ON CHUVASH-MONGOLIAN LINGUISTIC CONTACTS

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The Mongolian loan words in Chuvash, investigated by A. Róna-Tas entered Chuvash through the medium of a neighboring Turkic language, such as Tatar, Bashkir, etc. All of the words in question occur also in Turkic and appear in their Turkic forms and with Turkic semantics in Chuvash. Only one does not occur in Turkic, but nor is it Mongolian.

In his interesting paper on the history of Ch¹ usra- ‘to keep up, raise, take care of’, A. Róna-Tas discusses a number of Ch words which he defines as borrowings from MMO.² There is no doubt that the words concerned are of ultimate M’origin. Moreover, it has been established that the T languages do have loan words taken from MMO.³ The problem that requires further clarification, however, is whether Ch borrowed the words in question directly from MMO or through the medium of neighboring T languages.⁴


⁴ This problem concerns other languages than Ch, because, so far, a distinction between direct and indirect borrowings in Altaic languages has been made only in a few cases. Thus, this problem was not dealt with by Vladimirtsov in his articles on Indo-European and Arabic

Róna-Tas’s list of MMo borrowings in Ch contains 33 words. A feature common to all of them, with only two exceptions, is that the respective M etymon words occur not only in Ch but also in other T languages. Such are Ch upra- ‘to keep, save’; usra- ‘to keep up, maintain’; parka ‘healthy, strong, firm’; pâletçav ‘agreement on the date of a wedding’; pâl’éi/pâncél ‘deadline’; pusaxa ‘threshold’; putene ‘quail’; purlā ‘grey’; pâltärka ‘loop on the handle of a whip’; čuptar ‘reddish-yellow with a white mane and tail’; čiper ‘good, excellent, beautiful’; čâl- ‘to endure’; tilzepe/tikpe ‘reins’; tim ‘help’; ilpek ‘abundance’; xûxém ‘handsome, beautiful, good’; yevč ‘matchmaker’; kârsaka ‘quick-tempered, nervous’; mulaxay ‘hat’; *markan > Cheremis maryan ‘straight’; mäka ‘blunt’; narát ‘pine tree’; nák ‘hard’; nâxta/nâkta ‘halter’; neker ‘the best man of the bridegroom’; xayči ‘scissors’; xural ‘guard’; xurečka ‘hawk’; xältà ‘relative of one spouse in relation to the relative of the other spouse’; sarana ‘Lilium tenuifolium’; sayá ‘good’; šâpa ‘dice, lot, fate’; sâltâkk ‘subterfuge’.

The two exceptions are Ch xûxém/xûkêm ‘pretty, good’ and Ch kârsaka ‘quick-tempered, nervous’. Of these two, xûxém/xûkêm can hardly be connected with the reconstructed MMO form yołqan.⁵ Mo gooa ‘beautiful’, Kh gõgõyo and Bur gõyo ‘pretty, beautiful’ because yołqan is nowhere attested, and the only MMO forms known are SH go’a ‘beautiful’ as part of the name alan


⁵ Róna-Tas, op. cit., p. 203.
qo'a, P qo'oda ‘beautifully’,7 Mu yo’a ‘pretty’/ qo'wa ‘handsome’,8 and IM qo'h ‘pretty’.9 Kh gyoaxon ‘pretty, nice, rather pretty’ represents what is called Modern Mongolian and cannot have existed in MMO.10 Ch xüzêm cannot be a new borrowing from Kalm either because the latter has only yo ‘straight’.11 Egorov’s comparison of xüzêm with T körk ‘beauty’12 is to be rejected because Ch x goes back to *q and occurs only in original back-vocalic words, not to mention the fact that Ch also has the word kärneklox ‘beauty’ derived from kurän- ‘to appear, to be seen’ and etymologically connected with T körk ‘beauty’. On the other hand, Ch xüzêm can be deduced from an older form *qyqam, cf. Tel qayyan ‘marvel, miracle’, KKp qayyan ‘elegant, graceful’, cf. qayq ‘id.’ from qayqa- ‘to admire, marvel’ < M, cf. Mo qayqa- ‘to be astonished, admire, marvel’, cf. Mo qayqama ‘admirable’. Consequently, Ch xüzêm is a borrowing from one of the neighboring T languages but ultimately of M origin. As for the sound correspondence, Ch xü- < *qay-, cf. Ch xü ‘to fence in’ = Tat qay- ‘to stitch’ (the original meaning in both cases is ‘to make a border’); Ch xüme ‘fence’ = Tat qayma ‘border, edge, rim, hem’; Ch xüter- ‘to chase, to drive, pursue’ = T qayt- ‘to return, to drive (cattle) back home’; Ch xüz ‘weeping, crying, lament’ = Tat qayt ‘grief, sorrow’.

