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For Jerzy Wełna, a hard-working farmer in the field of English linguistics

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ABSTRACT

This article dedicated to Professor Jerzy Wełna is about his first name, a Polish version of George, which developed dissimilar variants in the European languages. We look at the etymology and the phonetic processes responsible for these differences. Special attention is paid to the appearance of the name in medieval Polish and English. We also refer to some historical, literary and cultural associations connected with the name George.

Keywords: Jerzy, George, name, palatalization, compounding.

It is a great honour for me to have been invited to take part in marking the eightieth birthday of Professor Jerzy Wełna, an eminent Polish diachronic linguist and Anglicist. As his friend and colleague, I have decided to dedicate to him some linguistic, literary and historical observations concerning his Christian name.

Jerzy is the Polish equivalent of George. The etymology of the name is clear: it is a Greek word that denotes a farmer, created through compounding, the morphological process discussed in some works of Jerzy Wełna, e.g. Wełna (1996, 2012). The Greek name *Γεώργιος* (*Geōrgios*) comes from the noun *γεωργός* (*georgós*), literally 'earth-worker', i.e. 'farmer, husbandman', and is made up of two morphemes *γῆ* (*ge*) 'earth' and *ἔργον* (*érgon*) 'work'. In Greek mythology it was one of the epithets of Zeus (cf. Nilsson 1992), so our

Jerzy may have acquired some divine properties owing to his theophoric first name.

George is an old Christian name whose divergent phonetic developments in many languages have led to forms that do not look or sound similar at all, e.g. Armenian *Kevoork*, Russian *Юриу* (*Yuriy*) and *Езоп* (*Yegor*), Ukrainian *Юр* (*Yur*), Croatian *Ђуро* and *Ђурај*, Czech *Jiří*, Lithuanian *Jurgis*, German *Georg* and *Jürgen*, Swedish *Göran*, Norwegian *Jörn*, Hungarian *György*, Welsh *Siôr*, Irish *Seoirse*, Scottish Gaelic *Deòrsa*, Spanish *Jorge* and Finnish *Yrjö*. The phonetic transcription of these cognate names would show even greater discrepancies. Jerzy Wełna also discussed the sources of differences between spelling and pronunciation in some of his works devoted to the history of English spelling, e.g. Wełna (1982, 2010).

The process that is responsible for these differences in most cases is the tendency to palatalize velar consonants (here the original phoneme /g/) in the neighbourhood of front vowels (/e/, /i/), cf. e.g. Reszkiewicz (1973), Wełna (1978) and Laker (2007) for English, and Malec (1994) for Polish. As for the various interpretations of how the original Old English diphthong /eo/ developed in the different dialects of medieval English, see another book by hard-working Professor Jerzy Wełna (1987: 85-89).

In Polish the most popular forms of the name are the official *Jerzy*, now pronounced /jeʒi/, and the diminutive *Jurek*: the former is believed to have been copied from Czech *Jiří* while the latter is based on the East Slavonic *Jur* (from Old Church Slavonic *Гюргу* (*Giurgi*)). Also, in medieval Czech the forms *Jiří* and *Juří* competed with each other, so it is likely that they both are responsible for the Polish *Jerzy/Jurek* variation.

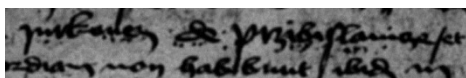
In the Old Russian medieval chronicles known as *letopis(es)*, one can find numerous variants of this name often borne by noblemen (after Litvina – Uspenskiy 2006): *Гергии*, *Горьги*, *Гюрги*, *Гюргий*, *Гюрий*, *Дюрга*, *Дюргий*, *Дюрди*, *Дюрдий*, *Юрий*, *Юрьи*, *Юрьги*, *Юрко* and *Юрка*, where one can see the variation in the onset of the first syllable from the original /g/ through the intermediate /d/ probably affricated to /dʒ/ down to the semivowel /j/. Some Slavonic etymologists claim that the *j*-initial form may have become popular due to the phonetic resemblance to the Russian adjective *юркий* (*jurkij*) meaning ‘agile, clever’.

