Marcel Erdal, review of Rona-Tas, Andras / Berta, Arpad: *West Old Turkic.* Turkic Loanwords in Hungarian, Part 1: Introduction, A-K. Part 2: L-Z, Conclusions, Apparatus. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2011. XX, 1490 pp. 8° = Turcologica 84. Hartbd. € 148,00. ISBN 978-3-447-06260.2.

The work under review appeared seven years ago, but reporting on its contents is as important as ever and as problematic as ever. Concerning most of its contents, its subtitle, "Turkic Loanwords in Hungarian" is more informative than the title "West Old Turkic", as pp. 53–1008 consist of an alphabetical list of entries of Hungarian words taken to have an early Turkic source. We will come back to the identity of "West Old Turkic" below.

Before delving into details, the non-specialist reader of this review deserves some clarifications. Hungarian (from here on abbreviated to H) is a Uralic language, closest to the Khanty and Mansi languages now spoken in Western Siberia. The original homeland of the tribes speaking these languages may have been the southern part of the Ural mountain range, considered the border between Europe and Asia.

The Turkic tribes are thought to have originated in present-day Western Mongolia and the South Siberian region adjacent to that; a Turkic state was formed around that area in the middle of the 6th century A.D., which quickly expanded all the way to Afghanistan and became a neighbour of the Byzantine empire. However, the names of some of the tribes mentioned as 5th century successors of the Huns in the Volga–Don–Dnieper region, such as Saragur, Kutrigur, Onogur, Utrigur, Onondur and Onogundur, are often interpreted as Turkic names. The Khazars who, from the early 7th century on, dominated the area north of the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus, the Bulgars north of the Black Sea, and the Avars north of the Balkan peninsula should, in any case, have been mostly Turkic speaking.

The Hungarians appear to have been in contact with Turkic groups at least from the 6th century on, then slowly moved through this area and finally reached Hungary at the end of the 9th century; they clearly absorbed linguistic influence from this contact.[1] The early Bulgars spoke a language directly documented only from 13th–14th century epitaphs.[2] Together with modern-day Chuvash, it forms a branch of Turkic which separated from the bulk of the Turkic languages at an early stage. The Proto-Bulgar branch of Turkic[3] actually already formed on the eastern edge of the Turkic world, as it has influenced the lexicon of Samoyed, the Siberian branch of Uralic, and, much more strongly, Proto-Mongolic, before the Bulgar – or Ogur – speakers migrated to Eastern Europe. On p. 1113, the authors (from now on called R-T&B) discuss such early contacts with Mongolic and Samoyed, and call that Ogur contact language WOT, i. e. "West Old Turkic".[4] They state (p. 1071) that the Old Turkic period ended with the Mongolic invasion in the West as in the East. The Volga-Bulgarian epitaphs thus belong to the 'Middle Turkic' stage of the language group; the title "West Old Turkic" implies that the early Turkic borrowings in H document the 'Old Turkic' stage of the Ogur branch of Turkic, for which we do not have written material.[5] R-T&B also admit that they "cannot exclude the presence of non-Oguric languages" for this period. There are thus contradictions in the use of the label "West Old Turkic", referring either to 'Early Ogur Turkic' or to 'any Turkic dialect which was in contact with H before the Mongolic invasion'. Section 7.4 with the title "Who spoke West Old Turkic?" only mentions

[1]Earlier influence cannot, I think, be excluded, e. g. the appearance of the possessive before and not after the case suffixes in the Ugric languages – unlike the other Uralic languages but like Turkic.

[2]See M. Erdal, *Die Sprache der wolgabolgarischen Inschriften*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1993. The form 'Bolgar' was meant to avoid confusion with the Slavic Bulgarians of Bulgaria, who (like the river Volga) inherited their name from the Bulgars. A few words in Bulgarian inscriptions show direct Danube Bulgar Turkic documentation; see also M. Erdal, 'The Turkic Nagy-Szent-Miklos inscription in Greek letters'. *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 42 (1988): 221–234, O. Pritsak, *Die bulgarische Furstenliste und die Sprache der Protobulgaren*. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz 1955, M. Erdal, 'The Khazar language', in P. B. Golden, H. Ben-Shammai & A. Rona-Tas (eds.), *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*. Leiden, Brill, 2007, 75–108.

