.) Arsène Turquetil, a Roman Catholic Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI) at Brochet, Manitoba, in 1921. Father Turquetil stated that the Chipewyan name means “Ptarmigan (large) white partridge” (GNBC, 1921–80). An alternative meaning for “Kazan” is provided by Pelly (2008:9), who says that it is derived from “the Chipewyan word KascaKza (the place where it is very, very cold, where the water freezes in lumps on the willows).”

On 3 May 1932, the name “Kazan” was also accepted by the Geographic Board of Canada for another river and its headwaters lake near Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan (GBC, 1932). Dominion Land Surveyor Guy H. Blanchet had supplied the origin of the name on 27 November 1916 as “a common name applied to a dog by the Indians and supposed to mean ‘glutton’” (Blanchet, 1916).

Yet another Kazan exists as Mont de Kazan in the southern townships of Quebec 25 km northeast of “L’Annonciation” (Commission de toponymie du Québec, 2012). This name commemorated a Quebec government trade mission to Kazan, capital of the Tatarstan republic in the Volga Federal Region of Russia (Tessier, 1999:135). The name was approved on 28 August 1998, shortly before the signing of a cooperation agreement on 23 October. The Commission records show that, in this case, the name was chosen for the Kazan Cathedral in Kazan, which was built in 1562 as the Cathedral of the Annunciation in honour of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Virgin Mary.

So how did the “Kazan” actually get its name, and what does it mean?

EXPLORATIONS

Archaeological evidence shows that the river “Kazan” has been known and variously occupied by Dene and Inuit ancestors for about 7000 years (Gordon, 1975:283). Samuel Hearne, during his barren land travels, became the first non-Native to record crossing the river, on 30 June 1770 (Hearne, 1795:35). Hearne referred to the river by the name “Cathawhachaga.” Joseph Tyrrell (1911:87) reported that this name means the place “where fish are plentiful in the river.” In 1772, after his second journey, Hearne produced a map showing the headwaters lake (now known as Kasba), with a note saying “To joine to Cathewhachaga [sic] River.” He also called this lake “Partridge Lake” on 6 February 1771 (Hearne, 1795:75).

Nearly 100 years later, in 1866, a young Roman Catholic OMI named Julien Moulin traveled north from a new mission at Brochet (at the northeastern end of Reindeer Lake) to the headwaters of the Kazan, called “Kazan Lake” in Arsène Turquetil’s 1912 account of the event (Turquetil, 1912:193).

Two years later, to proselytize the Inuit, Fr. Alphonse Gasté traveled even farther north, from the headwaters down the “Kazan” during April, overland to Dubawnt Lake, and back. He barely survived the seven-month trip and was brought back up the “Kazan” hauled by dogs on a small narrow sledge (Gasté, 1960:15). Fr. Gasté’s only published account of this journey says that he believed the Dene with him called the river “Kasandésé” (Gasté, 1960:12). This 1868 reference could be the first emergence of the name “Kazan.” Fr. Gasté’s mission was successful in that five Inuit accompanied him and the Dene travelers back to St. Peter’s mission at Brochet. Two years later, 50 more Inuit traveled south, and the mission’s future was assured.



FIG. 1. Map of northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba and southern Nunavut showing key locations and geographic features discussed.

J.B. Tyrrell was the first person to map the river for the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) in 1894 (Tyrrell, 1896a). On his way north, he met Fr. Gasté and George Des Chambault at Brochet on 18 July. Tyrrell (1894) “spent parts of the rest of the day with both of them, endeavouring to get some more provisions and a guide...to White Partridge Lake.” He would surely have discussed the route north and Fr. Gasté’s experiences 26 years earlier.

J.B. TYRRELL’S MAPPING EXPEDITIONS

All was well at St. John the Baptist mission when Joseph Burr Tyrrell visited Île-à-la-Crosse during 22–29 June 1892. He was on an expedition to map the area north of the Churchill River to Black Lake. As usual, he gathered sketch maps from Hudson’s Bay Company factors and Dene guides who were knowledgeable of the way north. In

his autobiographical notes, Tyrrell (1892:9) says, “We visited the R.C. Mission, and a large school connected with it, spent a pleasant time with the priest who very kindly presented me a copy of Petitots [sic] Chipewyan Dictionary, which would have been unobtainable except through the church.” The dictionary has no French words in it starting with the letter “k,” and there is no Dene translation of “perdrix,” the French word for partridge (Petitot, 1876).

