

THE TURKIC VARIETY USED BY THE KHAZARS

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Two millennia ago, most of the population on the Eastern edge of Europe consisted of Iranians in the South and Finno-Ugrians in the North. Then, for more than a millennium, there was a continuous westward movement of ethnic groups across the Ural Mountains, which appears to have been mostly Turkic – and involving also the Uralic Hungarians. The most important state formed in South-Eastern Europe by Turks was that of the Khazars.

The sources tell us that the Hungarians changed from a tribal to a national entity in the framework of the Khazar empire – indeed, the 10th century Byzantine emperor and author Constantinos Porphyrogennetos consistently calls them “Turks”,¹ and Hungary is, in the 10th–11th centuries, called “Tourkia”.² The Khazar–Hungarian relationship had serious consequences in the administrative, military and ideological domains. Concerning the lexicon, where we see the results to this day, the Hungarians had contact with many peoples, most of them Turkic, both before their arrival in the Carpathian Basin – where they replaced the Avars as well as Germanic and Slavic groups – and after their conquest. András Róna-Tas and the late Árpád Berta brought together the results of their wide-ranging research in the domain of Hungarian loans from what they called “West Old-Turkic” in Róna-Tas–Berta 2011.

We have no direct knowledge about the speech of the quite numerous, apparently Turkic tribes whom the Hungarians met before and during their establishment in the Carpathian Basin; these peoples appear not to have developed written languages. The speech of most of them is likely to have belonged to *r*-Turkic, as I call it, not the *z*-Turkic group, but we are not sure

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¹ Moravcsik, 1983, 321–322.

² Moravcsik, 1983, 320.

about the language of the Khazars. Proto-Turkic can be reconstructed to have had two dialects: an *r*-dialect, which had /r/ where *z*-dialect varieties had /z/, and /l/ or /ldʒ/ where *z*-Turkic showed /ʃ/. The only *r*-Turkic language surviving to this day is Chuvash; Atil Turkic (see below), the language of the Volga Bulgars, is an earlier variety of Chuvash. The *r*-Turkic speakers appear to have been prominent in the Yenisey river region at an early stage, because Proto-Mongolic cognates of early Turkic words all have *r*-Turkic features. But they all moved west around 1700 years ago, and in the Ob River region lent some lexemes to the Samoyeds; they then crossed the Ural Mountains and reached the region north of the Black Sea. Other features exclusively shared between *r*-Turkic and Mongolic are the pre-palatalization of Proto-Turkic long vowels, the change /si/ > /ši/, and the loss of stem-final velars. Bulgar-Chuvash, some other Turkic languages and Mongolic show onset /dʒ/ where *z*-Turkic including Old Turkic has /j/ (often transcribed as *y*) in shared lexemes. However, some Proto-Mongolic words had onset /j/; this means that there was, in Proto-Mongolic, a phonological opposition /j/ : /dʒ/ in this position. The shared lexemes therefore cannot be Proto-Altaic, as has been claimed, but must be loans.

The Pecheneks, the Uz, the Kimeks and Kumans, who arrived in Southeastern Europe after the Hungarian conquest, spoke *z*-Turkic; the 12th century intellectual Greek princess Anna Komnene says that the Pecheneks and Kumans spoke the same dialect, and we know more or less what the Uz, i.e. the Oghuz, spoke.

Many of the early Turkic loans in Hungarian, which are discussed by Róna-Tas–Berta 2011, are clearly *r*-Turkic, which they call Oguric. It can happen that Hungarian preserved a lexeme showing such features, when Chuvash lost the original term: *tenger* ‘sea’³ e.g., corresponds to *z*-Turkic *tāñiz*. Chuvash *tinēs* / *tinis*, on the other hand, must be a loan from *z*-Turkic Tatar, and it was transferred to Uralic Mari in the more archaic form *teñiz* / *tujiz*. But many early Turkic loans in Hungarian show *z*-Turkic, not *r*-Turkic features – though all of them are said by Róna-Tas & Berta to come from “West Old Turkic”. The authors 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 Tur-

³ See Róna-Tas–Berta, 2011, 893–895 and 1113.

kie’ or to ‘any Turkic dialect which was in contact with Hungarian before the Mongolic invasion’. The onset $q > x$ feature, which appears in Volga-Bulgarian and leads to onset /h/ in Hungarian, e.g., is found also in Middle Qipchaq and in modern Qipchaq languages, and is also an inner-Finno-Ugrian feature; it therefore appears to be areal and not genetic.

I discussed the nature of the Khazar Turkic variety in Erdal 2007, based on the material collected mainly by Peter Golden up to that year, trying to answer the question whether the lexemes and suffixes surviving from Khazar linguistic usage were of the Bulgar-Chuvash or of the Common Turkic type. Róna-Tas–Berta, 2011, 1167–1176 took up the question with some additional evidence,⁴ formulated as an answer to Erdal 2007. On p. 1176 they reach the conclusion that the Bulgars and the Khazars spoke one and the same dialect. As correct general criticism of my paper they state that “with the exception of *dog*, all the other items are abstracted from” titles, personal and geographic names and ethnonyms. Agyagási, 2019, 19 has a section on this topic, but does not add anything to the statements of Róna-Tas–Berta 2011.

