

STUDIA ORIENTALIA
EDIDIT SOCIETAS ORIENTALIS FENNICA
XXVIII : 7

YUL

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HELSINKI 1964

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I have always thought that the principal charm of comparative Altaic linguistics consisted in the fact that even an apparently insignificant comparison could have far-reaching historical implications. We owe so much to the pioneer work which Professor Räsänen has undertaken in the field of comparative Altaic linguistics in general and Chuvash and Cheremis studies in particular, that I feel justified in presenting him, on his 70th birthday, with a modest flower plucked on these very same grounds.

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It is often forgotten, that the earliest known Turkic word occurs in the account of Hsüen-tsang's travels to the West. After some fruitless attempts to identify the original of the transcription used by the Chinese pilgrim, Paul Pelliot¹ successfully equated the two Chinese characters given as the name of the summer-residence of the qan of the Western Türks with Turkic *bing yul* 'thousand sources'. As this interpretation agrees with that given by Hsüen-tsang himself, the accuracy of the solution proposed by Pelliot is assured.²

¹ *Le nom turc des 'Mille sources' chez Hiuan-tsang*, (TP. XXVII, 1930, 189—190).

² The relevant passages are translated by Samuel Beal: *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist records of the western world, I—II*, (London 1884), vol. I, p. 27, vol. II, p. 288. — Beal's transcription of the Chinese characters: 'Myn bulak' is unacceptable. — As to the site of the Thousand Sources, cf. Edouard Chavannes: *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) Occidentaux*, (St. Pétersbourg 1903), p. 24.

It is regrettable that in the sometimes desperate hunt for early Turkic or Mongol words this solid evidence is regularly overlooked.

But is *yul* really Turkic? It certainly is in that sense that it is attested in Old-Turkic, in Kāšyarī and in a number of modern Turkic languages, all belonging to the Northern Group.

Kāšyarī records two forms, *yul* and *yulaq*, both with identical meanings, 'source'. Gabain¹ and Räsänen² recognize the identity of the root, but seem reluctant to define the function of the *-aq* ending. According to Brockelmann³ »bildet das Affix *äk, aq*, vereinzelt auch *ik*, manchmal Deminutiva und Deteriorativa», and he cites *yul* and *yulaq* among the examples. The question of the relationship of these two forms has no direct relevance to our subject. —

Radloff has *yul* 'Bach, Bergflüsschen', noted in the Kačinsk, Koibal and Kyzyl dialects, *čul* 'Fluss' in Sagay. The Koibal form was already noted by Castrén.⁴ Among more recent data: Khakas⁵ *čul* 'ручей', Kyzyl⁶ *šul* 'Fluss, Bach', *šuldžax* 'Bach'.

Other forms may have escaped my notice or may turn up as our knowledge of Turkic dialects expands, but it seems fairly certain that we shall never have to regard *yul* as a Common Turkic word. Its use is clearly circumscribed within an area in which peoples speaking a northern Turkic dialect live or have lived. A perfunctory search for Mongol correspondences remained unfruitful, but the word undoubtedly penetrated into the Tunguz domain. I have

¹ *Altürkische Grammatik*, (Leipzig 1941), p. 62.

² *Materialien zur Morphologie der türkischen Sprachen*, (SO. XXI, 1957), p. 100.

³ *Osttürkische Grammatik der islamischen Literatursprachen Mittelasiens*, (Leiden 1954), p. 111.

⁴ N. Katanoff: *Castrén's Koibalisch-deutsches Wörterverzeichnis und Sprachproben*, (Mélanges asiatiques IX, 1880—89, 97—205).

⁵ N. A. Baskakov — A. I. Inkižekova-Grekul: *Khakassko-russkij slovar'*, (Moskva 1953).