J.B. Tyrrell obtained at least six sketch maps from a Dene guide named Ithingo Campbell, during July and August 1892 (Campbell, 1892a–f), while working with D.B. Dowling to survey the land in northwestern Saskatchewan. From Prince Albert, they traveled northwest to Green Lake and Île-à-la-Crosse, and then northward to Cree Lake and on to Black Lake, at the eastern end of Lake Athabasca. Tyrrell started southward again in September 1892, and by 20 September he was back at Île-à-la-Crosse. On one of Ithingo’s maps, Tyrrell labeled a small lake, drawn northwest of Île-à-la-Crosse and south of Buffalo Lake (now Peter Pond Lake), with a short river draining out of the lake. Tyrrell’s label for this lake is “Martin L.” (Campbell, 1892c). However, the map appearing in Tyrrell’s official 1896 report on this expedition does not show a name for this small lake and river (Tyrrell, 1896b; Dowling, 1897). Modern Saskatchewan maps show both a lake and a river named Kazan. Saskatchewan also has a Kazan Island and a Kazan Bay, which were named more recently (CBGN, 1951, 1957).

During 1892, J.B. Tyrrell also collected other maps about northeast routes to Hudson Bay or the Arctic Ocean. One of his Chipewyan guides, Gabriel Thi-eel-zoa, sketched a map in pencil on 8 August 1892 (Thieelzoa, 1892). The map shows a route from northeastern Saskatchewan to “Kas-ba-tua White Partridge Lake,” as labeled by Tyrrell. A small lake shown downstream of Kasba is labeled “Cree Hide Lake,” and the river leaving it is labeled “Kas-ba dize White Partridge R.”

By early 1893, Tyrrell had finalized plans for an expedition with his brother James to the Barren Lands (Tyrrell, 1898). Their successful expedition route was through Dubawnt Lake to Baker Lake and back to Churchill, Manitoba, along the western coast of Hudson Bay. All that lay between that coast and the Dubawnt River was the unexplored watershed of the White Partridge River.

In late May 1894, the Director of the GSC asked J.B. Tyrrell to continue exploring the unmapped country northwest of Hudson Bay. Tyrrell already had Hearne’s maps and the key maps of Ithingo Campbell and Gabriel Thieelzoa, so he was aware that a river flowed northward and eastward of his 1893 exploration route down the Dubawnt.

On 19 July 1894, at Brochet, at the northeast end of Reindeer Lake, which is on the present-day border between northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, J.B. Tyrrell obtained yet another Dene map sketched by L. Casimir but labeled by Tyrrell as, “White Partridge Lake/Kazan [sic] tue” and the “Kazan River for a short distance below it,” (Casimir, 1894). There is also a map drawn by Casimir’s brother Saint Pierre, with Tyrrell’s labels “Kazan tua” for the lake

and “Kazan deze” for the river (Saint Pierre, 1894). Tyrrell obtained these maps after visiting Brochet, where St Peter’s Roman Catholic mission and Fr. Gasté were located.

Tyrrell directly wrote “Kazan” on three other sketch maps during his 1894 expedition of the White Partridge River (Hallo, 1894; Pasamut, 1894; Son of Pasamut, 1894). Two other sketch maps titled or labeled “Kazan” on the basis of their content are found in the Barren Lands Digital Collection (Ahyout, 1894; Thebayazie, 1894).

J.B. Tyrrell’s labels on these published maps are the first showing the name “Kazan” on this river. However, there is an 1866 reference to “Kazan” in the records of the OMI. Arsène Turquetil wrote in 1912 that “On parle encore aujourd’hui des voyages du joyeux P. Moulin, plus dur à la fatigue que les sauvages eux-mêmes. Le 4 novembre, Père était encore sur Kazan Lake” (Turquetil, 1912:193). Since Turquetil wrote this account 47 years after the event, the reference may be a reflection of the newly published Canadian map-name of “Kazan” at that time, or it may actually be the name that the OMI congregation called the lake and river 28 years before Tyrrell’s expedition.