[3]Some call this the Ogur branch because of the *-gur* element in the names of the Saragurs etc.: The name *"Ogur"* is taken to be the Bulgar-Chuvash variant (with /r/ instead of /z/) of Oguz, the name of an early Turkic tribe, whose members are said to be the ancestors of the Turkic groups which migrated to the South-West of the Turkic world, mainly Iran and Turkey. Others have, for no good reason, connected *'ogur'* with meanings like 'tribe' and 'arrow'.

[4]The connection of the Ogur branch with Mongolic actually makes the early loans into H highly important for the question of whether Turkic and Mongolic are genetically related. In a 2014 review, M. Stachowski (‚Remarks on the investigation of the oldest layer of Turkic loan-words in Hungarian.' *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia* 19, 215–222) goes so far as to state that what Berta and Rona-Tas call "West Old Turkic" is in fact Proto-Altaic.

[5]Dozens of inscriptions have actually been discovered in the Khazar realm, but their script – of the runiform type used in hundreds of inscriptions further east – has not yet been deciphered.

the “Avars”, the “Danube Bulgars” and “Bulgars and Khazars”, but no other Turkic groups whose lexemes are mentioned as sources for early H words in the book. Before the Hungarians began to write their language, they had also come into contact with the Pechenegs, the Oguz and the Kumans, whose dialects were not of the Ogur type. Little is known about the Pecheneg variety but we have a good idea about what the Kumans (by Muslims called *Qifčāq*, by Slavs *Polovcy*) and the Oguz must have spoken. R-T&B understand “West Old Turkic” as an Oguric language opposed to what they call “East Old Turkic” (EOT), the language of the runiform, Uygur and Khāqānī sources.

The earliest H sources date from the 11th century. The language contact on which the present work tried to focus thus took place during a prehistorical stage of H; in fact prehistorical for all of Uralic, as H was the earliest Uralic language to be written down. I can only comment on the Turcological merits of this work, being in no way competent in Uralic studies. The work takes a great number of H words to have originally been Turkic and not Uralic, to have at some stage been adopted by H and, starting with that adoption, to have followed H sound developments. Uralic diachronic phonology is much more complicated than Turkic diachronic phonology and even more complicated than the Turkic-Mongolic lexical and phonological relationship, as Uralic languages are much further apart from each other than Turkic languages, and in fact show greater differences from each other than seen in the Mongolic words considered to be related to Turkic ones. I understand that Uralists have heavily criticised the present work; unfortunately for me, all that criticism is in Hungarian.[6] That criticism should be taken into consideration *before* one considers the merits of an etymology connecting a H word with an unattested Turkic one, since H is, first and foremost, a Uralic language. I say “unattested”, because any aberrant feature of a putative Turkic word which the authors are unable to explain through internal H sound laws is considered a WOT feature – even if not actually attested in Volga Bulgarian or in Chuvash. This attitude is justified with the (reasonable) argument that there may have been WOT varieties not continued into Volga Bulgarian or Chuvash; but not limiting oneself to Turkic forms which are actually documented makes the whole enterprise rather problematic. There should, then, be Uralistic consensus that a word is unlikely to continue a Uralic etymon before considering its possible Turkic sources; this has not yet happened. The book contains a highly welcome 60-page ‘Historical phonology of Hungarian’, but that is not a sufficient basis for forming one’s own opinion.

Two among the non-Uralistic book reviews[7] contain highly informative and quite basic suggestions which will not be repeated here. Both reviewers say that their corrective remarks address only a small selection of what should be discussed. I will here mention a few other random examples as concisely as it is possible with this complex topic.

