

Einar Barnes and the Lost Tradition of Dagur Studies in Norway

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After the death of Pentti Aalto (1917-1998), *professor extraordinarius* of comparative linguistics at the University of Helsinki, parts of his personal library became available to his students and successors. Between the leaves of his copy of the *Dagur Grammar* by Samuel E. Martin (1961), a typewritten letter in Norwegian sent in March, 1946, by Einar Barnes to G[ustaf] J[ohn] Ramstedt (1873-1950) was found. The letter is addressed to Ramstedt's holiday residence at Lappvik (on the southwestern coast of Finland) and goes as follows:

Mandal den 22/3 1946.

Herr Professor G. J. Ramstedt
L a p p v i k
Finland.

Kjære professor Ramstedt!

Jeg har mottatt Deres brev idag, og det blev meg til stor glede. Jeg vil derfor takke Dem hjertelig for alle gode opplysninger og for Deres vennlighet. Imens sendte jeg i går et brev til Dem rekomandert til Helsinki etter den adr. som stod på Deres første sending. Det var en oversikt over det fonetiske system som jeg har tenkt å anvende samt et lite tekststopsett som jeg nedtegnet i 1938.

Som jeg antydet er dette svært ufullkomment da mine bøker ligger derute. Jeg fikk foresten telegramm i går om at min venn som har opbevart dette derute er på vei hjem over Russland og er antagelig i Vipuri idag. Dermed har jag håp om at disse mine bøker muligens kan være opbevart og at jeg kan få de med det første.

De har utvilsomt rett i Deres påstand at mongolene har hatt p i begynnelsen av ord, og som så igjen har blitt till h. Denne h har Dağxurene bevart. Det vil si at D. som bor i Hailar området har mistet den, mens alle de som har vært fastboende på vestre side av Noni-floden har den helt rendyrket. Man sier således hodun, stjerne eller også hodu, haraben ~ harban, 10 og hunuğu, rev. Denne h er helt konsekvent der hvor D. har bodd fast siden Tschingis Khans tid, nemlig i Numendalføret ved det gamle grenseskille, den lange grav som går fra Pusi ved Noni til Solun i syd. I Numendalføret har stammene ikke vært på flyttefot slik som på østre siden av Noni. Der er dialekten noe upålitelig

og har ikke lite fremmede elementer. Man finner således at h blir till k på andre siden av elven. Her har stammene imidlertid vært i drift på grunn av at de har vært trengt av innvandringen fra syd. På vestsiden i det overnevnte dalføre har boplassene for de gamle høvdinger vært og de fornemmeste [æ]tter som kan føre sin slekt tilbake like til Tschingis Khan eller hans brødre. Jag bodde i tre år i Pusi (Butexa) og det jeg har nedskrevet er vesentlig fra den dialekten som har «overvintret» der nord. Det er derfor mulig at jeg skal kunde klarlegge det problem som De her har nevnt. Jeg tror jeg visstnok er den eneste som virkelig er kommet i forbindelse med selve grunnstammen av Dağxurene, og tilnærmedesvis har lært deres språk. Men som sagt har disse fem år visket ut endel da jeg ikke turde ta med meg hjem mine bøker, men bare noen meget ufulstendige notater og en del setninger. Dermed tør jeg ikke ta på meg å komme med noen helt nøyaktige opplysninger før jeg kommer der ut igjen, men derutefra skal jeg kunne gi Dem opplysninger som både er nøyaktige og pålitelige.

Det er mulig at de D. som Poppe møtte i Urga er kommet fra Hailar området, det gamle Barga på vestsiden av Hsingan fjellene. De er meget påvirket av mongolsk og har lagt seg etter å tale slik at mongolene forstår de. Dermed må de stort sett regnes for å ha blitt mongolisert så man ikke språkhistorisk kan regne de for helt pålitelige. Altså må vi holde oss til selve grunnstammen på østre siden av Hsinganfjellene. Tror ikke De også at i en fremtidig avhandling bør jeg legge denne dialekten til grunn? Jeg har nemlig tre variasjoner av D. 1. Bargadialekten som er mongolisert, 2. Mergen-dialekten som er påvirket av tunguserne og Mandsjuerne, 3. Butexa-dialekten som er så og si uberørt.