The other exception is Ch kàrsaka ‘quick-tempered, nervous’ compared with Bur xirzaga ‘nervous, angry’.13 This equation has to be rejected because Bur -z- goes back to -j- which never corresponds to Ch -s-, not to mention that xirzaga occurs only in Bur. The latter form can be connected with Kalm kirjyna- ‘to creak, grit one’s teeth’ and Yak kirjina- ‘to growl, roar’, Tel qirš ‘to quarrel, fight’ from qir- ‘to destroy, kill’.

Consequently, neither of the two exceptions proves what they are supposed to prove.

Returning to the above list of words, it should be pointed out that all of them occur not only in Ch, but also in the neighboring T languages. There is not a single word among them that occurs only in Ch, which weakens the assumption that they are direct borrowings from MMO. The fact that the words in question occur both in Ch and neighboring T languages makes it probable that they penetrated a number of T languages at the same time or at different times and were borrowed by Ch from a T language such as Cum (in the XIII-XV cent.) or Tat (in the XV-XVII cent.). Indeed, Mo abura- ‘to save, rescue, protect’ occurs in Cum as abra.14 and is regarded by Sevortjan as a T loan word in Ch (as upra-) but of ultimate M origin.15

The other word, Mo asara- ‘to nourish, raise, bring up’ also occurs as a loan word in various T languages (cf. Cum asra-) and is regarded as a

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6 Igor de Rachewiltz, Index to the Secret History of the Mongols, Bloomington, Indiana, 1972, p. 181. This form corresponds to ho’a in E. Haenisch, Wörterbuch zu Manghöl un Niua Tobaa’an (Yüan-ch’ao pi-shi). Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen, Leipzig 1939, p. 64.
8 N. Poppe, Mongol’skij slovar’ Mukaddimat al-Adab, čast’ I-II, Moskva-Leningrad 1938, pp. 179, 258; cf. also yo'atu in ni'ur yo'atu ‘having a pretty face’.
13 K. Gronbech, Komanisches Wörterbuch, Türkischer Wortindex zu Codex Cumanicus, Kobenhavn 1942, p. 27.
14 V. S. Sevortjan, Ëtimologičeskij slovar’ tjurkskix jazykov (Obščetjurkskie i mežtjurkskie osnomy na glasnye), Moskva 1974, pp. 59-60.
T loan word in Ch. Consequently, this word was hardly borrowed directly from M in Ch.

Ch upra- < T abra- and Ch usra- < T asra-have u < a which is a relatively new development in Ch, cf. Ch ulput 'lord, landowner' < Tat alpäwit; Ch éax 'time' < Tat čeq; Ch xuska 'white spot on the forehead of an animal' < Tat qasqa, etc. This development is observed in the following Ch words of ultimate M origin: Ch čuptar < Tat čaptar 'chestnut-colored horse with a lighter mane and tail'; xural < Tat qarawil 'watch, sentry'; and xurčka < Tat qarčya 'hawk'. On the other hand, forms with a are also believed to go back to MMo, namely, Ch narat 'pine tree', sarana 'flag', and xurc'ka 'hawk'.

The 110 form is bogoldiirge reconstructed by Róna-Tas is incorrect because -g- is in strong position and does not disappear. True, in the dictionary Muqaddimat al-Adab, quoted by Egorov, there occurs the form b öldürge but it is given as a T word without its M equivalent.

A T loan word is also Ch yerbć 'matchmaker' < Tat yůwě < M jayučě, MMo já'učě. As for the older Ch form *sauši reconstructed by Róna-Tas on the basis of Mari (Cheremis) saus/sawus, it goes back to jawě which form is found in the dialect of the so-called Krasn-Tatars. There remains Ch parka 'firm, strong, healthy', correctly compared with Chag berk, etc., by Egorov, although disyllabic parka looks as if its etymon word were M berke. Ch a regularly corresponds to T e(ā) and M e both in words of common origin, e.g., Ch ar 'man' = Az ār, Mo ere, and in loan words, e.g., Ch arča 'chest' < Tat ārjā 'chest, box'; Ch ašak 'donkey' < T āšāk; Ch tantāš 'a person of the same age' < Chag tântâš, Cum tântâš, etc.; Ch kanaš 'counsel, advice' < T küppāš, etc. However, it is easy to prove that Ch parka is of T origin. This is evident from the semantics. Both in Ch and in T languages the meaning of parka/börk is 'strong, firm', cf. Ch parka 'durable, strong, healthy, firmly, strongly' = Chag, ET, Osm, Crim, Trkm bark 'strong, solid', Kaz berik 'id.', Azerbajdfansko-russkij slovar', Baku 1965, p. 62.