⁶ Aulis J. Joki: *Wörterverzeichnis der Kyzyl-Sprache*, (SO. XIX, 1, 1953), p. 30.

found it in Even¹ *čul* 'водопад' and in Evenki² *yūktu* 'ручей'. As initial *y-* does not normally occur in that language, this is undoubtedly a loanword, and the length of the first-syllable vowel may well be compensatory to the loss of the final *-l* which, if retained and combined with the suffix of derivation *-ktu*, would have formed a consonant cluster unacceptable to Tunguz ears. To my mind, *-ktu* is a suffix (not listed by Vasilevič³ among the variants *-kta*, *-kte*, *-kto*) used to form a noun bearing only one meaning of the polysemantic base to which it is appended, e.g. *goč'in* 'the following year, during the following year', *goč'ikta* 'the following year' (note the disappearance of the final consonant!). In fact, there exists a form *yukta* 'source', noted by Czekanowski in the Kondogir dialect.⁴

The word thus attested cannot be considered Tunguz. Unknown in Mongol, its occurrence in Turkic is geographically limited, so that one would be tempted to consider it as belonging to an area rather than to a group of languages. However, the curious fact which prompts me to write this article is that the word occurs in Chuvash: *śāl* 'source, well'. The connection between this word and the Northern Turkic forms has already been recognized by H. Paasonen.⁵ As it is a perfectly regular correspondence to Common Turkic *yul*, there is no need to elaborate on the phonetic equivalence of the two words. The interest lies elsewhere.

The Cheremis name of the Volga is *Yäl* in the Western dialect, and *Yul* in the Eastern. J. J. Mikkola⁶ explained these forms by postulating an Old-Cheremis **yuly* < **yulya*, which he equates

¹ V. I. Levin: *Kratkij evensko-russkij slovar'*, (Moskva—Leningrad 1936); given also by Johannes Benzing: *Lamutische Grammatik*, (Wiesbaden 1955), p. 155: 'Wasserfall'.

² G. M. Vasilevič: *Evenkijsko-russkij slovar'*, (Moskva 1958).

³ *Op.cit* p. 464.

⁴ A. Schiefner: *Alexander Czekanowski's tungusisches Wörterverzeichnis*, (Mélanges asiatiques VIII, 1877, 335—416).

⁵ *Csuvas szójegyzék*, (Budapest 1908), p. 134.

⁶ *Der Name Wolga*, (FUF. XX, 1929, 125—128) and *Nochmals der Name Wolga*, (FUF. XXI, 1933, 162—163).

with Turkic words such as Bashkir *yīlya* 'river', etc. According to Mikkola the development **yulya* < **yuly* < *yul* could be satisfactorily explained. With the 'discovery' of a Turkic form *yul* 'source, river', there is, however no need to bring into the picture hypothetical forms, and unless one rejects out of hand the possibility of a Turkic etymology, no objection can be raised against the equation of the Cheremis name of the Volga with the Turkic word *yul*. H. Paasonen (or Kai Donner?) suggests¹ a connection between Cheremis *Yul* and some Ostiak forms *yəlpə*, *yəlpə*. The *-p* ending of the Ostiak words can probably be explained,² but there might be difficulties in deriving the Ostiak vowel from a Turkic *u*.³

The historical implications of the etymology I propose for Cheremis *Yul* are considerable, and these, in their turn, have important bearings on the linguistic history of the region.

The fact that a word attested only in the Northern Turkic languages should also occur in Chuvash, is in itself very interesting, as the question arises »How did it travel so far west?». Words do travel but they rarely do so without leaving some trace of their peregrinations and it would be natural to find the word *yul* attested in languages that, geographically, lie between the Altai and the Volga.⁴ In recent years our knowledge of Turkic and, in general, Altaic vocabulary has improved so much, that the 'argumentum ex silentio' can, on occasion, be convincingly invoked. For this reason, I would be tempted to take the word *śāl* as an indication that the Chuvash are not indigenous to the Volga-region, but settled there at the end of a peregrination, the starting point of which might well have been the area where *yul* was autochthonous. It would be preposterous to attempt to give an absolute date to such a hypothetical migration, but a relative chronology may perhaps be established.