Den sistnevnte har ordet *haptä*, trollkunster og *heši* ~ *heçi*, skaft. De sier også *aka*, eldre bror (jeg hørte også noen si *akka*) men *axxa-dou*, brødre. I det hele var det litt vanskelig å skille mellom ord som *beg[yn]te* på x og h. Uttalen varierte. Jeg hadde tre språklærere men det hente at der den ene sa x kom den andre med h. F. eks. *xu*, menneske ble ofte uttalt med en ren h. Jeg er derfor i tvil om jeg skal skrive ordet med *xu* eller *hu*. For meg står det slik at det vilde være rettest å skrive det *hu*, da nok de fleste uttalte det slik.

Jeg kan ikke finne ut av det materiale jeg har om ordet *jörö*, velsigne finnes i D. Ordet jeg har opnotert for velsigne er *dufulebë*. Det er et kinesisk lånord og kommer av *Chu-fu* 祝福, invoke blessing. Men ordet finnes sansynligvis og det står for meg at jeg har hørt det også, men etter så mange år kan jeg ikke fiske det op. Men vi har et ord som heter *birübë* å be. Det kan hende at dette kunde være samme ordet? Stammen blir jo da *birü*. En avledning har vi i *dielebirübë*, som betyr å be instendig. Det skulde derfor ligge nær å anta at ved nærmere undersøkelse skulde man kunde finne fram til selve ordet velsigne da jeg ikke har noe oprindelig D. ord for dette.

Jeg undersøkte i sin tid litt om enkelte stedsnavn i Nord Mandsjuria og kom til at i Butexa distriktet måtte D. ha vært de første da selve navnene hadde nøye sammenheng med språket. Jeg har ikke noen notater med om dette men jeg gjorde det for å finne ut hvor man kunde finne den mest pålitelige dialekt.

På en undersøkelse jeg hadde nordover langs Noni fant jeg og ut at ordet xar, svart, ble uttalt ar lengere nord, og enda lengere nord bare a', en liten rest av en drøvel r. Det bestyrket min tanke om at Amur, den sorte elv må oprindelig ha vært Xarmüri. Müri på D. er flod. Dette ordet ble uttalt som müri i enkelte distrikter der nord. På kinesisk heter jo eleven [sic] Hei-ho, the black river. Jeg nevner dette bare som en lite kuriositet da jeg har sett enkelte utredninger av hvor navnet Amur kom fra som har vært helt latterlige. Når D. snakker om denne elven så sier de alltid xarmüri.

Så var det et lite privat spørsmål som jeg vilde spørre Dem tilråds i. Jeg har tenkt hvis forholdene ordner seg at jeg kan komme ut til Butexa-distriktet, å skrive en avhandling om denne dialekten med sikte på en doktoravhandling. Jeg beregner 5 års arbeide med dette mål forøye. Skulde jeg da legge arbeidet an som en fullstendig innføring i dialekten, eller begrense meg til et bestemt område? Kunde De isåfall gi meg et bestemt emne som vilde ha særlig vitenskapelig interesse å få klarlagt? Jeg vilde være meget takksam om De allerede nå kunde gi meg noen råd. Jeg har studert fonetikk og almenspråkvitenskap, samt lappisk og ostjakisk for å tilegne meg litt kunnskaper om hvorledes et slikt arbeide skal legges an. Jeg har dessuten tre års spesialutdannelse i kinesisk og behersker dette språk nokså bra. Mine kunnskaper er jo ellers meget mangelfulle da jeg vel burde beherske både russisk og mongolsk. Det siste har jeg imidlertid en lite teft av da jeg har lest endel på egenhånd, men det er jo bare teoretisk. Imens håper jeg å få gode råd av Dem så mitt arbeide ikke blir helt forgjeves.