The maps that accompany J.B. Tyrrell’s 1896 report on his expeditions show the headwaters of “Kazan” as Kasba Lake (White, 1897). The “Kazan” is shown, by a dotted line, to empty into Chesterfield Inlet, on the basis of information that Tyrrell obtained from his Dene guides. His party did not travel down the lower “Kazan.” He was already familiar with Chesterfield Inlet from the year before when he explored the Dubawnt River, and the season was advancing. Therefore, he and his party left “Kazan” north of Yathkyed Lake and made their way east to the Hudson Bay coast by way of the Ferguson River, to end their expedition at Churchill, Manitoba.

SUMMARY

It seems unlikely that J.B. Tyrrell mistakenly named the river “Kazan.” He was a careful surveyor who repeatedly used the name “Kazan” in his notations. He clearly distinguished between the words *kasba* and *kazan* on many occasions. He was raised by a devout Methodist mother, but there seems to have been no Roman Catholic teaching in his young life, and his biography describes no obvious Russian connections (Inglis, 1978). I suggest that the naming is a reflection of the Roman Catholic OMI missionary efforts to inculcate religious icons and terms to convert the Inuit and Dene to the Roman Catholic faith in the late 19th century.

Two Kazan rivers, a lake, an island, a bay, and a mountain are all near Roman Catholic church centres and missionary efforts. Our Lady of Kazan is the subject of devotion in the Catholic church. The dark image of Our Lady of Kazan would likely be more accepted by the Inuit and Dene, whom the OMI were trying to baptize, than a white Virgin Mary. The early OMI Fathers may have named local features in Nunavut and Saskatchewan

to honour their missionary efforts and further their success in converting the Dene and Inuit. The church at Île-à-la-Crosse is named for St. John the Baptist, whose birth to Elisabeth was foretold in an Annunciation passage of the Bible (Luke 1:13). The Kazan Cathedral in Tatarstan, Russia, where the Our Lady of Kazan icon was first found, is dedicated to the Annunciation. The OMI fathers wanted to honour their faith, and facilitate their baptizing efforts. The similar sounds of Kasba and Kazan may have encouraged the naming.

Dene guides, OMI Fathers/Brothers, and J.B. Tyrrell have all said that *kasba* means ‘white partridge.’ Samuel Hearne called present-day Kasba Lake “Rock Partridge” in his 1771 account of his exploration. OMI priests and Tyrrell have also interchangeably said on various occasions that “Kazan” and “Kasba” mean ‘white partridge.’ Fr. Gasté, during his 1868 trip, reported that he believed the river name was “Kasandésé.” Although “Kazan” could be a derivative of Pelly’s “kacaskza,” it seems unlikely that the Dene would have used a root name different from that of the headwaters lake, Kasba. An Athapaskan-language naming principle is that “Names for stream mouths, headwaters, and glaciers are derived from the basic stream name. A stream name never changes in mid-course” (Kari, 1989:135). I conclude that the intended Dene name for “Kazan” is “Kasba” (‘white partridge’).

The question of *kazan* meaning gluttonous dog, for the features near Île-à-la-Crosse, is still unresolved. Guy Blanchet was a non-Native Dene/Cree speaker. Île-à-la-Crosse today is predominantly a Métis village, but during Blanchet’s time both Chipewyan and Cree extensively traded there (Foran, 2011). Their respective words for dog (*Lihn/Li* and *Atim*), and marten (*Tha* and *Wapistan*) are very unlike the word *kazan*.

Although J.B. Tyrrell’s reasons for changing the river name from “Kasba” on Thieelzoa’s 1892 map to “Kazan,” on Casimir and Saint Pierre’s 1894 maps are unclear, it is certain that he gave a new name to the river and so changed the map of Canada.

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