H *belyeg* ['be:ʎeg] ‘stamp, bond, mark’ is (p. 113 ff.) said to come from WOT **bäläg* < **bäläk*, with **bäläk* posited also for EOT. R-T&B say that it "can only be connected with T **bäläk* or **bäläg* because … the second vowel *-e-* does not disappear when the word is declined in H.” But the problem is that **bäläk* / **bäläg* is attested neither in WOT nor in EOT, nor in Middle Turkic: *“belek”* of the Ottoman *Tarama Sözlüğü* is supported by only a single example, which is an error. The word is attested in this shape in all South Slavic languages, including Old Church Slavonic *bělěg*. R-T&B assign a 13th century proper name to this lexeme; otherwise, its first Hungarian instances are from the 15th century. In the 15th century, the Ottomans were already entrenched in the Balkans and all scholars agree that the South Slavic term was borrowed from Ottoman *bellük* << *bälgü+lük*. Slavic *beleg* was adopted also by Albanian and Rumanian and the Hungarian term no doubt also comes from it. Nor can **bäläk* / **bäläg* be expected to have existed in WOT or in EOT: *bälgü*, which has this meaning in all varieties of Turkic, is a simple noun;[8] even if there had been *-(X)g* and *-(O)k* derivates from a base "**bäl-*", they would have had to be **bälig* and **bälök* and could not have had an /ä/ in the second syllable. The following quotation (p. 115) is indicative:

> To the arguments in favour of the T origin, we can add that the supposed form **bäläg*, in the shape **bälüg* is present in the VBulg inscriptions, where the word *bälüwi*[9] <BLWY> is a later form from **bälüg-i* or **bäläg-i*.

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[6] I will only mention the 220 page book of L. Honti, *A magyar es a nyugati otorok szokeszleti kapcsolatairol*. Budapest, Tinta, 2017 (= *Segedkonyvek a nyelveszet tanulmanyozasahoz* 196); Prof. Honti has also published several articles on various additional Uralistic aspects of the work.

[7] I have already mentioned the one by M. Stachowski. H. Jankowski’s review appeared in *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 66,1 (2013): 151–169.

[8] Its Proto-Turkic shape must have been **bälgö*, as *belge* is an early loan in Mongolic.

[9] In Erdal 1993: 132 and 156 I argue for reading *bälüi* and not *bälüwi*. That this nominal form comes “from **bälüg-i* or **bäläg-i*” makes no sense, as /ü/ and /ä/ are different vowels: In Turkic etymology, vowels are just as important

The authors here invented an Old Turkic word to serve the etymology of a Hungarian term whose use is documented only from the 15th century on! Another likely borrowing via Slavic is *csiger* 'wine of low quality, fruit wine', also earliest attested in Hungarian with this meaning in the 15th century (earlier instances are either person or place names).

Two important features which Bulgar-Chuvash shares with numerous Mongolic lexemes which have Turkic correspondences is the fact that, in words where most Turkic languages have /z/, Bulgar-Chuvash, the early Turkic loans in Hungarian and those Mongolic-Turkic words have the phoneme /r/; similarly, where most Turkic languages have /š/, Bulgar-Chuvash, the early Turkic loans in Hungarian and numerous Turkic-Mongolic lexemes have either /l/ or /lč/. For some reason, scholars who believe in a genetic connection between the Turkic and Mongolic languages have taken Proto-Turkic-Mongolic to have had /r/ and /l/ or /lč/ and have considered /z/ and /š/ to be secondary, whereas scholars who do not believe in such a genetic connection but consider words shared by Turkic and Mongolic to have been borrowed from Turkic to Mongolic have taken the opposite view about these consonants: They think that Proto-Turkic had /z/ and /š/ and that Ogur-Turkic /r/ and /l/ or /lč/ are secondary. Rona-Tas and Berta belong to this second group of scholars. I will not get into the question of genetical relationship; the only point I would like to make is that /š/ > /lč/, the unconditioned development of a cluster from a simple consonant assumed to have taken place on pp. 1098, 1104–1107, 1172 – e. g. in Volga Bulgarian *balč* < *baš* 'head' – seems an unnatural process. I think one can assume Proto-Turkic to have had /lč/ or /lʤ/, which secondly developed into /š/ in most Turkic languages, even if one does not believe in any genetic connection between Turkic and Mongolic. Corresponding to the Common Turkic bird name *taz-baš*, Mongolic actually has *tarbalji* 'sparrow hawk, tawny eagle', whose first element has been borrowed into Hungarian as *tar*; like Common Turkic *taz*, it signifies 'bald'.