Hvis mine bøker er blitt tatt vare på skulde det ha vært meget interessant og hatt personlig kontakt med Dem før jeg reiste ut. Det er ikke umulig at jeg kunde komme en tur til Finnland. Jeg beregner å få komme in i Mandsjuria i oktober. Det måtte isåfall bli før denne tid.

Så vil jeg komme med et annet spørsmål som jeg håper De ikke vil ta ille op. Vi her i Norge er jo blitt vel forsørget med alle livets goder etter freden. Nå hører jeg at det går an å sende gavepakker til Finnland. Er det noe De personlig ikke kan få i Finnland vilde jeg være glad for å få vite det. F. eks., tobakk, smørr, hvete o.s.v. Det vilde være en personlig glede for meg å få sende noe av og til. Vi har jo selv blitt kjent med å mangle disse saker under krigen. Dertil kommer at vi Normenn har et varmt hjerte for Finnland. Derfor disse personlige bemerkninger.

Så vil jag atter takke Dem for oplysningene om literatur over mongolske emner, og jeg skal straks sette meg i forbindelse med Universitetsbiblioteket i Oslo.

Med hjertelig hilsen Deres hengivne
[signed:] *Einar Barnes*

Ps. Den rekomanderte sending igår var adressert til Helsinki, uten noe mere så skulde det ikke nå Dem med det første så må De henvende til postkontoret der. Ds.

[Translation:] Dear Professor Ramstedt!

I have today with great pleasure received your letter. I would therefore like to thank you cordially for all the useful information and for your kindness. Meanwhile, I sent you yesterday a registered letter to the address in Helsinki that stood on your first mail. It was an overview of the phonetic system that I have been thinking to use, as well as a small text sample that I recorded in 1938.

As I indicated, [all of] this is very incomplete, since my books are all lying out there [in Manchuria]. By the way, yesterday I received a telegram that a friend of mine who has taken care [of my materials] out there is on the way home through Russia and is probably in Vyborg today. I can therefore hope that my books are possibly preserved and that I will get them soon.

You are, without doubt, right when you say that Mongols [originally] had an initial *p*, which later became *h*. This *h* has been preserved by the Dagurs. That is, the Dagurs who live in the Hailar region have lost it, while those who live a settled life on the left bank of the river Nonni fully retain it. Thus, they say *hodun* 'star', or also *hodu*, *haraben* ~ *haraban* '10', and *hunuğu* 'fox'. This *h* is quite consistent [in the regions] where the Dagurs have lived a settled life since Chinggis Khan's times, viz. in the Numen Valley at the ancient borderline, the long trench that goes from Pusi at the Nonni to Solun in the south. The tribes in the Numen Valley have not been moving around like those on the eastern side of the Nonni. The dialect there is somewhat unreliable and has not few foreign elements. Thus, one finds that *h* becomes *k* on the other side of the river. The tribes there have been moving due to the immigration from the south. On the western side of the above-mentioned valley are located the territories of the ancient leaders and the most noble clans, which can trace their lineage back either to Chinggis Khan or to his brothers. I lived three years in Pusi (Butexa), and what I have written down derives mainly from the dialect that has «hibernated» up there in the north. It is therefore possible that I will be able to solve the problem that you mentioned. I think I am really the only person who has come in contact with the principal tribe of the Dagur, and who has more or less learnt their language. But, as I said, these five years have erased many things, as I was not able to take home with me my books, except for some incomplete notes and a number of sentences. Therefore I cannot give any completely satisfactory information until I get there again. From out there I will be able to give you information that will be both satisfactory and reliable.

It is possible that those Dagur whom Poppe met in Urga had come from the Hailar region, i.e. the old Barga region on the western side of the Khingan Mountains. They are very much influenced by the Mongol language and have adapted their speech so that the Mongols understand them. They may thus be considered to have become largely Mongolized, so that one cannot consider them reliable from the point of view of the history of the language. We must therefore keep to the main tribe on the eastern side of

the Kxingan Mountains. Don't you also think that in a future dissertation I should take this dialect as the basis? That is to say, I distinguish between three varieties of Dagur: 1. the Barga dialect, which is Mongolized, 2. the Mergen dialect, which is influenced by the Tungus and the Manchu, and 3. the Butexa dialect, which is more or less untouched [by any alien influences].