The name is attested in the *Słownik staropolski* citations of some of the oldest medieval Polish texts from the 14th and the 15th centuries in the following forms: *Georgius*, *Georius*, *Gerzy*, *Gierzyk*, *Hirzyk* (/h/-onset), *Irzyk*, *Georgius*, *Jeorius*, *Jerzy*, *Jerzyk*, *Jirko*, *Jirzyk*, *Jorg*, *Jura*, *Jurak*, *Jurek*, *Jurg*, *Jurga*, *Jurko*, *Juryj*, *Juryjasz* and *Jurzyk*. The form *Jerzy* competed with *Jurzy*, but the

former appears to have become dominant in the 15th century. The name was popular all over Poland, but especially in the East where Saint George was strongly venerated under the influence of the Orthodox tradition (Rymut 1995).

Słownik historyczno-geograficzny ziem polskich w Średniowieczu quotes numerous early instances of the various forms of the name in the texts written in Latin, e.g.:

- (1) in 1376 the owners of the village of Terpiczów were three noble brothers Jaczko, **Jurko** i Iwanko
- (2) in 1400 a widow named Małgorzata (Margaret) of Nieszkowice sued **Jurek** of Biernaszowice for stealing her a peasant and two oxen [Margaretha relicta Iliconis de Neschcouicz cum **Jurkone** de Bernaschouicze ...pro recepcione violenta kmethonis...et...duorum boum]
- (3) in 1443 Maciej, the parish priest at Korzkiew was asked to specify from what point the meadow through which **Jurek** of Przybysławice passed belonged to his church:



Jurkonem de Przibislawicze (Acta castrensia cracoviensia 8, p. 517)

- (4) in 1486 **Irzyk** of Filipowice guaranteed the refund of 10 grzywnas against Kuba's inn.

From the mid-16th century description of the district of Pinsk (now in Belarus) one can learn that some Jurzy owned a small forest shrine of Komarówka:

- (5) Na pierwszym mieszczu uroczyszcze Komarowka, kthory trzymal **Jurzy**. (after Woyna 1874: 312)

In Poland the name Jerzy became very popular at the turn of the 20th century (cf. Rymut 1995). Nowadays it seems to be seldom chosen by parents for their newborn boys.

The first mention of Saint George in Britain was in Adamnan of Iona's 7th century writings. The name George is attested in texts written in Latin and in English in England in the Anglo-Saxon period, e.g. in the Venerable Bede's calendar where Saint George the Martyr's day (birthday) falls on the 9th day before the calends of May, i.e. on 23 April:



[https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/images/psalter/H229_0002vwf2.jpg]

In Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* the name has the Old English form *Georius*, where the initial sound represented by <g> was most likely palatalized to /j/ while the other must have merged with the following vowel /i/:

- (6) **ÆLS (George)**¹: *UIII. KALENDAS MAI. NATALE SANCTI GEORGII MARTYRIS ...* 5 Se halga **georius** wæs on hæpenum dagum rice ealdorman under ðam reþan casere þe wæs Datianus geciged, on ðære scire Cappadocia. 'In heathen times Saint George was a noble ealdorman under the severe emperor called Datianus in the district of Cappadocia'.
- (7) **ÆLS (George)**²⁸: **Georius** ic eom gehaten, and ic hæbbe ealdordom on minum earde, ðe is gehaten Cappadocia. 'I am called George and I have sovereignty of my land which is called Cappadocia'.

In the 9th century Old High German *Georgslied*, an adaptation of Saint George's legend, the form of the name is *Gorio*, which shows that the initial sound reflected in <g> had not become a palatalized semivowel, as in:

- (8) dhazs zheiken uhorta dhare **Gorio** ce uhare. ‘George really made this sign there himself’.