¹ Kai Donner: *H. Paasonens Ostjakisches Wörterbuch*, (Helsingfors 1926), p. 38.

² Cf. Y. H. Toivonen, MSFOu. LXVII, 1933, pp. 382—383.

³ Cf. Wolfgang Steinitz, *Geschichte des ostjakischen Vokalismus*, (Berlin 1950), p. 90.

⁴ Such is the case for instance of the word examined by Johannes Benzing: *Zum tschuwaschischen Worte, śālan 'Heckenrose'*, (UAJ. XXIV, 1952, 143—144).

The Turkic etymology of *Yul*, the Cheremis name of the Volga, is as acceptable as any other similar attempt can be; the presence of such a word in the region is conclusively attested by the Chuvash form *śāl*. Since *yul*, in its function as a common noun, has not survived in any of the Turkic languages of the Volga-region, it seems reasonable to suppose, that the word reached the area in its Northern Turkic form *yul*, that the Cheremis kept this form as the name of the river Volga, whereas in the language in which it was a common noun, namely in pre-Chuvash, it underwent the phonetic developments proper to this language. This would then mean that we would have a further proof (the Hungarian correspondences of Chuvash *ś-* testify to the same effect) that the Chuvash *ś-* is of relatively recent origin, and that the ancestors of the Chuvash spoke a *y-* language at the time of their settlement in the Volga-region.

It is well known that Mongol and Chuvash share a number of phonetic features which distinguish them from Common Turkic. Among these, the so-called 'rhotacism' and 'lambdacism' are the most characteristic, i.e. in a great number of cases, Mongol and Chuvash have *r* and *l* in words which occur in Turkic with *z* and *r* respectively. It has always seemed to me that the Mongol-Chuvash correspondences¹ presupposed a Mongol-Chuvash (or pre-Mongol and pre-Chuvash) symbiosis, somewhere in a region far to the east of the present Chuvash territory.² The *y- > ś-* change, as exemplified

¹ I am not speaking here of recent Mongol loanwords in Chuvash. To my knowledge, these have never been studied or even mentioned, although their importance is obvious. The presence of Mongols in the Volga-region has left its traces and their methodical survey would help in shedding new light on a number of relevant problems.

² I find myself therefore in disagreement with Ramstedt's conclusions in *Zur Frage nach der Stellung des Tschuwassischen*, (JSFOu. XXXVIII, 1922, 1) and think that the old Gombocz-Németh theory on Chuvash-Mongol contacts is nearer the truth. — This is not the place to reconsider the whole problem of the Chuvash language, but I hope to be able to make a modest contribution to its discussion in the not too distant future. The older theories, set up some forty years ago, just cannot be sustained any longer. In a lecture delivered quite some time ago, on the 14th May 1948, to the Société asiatique I have indicated the broad outline along which, to my mind, we have to proceed.

in the case of *yul* must have taken place after the Mongol-Chuvash separation, i.e. subsequent to the westward migration of the Chuvash to the Volga-region.

All this may seem too hypothetical considering the scanty nature of the evidence, and I certainly would not consider the *yul* ~ *šäl* correspondence to be sufficient for proving each stage of the historico-linguistic process I have just outlined. Some time ago, quite by chance, I found a Cheremis word, attested only in the 18th century (*kunzü* 'ship'), which I equated with Mongol *günje* 'raft', Olcha *kênzume*, Goldi *könzima*.¹ This again is an area-word, not specifically Tunguz or Mongol and certainly not Altaic. How did it come into Cheremis?

There are other facts which seem to show Tunguz or Mongol influences in the Volga-region; a whole complex of problems awaits exploration. The aim of this article was simply to call attention to its existence.

¹ *On water-transport in Central-Eurasia*, (UAI. XXXIII, 1961, 156—179), pp. 172—173.