The last-mentioned [dialect] has the words *haptä* 'sorcery' and *heši ~ heči* 'shaft'. They also say *aka* 'elder brother' (I also heard somebody say *akka*), but *axxa-dou* 'brothers'. In general, it was rather difficult to hear the distinction between words beginning with *x* and *h*. The pronunciation varied. I had three language informants, but it happened that when one of them said *x*, another came with *h*. For instance, [the word] *xu* 'man' was often pronounced with a clear *h*. I am therefore doubtful as to whether I should write the word as *xu* or *hu*. My impression is that it would be best to write it as *hu*, since most people pronounced it like this.

From the material I have here, I cannot see whether the word *jörö* 'to bless' is attested in Dagur. The word I have noted down in the meaning 'to bless' is *dufulebë*. It is a Chinese loanword and comes from 祝福 '[to] invoke blessing'. But the word [*jörö*] is probably present [in Dagur], and I think I have even heard it, though I cannot recover it after so many years. But we have a word that is *birübë* 'to pray'. Could it be that this is the same word? As you can see, the stem is *birü*. A derivative is present in *dielëbirübë*, which means 'to pray persistently'. It would therefore appear possible to assume that a closer investigation would bring us to the very word 'to bless', as I do not have any [other] original Dagur word for this [meaning].

I did some research on individual place names in Northern Manchuria, and I came to the conclusion that the Dagur must have been the first [people] in the Butexa district, since the place names themselves had an intimate connection with the [Dagur] language. I have no notes on this with me, but I did this [research] in order to find out where I could find the most reliable dialect.

During an investigation I carried out northwards along the Nonni I found out that the word *xar* 'black' was pronounced *ar* further in the north, while still further in the north it was [pronounced] *a'*, with a small residue of a uvular *r*. This strengthened my assumption that *Amur*, 'the Black River', may originally have been *Xarümüri*. *Müri* in Dagur means 'river'. This word was pronounced *mür* in some districts in the north. As you know, the Chinese name of the river is *Hei-ho* 'the Black River'. I mention this only as a small curiosity, as I have seen some completely ridiculous explanations of the origin of the name *Amur*. When the Dagur talk about this river, they always say *xarümür*.

I also have a little private question concerning which I would like to ask your advice. I have been thinking, provided that the conditions allow me to go back to the Butexa district, to write a thesis on this dialect, to be presented as a doctoral dissertation. I estimate that this goal will require five years' work. Should I present this work as a complete introduction to the dialect, or should I focus on a specific topic? Could you in such a case give me a topic that would be of a special scientific interest? I would be most grateful if you already now could give me some advice. I have studied phonetics and general linguistics, as well as Lappish and Ostyak, in order to obtain some information as to how such work should be organized. Apart from this, I have undergone three years' special training in Chinese, a language that I know fairly well. In other respects, of course, my skills are very incomplete, as I think I should also know Russian and Mongol. It is true that I do have some scent of Mongol thanks my individual studies, but my knowledge is, of course, only theoretical. Meanwhile, I hope to get good advice from you so that my work will not be completely futile.

If my books have been rescued, it would be very interesting to meet you personally before my departure. It is not impossible that I could make a trip to Finland. I expect to be in Manchuria in October. In that case, it would be before that time.

I have one more question that, I hope, will not embarrass you. As you know, we here in Norway have enjoyed all the good things of life after the end of the war. I have heard that it is possible to send parcels to Finland. I would be glad to know if there is anything that you personally cannot get in Finland, e.g. tobacco, butter, wheat, etc. It would be a personal pleasure for me to send something every now and then. We have ourselves experienced a shortage of these things during the war. Also, we Norwegians have warm feelings towards Finland. This is why I am making these personal remarks.

Finally, I want to thank you once more for the information [that you sent] concerning literature about Mongolian studies. I will immediately take contact with the University Library in Oslo.