The Middle English form and pronunciation of the name George, which continues to be used, was derived from French and/or Anglo-Norman. According to Recasens (2014: 17), Latin /g/ became palatalized to [gʲ] in Late Latin and then affricated to [dʒ]. An early Anglo-Norman example from the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* is this:

- (9) (s.xii^{ex}; MS: s.xiii²) **Georges** sure fu liez E tut mort e demiez. ‘George was bound and killed and cut to pieces’. S Geo 515

Some Middle English examples referring to Saint George from the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* are:

- (10) c1300 *The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* 8412: Sein **George** þe verste was & oþer martir þer to. ‘Saint George was the first and the second martyr there’.
- (11) c1300 *The early South-English legendary; or, Lives of saints*. I. Ms. Laud, 108, in the Bodleian library, 1:

SEint **George** þe holie man : ase we findez i-write,
 In þe londe of Cappadoce : he was i-bore and bi-ʒite.
 þe false godes he for-sok : and tornede to cristine-dom,
 And louede Iesu crist swiþe wel : and holi man bi-com.

‘Saint George, the holy man, as we find it written, was born and begotten in the land of Cappadocia. He forsook false gods and turned to Christianity and loved Jesus Christ very much and became a holy man’.

- (12) c1300 *The early South-English legendary*, 24: “**George**, ich hote”, þis oþur seide : “and cristine man ich am, And out of þe lond of cappadoce :

hidere to eov ich cam.". 'My name is George and I am a Christian man and I came to you here from the land of Cappadocia.'

Saint George had a number of followers, who were named Georgians after him:

- (13) ?a1425(c1400) Mandev.(1) (Tit C.16)80/32 : ðere ben oþere þat men depen **Georgyenes** þat seynt **George** conuerted & him þei worschipen more þan ony other seynt. 'There are some other people called Georgians, whom Saint George converted and they worship him more than any other saint'.

Saint George came from Cappadocia, and he was a member of the Praetorian Guard (*cohortes praetoriae*) for the emperor and a devout early Christian. When he refused to renounce Christianity, he was sentenced to death and decapitated on 23 April 303 thus becoming a martyr. The saint became very popular among crusaders who brought to the West the golden legend of Saint George and the dragon. English soldiers were called to wear "a signe of Saint George" on chest and back.

Saint George was known in England in Anglo-Saxon times – the earliest dedication of an English church to Saint George is at Fordington in Dorset, where one can see the image of the saint slaying the dragon carved in stone over the south door. The 23rd day of April was officially recognized as Saint George's Day by the Council of Oxford in 1222. However, it was not until the 14th century that he became the patron saint of England. The founding of the Order of the Garter in the mid-14th century by King Edward III was connected with putting this most senior English order of knighthood under Saint George's patronage. In his speech after the battle of Agincourt in 1415 King Henry V referred to the saint, who was believed to have been fighting on the victorious English side.

The name became extremely popular in England from 1500 onwards, when more and more boys were christened George (cf. Hanks *et al.* 2006, headword *George*). Four successive Hanoverian Georges on the British throne gave their name to the whole Georgian era (1714-1830), the time of great social changes, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and associated technological, scientific and cultural transformations. In more recent times,

Saint George's Day of 1924 witnessed the first-ever radio broadcast by a British monarch: it was given by King George V.

Saint George's red cross on a white background is the national flag of England. Saint George is also the patron of Catalonia and of Georgia, which also has red crosses on its flag though the international name of the country has Persian etymology and has nothing to do with George. By extension, the US state of Georgia was named after George II, the king of Great Britain and Ireland.

Saint George's Day is also associated with the greatest English writer, William Shakespeare, who is believed to have been born on 23 April 1564 and died on 23 April 1616. In his *Hamlet* (Act 5, Scene 1) a gravedigger exhumes the skull of the dead court jester Yorick, whose name is another version of George. Another great English poet was George Byron, one of the founders of Romanticism. Two great English writers Mary Ann Evans and Eric Arthur Blair picked the first name George in their respective pen names of George Eliot and George Orwell.

It is no wonder that with such a first name, Jerzy Welna has been greatly predisposed to becoming an expert in English studies. His outstanding contributions to research in English sounds, spelling, inflections and word-formation as they were changing over time are significant and known globally. Jerzy, a fantastic teacher and 'academic life organizer', set up the distinguished school of diachronic English linguistics at the University of Warsaw, a school made up of his numerous disciples who continue to follow his lead.

Ad multos annos, dear Jerzy!

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