It should be added that MMo boljaj is nowhere found as a loan

(= difficult), troublesome, hard (e.g., life, fate), burdensome, complicated, serious’ (Čeremisov); Kalm berkä ‘difficult, demanding too much, evil (of character), difficult to find and therefore rare’ (Ramstedt); Ord Berzge ‘difficult, invincible, a difficult terrain’ (Mostaert); Mngr p’ierże ‘difficult, troublesome’ (Mostaert and de Smedt); SH berke ‘difficult, grave’; H, IM, Mu berke ‘difficult’. The borrowing of Ch parka from M is improbable because of the difference in meaning: the meaning of Ch parka is the same as that of T berk (bäyk) and different from that of Mo berke. It is difficult to accept the notion that Ch borrowed the form of the word in question from T but used it with the meaning taken from T.

As for the fact that the Ch word is disyllabic (as in M) versus the monosyllabic form in T, it is well known that Ch often has an epithetic vowel on words corresponding to T monosyllables, e.g., Ch utā ‘hay’ = Tat ūt; Ch uxa ‘bow’ = Tat uq ‘arrow’; Ch alā ‘hand’ = Az āl; Ch yīlā ‘dog’ = Tat āt; Ch kēnē ‘melody, tune’ = Tat kőy (cf. MT kőg < Chin); Ch sulā ‘raft’ = Tat sal; Ch vēčē ‘revenge’ < T āč; Ch vunnā ‘ten’ = Tat ān; Ch višā ‘hungry’ = Tat ăč; Ch yēke ‘spindle’ = Kaz, Chag, etc. ıč; Ch kūlē ‘lake’ = Tat kūl; Ch pušā/puş ‘empty’ < Tat buš; Ch pīytā ‘louse’ = Tat bol; Ch samana < Tat zaman < Ar; Ch sapaka ‘cluster, bunch of grapes, pod’ = Tat sabaq ‘stalk, tendril’; Ch sasā ‘voice, sound’ = Trkm, Tu, Cum ses; Ch sivā ‘healthy’ = Tat saw; Ch šanā ‘sleeve’ = Tu, Nog yen, Tat jiğ, etc.

The general conclusion from the above discussion is that the Ch words examined by Rõna-Tas were not directly borrowed from Mo but through one or several neighboring T languages. Some words, namely those with ā = Tat ā in the initial syllable are more recent borrowings from T, much younger than the Mo period.

Part of the M words found in Ch probably penetrated some T languages at the Mo time. They were borrowed by Ch from those intermediate languages at different times, some earlier, others later. Chuvash is in this aspect no different from Russian which does not have words borrowed directly from Mongolian at the time of the Mongolian invasion, all respective words as esaul ‘cossack captain’ and other military terms being loan words from T in which they are of ultimate Mongolian origin.

However, the author of these lines agrees with Rõna-Tas’s other conclusions, namely, 1. that the presence of a word in all Altaic branches does not prove the Common Altaic origin of the word in question, and 2. that there have been contacts between the Altaic speaking peoples prior to the XIII century and after the dissolution of the Altaic protolanguage. To this should be added the observation that among the numerous loan words taken by one Altaic language from another there are both direct and indirect borrowings. The latter may have penetrated a particular language, e.g., Chuvash, at a time considerably later than the period of borrowing by the intermediate language, e.g., Tatar. Consequently, such Mongolian words in Chuvash should be regarded as Tatar loan words of ultimate Mongolian origin.

30 For this reason works on the history of the Russian language discuss only the Turkic elements in Old Russian, cf. L. A. Bulavovskij, Istoričeskij kommentarij k russkomu literaturnomu jazyku, Pjatoe, dopolnennoe i pererabotannoe izdanie, Kiev 1958, pp. 31-32; L. P. Jakubinskij, Istorija drevnerusskogo jazyka, S predislaviem i pod redakciej akad. V. V. Vinogradova, Moskva 1953, pp. 346 ff. This does not mean that Russian does not have loan words taken from languages related to Proto-Mongolian.

29 M. Räsänen, Materialien zur Lautgeschichte der Türk sprachen, Helsinki 1946, p. 52.