With cordial greetings, sincerely yours,
[signed:] Einar Barnes

P.S. The recommended parcel I sent yesterday was addressed to Helsinki, without any more [details], so should it not reach you soon please ask at the post office. Id.

For the time being, this letter seems to remain the only known piece of evidence about the correspondence that was exchanged soon after World War Two between Einar Barnes and G. J. Ramstedt, though it cannot be ruled out that more letters are preserved in hidden archives and collections, especially in Norway. In his detailed biography of Ramstedt, Harry Halén (1998) does not mention Barnes. It is, however, known that in 1946 Ramstedt was still in relatively good health and spent, between October and December, several weeks on a lecturing trip in Stockholm and Uppsala. In Sweden Ramstedt also met Scandinavian Mongolia experts, including the missionary Folke Boberg, but obviously not Barnes (Halén, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-316). Although weakened by a progressive illness, Ramstedt remained active till his death four years later. In his last years, he mainly worked on his Korean materials.

However, the text of the letter allows us to conclude that Barnes had spent several years among the Dagur in Manchuria, and that five years had elapsed since his return before he contacted Ramstedt. In Manchuria, he had studied the Dagur language, and having increased his linguistic knowledge in Norway, he was now planning to prepare a monographic work on Dagur, perhaps to be presented as a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, with the war now over, Barnes intended to return to Manchuria as soon as possible in order to gather more material and to compensate for the apparent loss of his earlier notes. Obviously, Barnes had written to Ramstedt once before, asking for instructions for the planned work. In his answer, Ramstedt had made inquiries about certain details of Dagur phonology, which Barnes was trying to clarify.

From the letter it is obvious that Barnes, although well informed about the Dagur language, was still a beginner as a linguist, as is evident, for instance, from his inadequate and inconsistent system of transcription. The most important detail discussed by him concerns the preservation of Proto-Mongolic initial **x* (< **p*) in Dagur, a feature which was already well known from the materials of A. O. Ivanovskii (1894), but which was

absent in the Hailar Dagur notes of Nicholas Poppe (1930). To illustrate this issue, Barnes added to his letter a handwritten appendix containing a list of 70 Dagur words beginning with *x* (*h*). The list, titled «Liste over en del Dağxur ord som begynner på *h*» («List of some Dagur words beginning with *h*») includes also items beginning with an original **k* (*>x*), which has merged with **x* (*<*p*) in Dagur. Barnes concludes the list (which is not reproduced here) with the following remark:

*Ps. Ordene er skrivet av i all hast så rettskrivningen kan være upålitelig. Dertil kommer at enkelte ord er hentet fra en kladd helt fra 1938. Det er dessuten en mengde ord på *h*, som ikke er tatt mer her. EB.*

[Translation:] P.S. The words were written down in a hurry, so that the transcription may be unreliable. Moreover, some of the words are taken from a draft made already in 1938. There are additionally a number of [other] items beginning with *h*, which are not included here. EB.

Although not working on Dagur at the time, Ramstedt has clearly studied the contents of the letter and its appendix carefully. In the margins of the word list he has made several handwritten corrections and additions concerning the diachronic and comparative status of the Dagur words. His notes are very few in the actual letter, however, making it impossible to know what he generally thought of the information provided by Barnes. In retrospective it can be said that Barnes was on the right track concerning many details of Dagur diachrony and dialectology. For instance, his explanation of the Russian hydronym *Amur* from Dagur (**)xar(a)+mur* ‘Black River’ is likely to be correct. The same explanation had, incidentally, been proposed already by S. M. Shirokogoroff (1933: 22, note 2), whom Barnes had probably not read.

The letter does not give any direct hint as to what business may have brought Barnes to Manchuria. Apart from Shirokogoroff and other emigrant Russians, very few Europeans were able to carry out linguistic or ethnological fieldwork in Manchuria in the period between the World Wars, when the field of Manchurian studies was dominated by Japanese scholars. The only notable Western scholar who before Barnes had stayed a longer time among the Dagur of the Nonni valley seems to have been the German explorer and ethnologist Walther Stötzner. Unfortunately, most of Stötzner’s materials, which apparently also contain linguistic notes, remain unpublished, though a popular account of his Manchurian expedition was written by Frithjof Melzer (1929).