Early Turkic *yog* 'funeral feast' is attested in various runiform inscriptions (the earliest Turkic sources) and in Khāqānī Turkic.[10] The term appears with the same meaning in late 6th and early 9th century reports of Byzantine ambassadors to the Turk court as δόγια / δόχια / δογή / δοχή. This is clearly the Türk term, adapted to serve Greek inflexion. R-T&B (p. 1169) say the *delta* is meant to represent the sound [ʤ], for which there is no letter in the Greek alphabet, because, they say, EOT onset /y/ corresponded to /ʤ/ in WOT. Their proof is the name of the Ural river, which appears as δάϊκ-ος (genitive form) and δαΐχ in 2nd and 6th century sources, but as γεήχ [ye'ix] in a 10th century source, was called *Yaik* in a late 12th century Russian text describing the war with the Polovcy, and is called *Yayık* or *Jayık* [ʤa'jɯk] in modern Kipchak languages. However, we find onset foreign [ʤ] transcribed as τζ in all Greek sources; the Greeks *had* developed a way to transcribe the sound [ʤ] and used it consistently for centuries. Our conclusion must be that the Turkic population of the region changed onset [d] and/or [δ] to [j] between the 6th and the 10th centuries. The term for 'funeral feast' has onset /j/ in the early 8th century runiform inscriptions,[11] but the 6th century ancestors of the authors of those inscriptions can very well have pronounced the word with /d/ or /δ/. These sounds are no longer attested in word onsets in Runiform Turkic, but they appear in Mongolic counterparts of a number of EOT words.[12] A similar argument is used for excluding (on pp. 1206–1210) H *nyar* [ńār] 'summer' from being connected with *yāz*, which also signifies 'summer' in a part of the Turkic languages but 'spring' in some others, on the grounds that in Chuvash, the continuant of WOT, the cognate of Common Turkic *yāz* has the shape *śur* and signifies 'spring', not summer. Chuvash onset /ś/ corresponds to Volga-Bulgarian /ʤ/ and EOT /y/. But some EOT lexemes with onset /y/ do indeed have /n/ (also in this particular word according to some scholars) in Mongolic cognates; they could still have had /ń/ when the Hungarians met Turkic groups in the 6th or 7th centuries. Such /ń/ need not have been a WOT feature, as EOT was not as yet written either, at that time.

The book also has some highly doubtful 'Proto-Turkic' forms, such as **ikirmi* 'twenty' instead of *yigirmi* / *ǰigirmi*, apparently created for a connection with *iki* ~ *aki* 'two' in spite of the different onset and the obscure third syllable, and figures an "ancient verbal base" *bar-* 'to exist' (not even starred!) instead of the adjective *bār* 'existing'; *bār* was also used attributively and served as base for denominal derivations.

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as consonants. Saying that "the supposed form **bäläg* is present in the shape **bälüg*" is also meaningless, as the "shapes" are different.

[10]But not in Old Uyghur, whose authors had already given up the original Turkic religious practices.

[11]It cannot be excluded that Runiform Turkic /y/ had an onset allophone [ʤ].

[12]E.g. Mo. *daagan* Tu. *yapak* 'foal', Mo. *daakı* 'shaggy hair' Tu. *yapaku* 'matted wool', Mo. *daarı* Tu. *yagır* 'saddle gall', Mo. *dai-n* 'war' and *dai-sun* 'enemy' Tu. *yagı* 'enemy', Mo. *daku* Tu. *yagku* 'rain coat', Mo. *del* Tu. *ye:l* 'mane', Mo. *delbi-* Tu. *yelpi-* 'to wave, fan', Mo. *deresün* Tu. *yäz* 'some type of reed', Mo. *domag* Tu. *yomak* 'tale', Mo. *düil-* Tu. *yilü-* 'to shave'.

What is presented in this work with a huge amount of (mostly quite unnecessary) detail (exclusively taken from dictionaries, which are often erroneous) and argumentation, exhaustively listing even the most absurd views of colleagues, can serve as base for ongoing research on the topic. Unfortunately, the authors' proposals are often as problematical as the ones they criticise. The chapter 6, a part of the 'Conclusions', sums up what one can learn about "West Old Turkic" from Hungarian evidence; using this chapter, the reader should check every bit of information in the detailed entries for the Hungarian terms. Since we still have practically no "West Old Turkic" texts, one does not really need this term at present, and could as well – for medieval Eastern Europe – speak of indirect Bulgar evidence, progressively enriched by the speech of Kuman invaders.