

Re: Fr/lat/ru tu-vous/tu-vos/BK-2K: etymology ?

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- *From:* "Peter T. Daniels" <grammatim@xxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Wed, 26 Sep 2007 15:33:07 -0700
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On Sep 26, 10:47 am, Franz Gnaedinger <f...@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Sep 26, 3:00 pm, "Peter T. Daniels" <gramma...@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

You claimed that the Americanism "okay" is Magdalenian.

What I claim is this: Magdalenian OC means right eye, Magdalenian AY means left eye, a firm look into each other's eyes was the Magdalenian way of saying yes, and the words for it were OC AY. The eye aspect of this early 'yes' survived in *occulus* *occhio* for eye, and in eye itself. The yes aspect of this compound survived in Occitanian *oc* for yes, and in *aye aye* for yes. The ego aspect survived in Latin *ego* and in English *I* (pronounced like *aye* or *eye*). The Magdalenian OC AY would have survived in Scottish *och*, *aye*, a rather fatalistic affirmation, 'oh, it is so, alas' (if I understand the exclamation properly), and it would have survived in Choctaw *okeh* 'it is so'.

None of that speculation has anything to do with the facts of the origin of the Americanism "okay."

When an American president (was it Truman?)

What does poor Harry Truman have to do with it,

was asked where the affirmation okay comes from,

and why would anyone have asked him a question of etymology?

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he mentioned the Choctaws. I assume okay is a derivative of Scottish och, aye, that must have come to the USA with the many poor Scottish who were shipped over the Atlantic ocean and labored in America.

But your assumption is simply wrong.

But as both och, aye, and Choctaw okeh have the same meaning of an affirmation, they might both go back to hypothetical Magdalenian OC AY 'right eye, left eye', testifying to an early time when a firm look into each other's eyes was a yes and sealed a contract. This compound would have survived in the remote Scottish highland, and it would have traveled to North America by the end of the Magdalenian, and then, some hundred years ago, the two sparated traditions would have united in the famous okay given as OK. That's a far more detailed explanation than your mocking line suggests. Okay?

It is not an explanation, it is a groundless speculation. The etymology of "okay" was practically a lifetime obsession of one of the great American Anglists of the 20th century, Allan Walker Read; he published on it several times during his very long career. (The most accessible account of his quest is in a New Yorker profile, probably from the 1980s — I didn't meet him until 1993.)

Two rather improbable fads and a nickname converged in the 1830s to give rise to the word. There was a fad for "phonetic" respellings of folksy expressions, and <oll korrekt> was used for <all correct>. There was a fad for reducing phrases to initials, and "Oll Korrekt" became <O.K.>. And a hack politician, Martin Van Buren, ran for president, and his nickname (from his home town in Upstate New York) was "Old Kinderhook." which also fed into "O.K." This was eventually respelled more genteelly as <okay>.

No Magdalenians, no Scotsmen (Van Buren, obviously, was of Dutch ancestry, and the Hudson River Valley was still thickly settled with Dutch–Americans, and also with Huguenots, who of course could not come to New France in the 17th century), no Choctaws. (They were among the Southeastern Indians who were relocated by Andrew Jackson, Van Buren's predecessor, and it's unlikely that an item of Choctaw vocabulary would have entered American English around that time.)

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