I will first discuss two of the instances in which Róna-Tas–Berta 2011 misleadingly made Khazar terms accord with Hungarian data, the name of a Khazar region and a Khazar personal name, and then come to *dog*. The Khazar name of the Volga River is on p. 345 stated to be *Ätil*, on p. 1172 as *Etel*, as it appears in Hungarian sources as *Etel*. Konstantinos and others tell us that the Hungarians emerged from a Khazar region called *Ἀτελκουζου*, with onset α , where, Konstantinos says, ‘now the Pechenegs live’. Both Greek and Muslim evidence for the original name of the Kama–Volga system clearly show an /a/ in its onset, and not an /ä/; see examples in Moravcsik 1983, 77, entry *Ἀτήλ*, and the text of Ibn Faḍlān, who was a member of the 921–922 AD mission to the Volga Bulgars.⁵ *Ätil közi* might then refer to the source region of the Volga or the Kama.

⁴ See Erdal 2018 for some relevant topics which are not discussed here. Part 7 of the work is called ‘Who spoke where and when West Old Turkic?’, part 7.4. ‘Who spoke West Old Turkic?’. This is the section 7.4.3, which has the subtitle ‘Bulgars and Khazars’.

⁵ On pp. 208a, 209b and 210a of the manuscript (Ed. Togan, 1939), it is always written with *madda* above the onset *alif*; §§ 71, 72, 80, 83 and 101. According to Togan, the name is spelled in this way also by 10th–11th century al-Bīrūnī and 13th–14th century al-Qazwīnī.

The meaning of Hungarian *búcsú* (pronounced as [bu:ʃu:]) ‘farewell, indulgence, dedication festival’, discussed in Róna-Tas–Berta, 2011, 179–182, accords with that of Old Turkic *boşog*, which signifies ‘fate, destiny, prophecy, prediction, command, order, instruction, permission’, and comes from *boşo-* ‘to release, let go, permit to depart, forgive’. Their problem is that Hungarian /č/ cannot come from /š/; nor do they expect it to, as ‘Oguric’ Turkic, the source of Hungarian loans, is taken to have applied lambdacism. Here is where the 10th century Khazar name which appears in the Hebrew Schechter text as בולשצי, transliterated as BWLŠCY, comes in, the Turkic name of a general whose Hebrew name was *Pesax*. Golden convincingly read this name as *boluşçı*, taking it to come from *boluş* ‘help, helper’, from the verb *boluş-* ‘to help’; *boluş* and *boluş-* are well attested in the *Dīvān Lughātī* ‘t-Turk and in Middle Kipchak. Róna-Tas & Berta instead propose connecting the Khazar name with Old Turkic *boşog*, which they take to lambdacistically have become **bolščug* and then **bolčug*, which then lead to the Hungarian word. They say “the Proto-Turkic -š- did not become -l- immediately, but changed into a consonant cluster *lš* > *lšč*.” They think “the Khazar title was Proto-Turkic **Boşugčī* ‘the releaser, the commander’, which changed to **Bolščuyčī* > **Bolščučī* > *Bolščī*.” The meaning which they propose for **boşugčī* appears to come from (Mongolic) Buryat, one of the languages which borrowed *boşog*. However, regular phonic development of the Bulgar branch of Turkic would not need the *č* – would not create any *č* – if the authors did not need to connect it to the Hungarian term. The work’s aim is the etymology of Hungarian lexemes; but this endeavour should not cause a bending of Turkic etymologies; the etymological processes here proposed are clearly invalid.

Our scant Khazar linguistic evidence is much earlier than Bulgar evidence, and this proves to be important. One feature which is relevant here is the Proto-Turkic word-onset /d/, which had already become /y/ in the early 8th century Orkhon inscriptions, the earliest Turkic texts we have, but is preserved as /d/ in at least a dozen Mongolic cognates: E.g. in Mo. *dayin* corresponding to Turkic *yagı* ‘enemy’, *dom* ~ *yom* ‘omen’, *daari* ~ *yagır* ‘saddle gall’, *delbi-* ~ *yelpi-* ‘to wave, to fan’ or *deresün* ~ *yez* ‘some type of reed’.⁶ The 6th century author Menandros documents the use of a term which, in the

⁶ See Ölmez, 1991 for the whole evidence.

