

# PUAKA.

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In Tregear's "Maori Comparative Dictionary" is to be found a word *poaka*, meaning a pig, a hog, and it is stated that the term, generally supposed to be a corruption of the English word "porker," is genuinely Polynesian.

*Poaka* is found, in varying forms, in many Polynesian dialects and languages. Thus, according to Tregear, we have Samoan—*pua'a*; Tahitian—*puaa*; Hawaiian—*puaa*; Tongan—*buaka*; Rarotongan—*puaka*; Marquesan—*puaa*; Mangarevan—*puaka*.

Outside Polynesia proper, too, but not outside the bounds of Polynesian linguistic, and other influences, we have such examples as *vuaka* (Fiji); *puaka* (Rotuma).

Now to any one who knows Malay the word *puaka* (or *puwaka*) is, of course quite familiar. It is not at all uncommon to come across places, often where there is some big tree, which are said to be *ber-puaka*, i.e. haunted by a *puaka*. The Malay has however, as far as I have been able to find out, absolutely no idea that *puaka* has anything to do with "pig," a *puaka* being apparently, according to Malay belief, a spirit, either a tree spirit or a *genius loci*.<sup>(1)</sup>

Among the Dusuns of British North Borneo<sup>(2)</sup> the *puaka*<sup>(3)</sup> is said to be a spirit which has the form of a pig. The *puaka* go in companies, hunt human beings, and have the peculiarity—like many spirits—that they cannot cross water with impunity. If they do so, they die, through licking all the flesh from their bones with their sharp tongues.

In Hawaii, besides being commonly used as the ordinary word for pig, *puaka*, either by itself, or in combination with some other word, may mean a spirit of some kind, often a spirit in the form of a pig; thus we find in Tregear's dictionary the statement that "*puaa*," seems to have been originally the name of any large quadruped, but (was?) afterwards restricted to hogs. The word occurs frequently in old legends and myths as descriptive of monsters,

(1) "The locally presiding earth-demon (*puaka*),———" "Malay Magic," p. 144.

*Ayer berputar jangan chebok,*

*Puwaka besar dudok menunggu*

don't take your water from an eddy, a mighty demon dwells there to guard it." Wilkinson's *Malay Dictionary*.

(2) Those of Piasau in the Tempasuk District.

(3) The word was, by mistake, written *pukou* in a folk-story which I collected in Borneo. I am nearly certain, however, that the spelling *puaka* is correct. For the folk-story *vide J. R. A. I.*, 1913, p. 452.



etc. Kama-puaa was a goblin, worshipped as a god, half man and half hog. . . . Poo-puaa was one of the gods in a temple; his head resembled a hog. Kane-puaa was the god of husbandry: *He akua kowaa o Kanepuaa*—"a furrow making god was Tane-poaka."

Now the pig, as is well known, played, and plays, an important part in agricultural rites in Europe,<sup>(1)</sup> and, to gain some idea of this, it is only necessary to glance through that part of "The Golden Bough" which is named "Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild." Furthermore there is a close connection between tree or vegetation spirits, *genii locorum*, and those of agriculture.

To return, however, to the word *puaka*, I have shewn that in Polynesia and in Borneo<sup>(2)</sup> the word can mean a pig-bodied or pig-faced spirit, and that in Polynesia it can mean pig only.

Now there can be no doubt that the word is of identical origin in Polynesia, in Borneo, and in the Malay Peninsula, seeing that the languages of Polynesia and Indonesia all belong to one group.

The Malays have no idea that *puaka* in any way refers to the pig, but consider a *puaka* to be a tree spirit or a *genius loci*. It seems probable, however, that *puaka* actually did mean pig in Malay at one time, or, if not, a pig-like tree spirit, vegetation spirit, or *genius loci*;<sup>(1)</sup> but that now-a-days—very likely owing to the introduction of the religion of Mohamed—the connection of pig with *puaka* has been forgotten (suppressed) and there merely remains the belief that the *puaka* is a tree spirit or *genius loci*.

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(1) Possibly the fact that wild pig often rout up large pieces of ground in search of worms or roots, so that they almost look as if they had been ploughed, may have had something to do with the respect in which the pig is held in connection with agriculture; *vide supra* the epithet "furrow-making." Furthermore the wild pig takes a great interest—an inimical interest—in agriculture. The Sakai tribesmen of some parts of the Malay States believe that the earth spirits, if offended, will appear as wild pigs, and come in droves to devastate the crops. The Dusuns of the Tempasuk District of North Borneo, too, tell how the people (spirits?) from certain villages far away become pigs in order to plunder the ripe padi.

(2) *Puaka* is not the Dusun word for either the domestic or the wild pig.

(1) The *genii locorum* in a jungle-covered country like the Malay Peninsula would probably be those of the jungle, i.e. of trees, especially of those which were large, or in any way remarkable.

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