As for Einar Barnes, his person can still be traced in Norway. Tollef Ås, who has made inquiries concerning him, reports (personal communication) that Barnes, who originally bore the surname Pettersen, was born in Finnmark, Northern Norway. After initially working in transportation business, he studied in a commercial school in Oslo, but

continued his studies at the Fjellhaug Mission School in the same city, from where he was sent to Manchuria in 1935. The Norwegian China Mission (*Kinamisjonsforbundet*) had established a mission station in Tsitsikar (*Qiqihaer*) in 1932 with the aim of propagating a brand of Evangelical Christianity among the local people, who at that time were already predominantly Han Chinese, but also comprised sizeable Manchu, Dagur, Solon, Oirat, and Mongol communities, as well as considerable numbers of Russian, Japanese, and Korean colonists.

The choice of Manchuria as a new mission field of the Norwegian China Mission was probably stimulated by the political developments in the region. Following the founding of the state of Manchukuo in 1932, Manchuria was widely seen as a land of opportunities. In so far as the Norwegian activities were meant to focus on the Dagur, a link may also be seen with the Scandinavian Mongolia missions, which were active among the Mongol tribes of Inner Mongolia. A rare glance at the situation in Manchuria is provided by Barnes himself, who published a booklet of experiences and instructions for future missionaries (Barnes [1944]). According to the booklet, there were as many as 26 Norwegian missionaries in Manchuria in 1938, while the number of converts had risen to 800 by 1940. There were also Catholic functionaries in Tsitsikar, taking care of the local Chinese Catholic congregation, whose members were mainly immigrants from Southern Manchuria.

From Tsitsikar, the Norwegians expanded their field northwards along the Nonni valley, where Barnes established his contact with the Butha Dagur, whom he (not without reason) considered the dialectally most intact Dagur group. All activities were, however, severed by the War and the subsequent political turmoil in both Europe and East Asia. Barnes managed to return to Norway via Siberia in 1941 and took actively part in the resistance movement against the German occupation forces. His plans of returning to Manchuria after the War were annihilated by the Communist takeover in China, which effectively sealed off Manchuria from outside visits for a period of almost four decades.

It was, without doubt, the inaccessibility of the field that forced Barnes to give up his plans of pursuing Dagur studies to the level of a doctoral dissertation. Indeed, Dagur remained one of the least documented Mongolic languages until an abundance of new data started to be published by both Russian and Chinese scholars during the 1980s (Janhunen 1988). With the loss of the Manchurian field, Barnes also abandoned his career as a missionary and returned to work in the business. One can only speculate what his later life would have been like if he had been able to fulfil his scholarly dreams. In any case, his first-hand knowledge of Dagur would have given him good chances of becoming the first serious international specialist on the language. His work might also have given confidence to the Dagur, who today are

struggling for survival in a country and a society very different from that of Old Manchukuo.

Acknowledgement and Final Note. The author is most grateful to Tollef Ås (Oslo) for locating information on the person of Einar Barnes and sending a copy of his published booklet. This information also revealed that the memory of Barnes continues to be cherished by his surviving daughter Kirsten Quist Barnes, who is planning a publication of her father's Manchurian materials. These materials include, at least, a brief sketch of Dagur grammar as well as an unknown number of other linguistic and ethnographic notes. Historical and photographic material on the Norwegian Manchuria mission is also reportedly preserved in the archives of the Fjellhaug Mission School in Oslo. It is, however, still unclear whether any letters from G. J. Ramstedt to Barnes survive in these collections. Although the immediate linguistic value of the Dagur data collected by Barnes has greatly diminished by the present day, the overall history of the Norwegian activities in Pre-War Manchuria remains a little-known and fascinating chapter that should definitely be studied in more detail. It may only be hoped that the present paper will provide another stimulus to the persons in Norway working on the Manchurian heritage of Einar Barnes and his countrymen.

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