manuscripts of his work, is spelled as *δογία* or *δοχία* with reference to the funeral of Ištāmi, the *qayan* of the First Turk Empire. However, the same traditional funeral feast is called *yoy* in a number of 8th century runiform inscriptions from the Second Turk Empire, in the 11th century Muslim sources *Dīwān Lughātī 't-Turk* and *Qutadgu Bilig* and in the 14th century work of Ibnu 'l-Muhannā from Southern Azerbaijan.⁷ The derived verb *yoyla-* ‘to mourn for a deceased’ is also attested in Old Uyghur. According to the evidence of the Greek ambassador to the Türk court, the Central Asian Turks in the 6th century appear still to have used this term in the form *doy*; but it had changed to *yoy* by the time of the Orkhon inscriptions. The 8th-9th century author Theophanes tells us that the early 8th century Khazars held a *doyn*⁸ for the death of their *tudun*; so they also did not call the funeral feast *yoy* but *doy*. This latter instance is discussed in Ludwig, 1982, 356–357. Both Greek authors clearly documented the same Turkic term, adapted to serve Greek inflexion. However, Róna-Tas–Berta, 2011, 1169 say that this reading “is impossible”: According to them, the *delta* is meant to represent the sound [dʒ], for which there is no letter in the Greek alphabet, because, they say, East Old Turkic onset /y/ corresponded to /dʒ/ in West Old Turkic. Their proof is the name of the Ural River, which appears as *δαῖκ-ος* (genitive form) in the work of the 2nd century geographer Ptolemaios, while the late 6th century Menandros gives it as *Δαίχ*. In the middle of the 10th century, however, Constantinus knows the river by the name *Yäix* spelled, already in Modern Greek manner, as *Γεήχ*. Russian *Yaik* is documented between 1140 and 1775; the Bashkirs and Noghays call the river *Yayıq*, regularly corresponding to *Žayıq* in Kazakh. The Greeks used the combination τζ for transcribing the palatal affricate [dʒ];⁹ it seems unlikely that they should have used δ, their letter for the voiced alveolar, for this purpose. The sound change /d/ > /y/ is not known in any other language spoken in the area; it therefore must have happened between the 6th and the 10th centuries in the Turkic language of the region. In the Khazar dialect, at any rate, the phonetic change had not yet taken place in the early 8th century. Retaining the onset /d/ and not chang-

⁷ See the entry in Boeschoten, 2023 for this latter.

⁸ In the accusative form in the source, *δογην* or *δογγην* in the manuscripts. The word appears as *δοχη* ‘banquet’ in a single manuscript, but that meaning does not suit the context.

⁹ Most of the instances in Moravcsik, 1983, 307–315 transcribe foreign [ʃ] but some correspond to [dʒ].

ing it to /y/ or to /dʒ/, Khazar Turkic was then, in this respect, more archaic than contemporary Orkhon Turkic – whether it belonged to the Chuvash-Bolgar or to the Common Turkic dialect grouping.

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Hazar Türkçesi

Özet

Hazarlar, Hazar Denizi'nin kuzeybatısında 7. ve 10. yüzyıl arasında önemli bir devletleri olan bir Türk milletidir. Hazarlar bize dillerinden metinler bırakmamıştır; elimizde sadece komşularının, özellikle Bizanslıların, Hazarca olarak kaydettikleri bazı sözcükler vardır. Erdal (2007), Peter Golden'in topladığı Hazarca kaynaklı sözcüklere dayanarak bu devletin dili hakkında sonuçlar çıkarmaya çalışır. Orta Çağ'da Hazarlarla sıkı ilişkileri olan Macarların dilinde de birçok Hazarca unsur korunmuştur; bunlarla son olarak ve en ciddi şekilde András Róna-Tas ve Árpád Berta (2011, 1167–1176) meşgul olmuşlardır.

Elimizdeki Hazarca malzeme genellikle özel adlardan ibaret olsa da bunlarda Hazarca tabanlar ve ekler görülmektedir. Róna-Tas ve Berta, bu malzemeye dayanarak, Hazarcanın Bulgar-Çuvaş tipinden bir Türk dili olduğu sonucuna varır. Biz, bu sorunda bir sonuca varamıyoruz.

Bu makalede Yunanca kaynaklarda, bir örneği I. Türk Kağanlığı'na atfedilip 6. yüzyılda kaydedilen, diğer örneği Hazarlara atfedilen ve 8. yüzyılda kaydedilen *doγ* sözcüğünden bahsedilmektedir; Bizans yazarları bu sözcüğe Yunanca türev ve çekim ekleri eklemişse de, bağlamlarından Eski ve Orta Türkçe *yoy* 'cenaze merasimi'nin tam karşılığı olduğu bellidir.

Eski Türkçeden beri Türk dillerinin tümünde sözbaşı /y/ gösteren sözcüklerin bazıları, Moğolcada da karşımıza çıktıklarında, Moğolcada başlarında /y/ değil /d/ vardır. Gösterdiğimiz *doγ* örnekleri, bu /d/'nin tarih öncesinde Genel Türkçede de bulunduğunu, en geç Orhon Türkçesinde /y/'ye dönüştüğünü, Hazarcada ise en azından 8. yüzyıla kadar korunduğunu göstermektedir. Hazarca ister Çuvaşça-Bulgarca tipinden olsun, ister Genel Türkçe tipinden olsun, bu veri Hazarcanın söz başı konusunda elimizdeki Bulgarca ve Eski Türkçe malzemedен daha eskicil olduğunu göstermektedir.

