

HUNGARIAN BÁJ 'BEAUTY, CHARM'

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A "charming etymology" in honour of Professor Zsuzsa Kakuk

Considerable confusion exists about the origin of the Hungarian word *báj*. In this paper I cannot promise to solve the problem, and what is more, I am afraid I shall add new ones. Nevertheless I hope that I shall at least be able to show a way out.

The original meaning of the Hungarian word was 'superstition, magic influence, magic healing power'. The semantical field and changes are so near to English *charm* that I shall not deal with the semantical problems of the Hungarian word. It is first registered in the Glossary of Beszterce (after 1395) as an attribute of *fű* 'grass' and it occurs frequently as a member of the composition *bű-báj* with the same or similar meanings.

Leaving aside the earlier opinions about the origin of the word I would first refer to the work of István Kniezsa on the Hungarian words of Slavic origin (1955). Kniezsa listed the word among those which erroneously had been considered to be of Slavic origin (1955, 792–3). According to Kniezsa, the Slavic origin proposed among others by Miklosich has to be refuted, because the word with which it has been compared, the noun *bajka* (from *bajati* 'fabulari, incantare') occurs late and everywhere has only the meaning 'fable, tale'. Kniezsa accepted the etymology suggested by Révai, and confirmed by Munkácsi and Gombocz from Turkic *baği* 'bond, binding'. The Hungarian Historical–Etymological Dictionary (TESz I 1967, 218) does not doubt the Turkic origin, though the authors remark: "Though the phonetic correspondence is not regular, it can be explained through the forms with personal suffixes [...]. The Slavic derivation is erroneous". Ligeti in his last work on the Turkic connections of the Hungarian language (1986) listed the word *báj* three times among the words of Turkic origin, (86, 207, 271), once with a question mark on p. 202. In the Index the word has been put into brackets which means that he did not consider the word of Turkic origin. The reason is given on pp. 272–273. After a lengthy discussion of the scanty data on the Turkic side, Ligeti returned to the Slavic verb *bajati* and wrote "... the Slavic word came into Hungarian as *bájol* and from it as secondary back derivation by inner Hungarian development a form *báj* may have been formed." This would have occurred parallel to Hungarian *varázs* 'magic' from Slavic *vražiti* as it is suggested by TESz (III, 1976, 1091). Then Ligeti added 'the Hungarian word *báj* could have got a new impulse from the

Ottoman word". The newest etymological dictionary (EWUng 1992, 69–70) lists the word under the derivation *bájos* and notes "Wahrsch[einliches] Ausgangsw[ort] der W[ort]Familie *báj*: Lehnw[ort], vermutl[ich] aus einer türk Spr[rache] ⊕ Vgl: uig *bay* 'Band; Fessel'; osm *bağ* 'magisches Band'...". The authors add at the end of the article "In den slaw[ischen] Spr[achen] gibt es zahlreiche W[örter] mit ähnl[icher] Lautform und Bed[eutung] (vgl: sbkr *baj* 'Zauberei, Zauber usw', ukr (v[er]j[et]et) *baï* 'Zauberer'; usw), deren Urspr[ung] nicht klar ist; so ist die Herleitung des ungar[ischen] W[ortes] aus diesen kaum wahrsch[einlich]".

All authors have more or less seen the problem of the derivation from Turkic. A supposed Turkic *bağ* 'bound, magic bound' would have given in Hungarian *bó* or *bú* (< **bau* < **bay* < **bağ*). The judgement of the correctness of this statement is made difficult by the fact that the word is monosyllabic. However, we find similar changes as in Hungarian *bő* 'rich, abundant' < **beu* ← T **bey* < *beg*, Hungarian *bú* 'sorrow, grief' ← T **buy* < **buñ*, Hungarian *szó* 'word' < **sau* ← T **saw* < *sab*. There is no ground to suppose that a hypothetical *bağ* would have given in Hungarian *baji* nor is it easy to suppose that the *-j-* is a Hungarian element from a unattested *bá* + personal suffix *-ja* and then from the suffixed form *bája* a back-formation *báj*. This occurred in Hungarian *száj* 'mouth' or *máj* 'liver', *fej* 'head', but all three words pertain to the inalienable category of nouns, and at least in the case of *száj* and *fej* we find the shorter forms as *szám*, *szád*, *főm*, *főd* beside the secondary later forms *szájam*, *szájad*, *fejem*, *fejed*.

All problems would be solved if the *-j-* (= *-y-*) would have been present already in the form borrowed.

The Slavic word is now better documented. It has been treated by Trubačov in the first volume of his etymological dictionary of the Slavic languages (Trubačov I, 1974) under **bajati* I, **baja*/**bajb* and **bajb*. I shall not repeat what can be found there, I shall only try to sum up the most essential facts. In the Slavic languages there does exist a noun **baja*/**bajb* which has a feminine gender. In the southern Slavic languages (Slovene, Serbo-Croatian) it has the meaning 'čary, sglaz, koldovstvo, zaklinanie', that is 'charm', while in the West and East Slavic languages (Czech, Czech dialects, Russian) it has the meaning 'basnja, mif, prozvišče veseloj govarljivoj ženščiny, rasskazčicy' that is 'tale, fable, nickname of women who relate the tales jolly'. The noun *bajb*, in most cases with masculine gender, has the meaning 'vorožba, koldovstvo, incantatio; očarovanie, čary; znahar, koldun' in the Southern Slavic languages (Serbo-Croatian) and in Old Ukrainian, while in all other languages (Slovak, Russian dial., Ukrainian, Belorussian) it has the meaning 'mif, skazanie, legenda, skazočnik, zabava, razvlečenie etc.' that is 'tale, myth, legend, story teller, amusement etc.'. According to Trubačov both groups of words are derivations from the verb **bajati*. Trubačov did not group the meanings of the verb *bajati* according to word geographical distribution. The verb has in all languages the meaning 'to speak, to chat etc.', however the meaning 'to spell, to bewitch, charm, enchant

etc.' is present only in the Southern Slavic languages such as Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, and only in Old Ukrainian and in some Ukrainian dialects. In the Western and Eastern Slavic languages the meaning includes further 'to tell stories, to chat, to speak nonsense etc.'. The semantic change in the Southern Slavic languages 'to speak' > 'to cast magic spell' > 'to bewitch or heal by words' may be a spontaneous change known to other languages as well, but may be the result of a substrate influence.

The Turkic word *bağ* has the meaning 'bond, tie, belt'. Until now the meaning 'magic bond' has not been found or cited. It occurs in an Old Turkic Manichean text where the virtues are dealt with. Here we read ... *bir qamağ yeklerke bağı bolzun* (LeCoq 1911, 15, ll. 19–20). 'one among them (i.e. the virtues) should be the bond of all demons'. In Turkish of Turkey we find the following words: *bağ-* 'to lay a spell upon, to charm', *bağı* 'spell, charm', *bağıcı* 'a sorcerer', *göz bağıcı* 'a sorcerer, who blinds the eyes'. Ottoman in Arabic script writes the word either with *gain* or with *ya*. The pronunciation of both *bağı* and *bayi* are the same: /*bayi*/. In Chuvash we find *kuş pāv* which is rendered by Ašmarin (VII 30) as 'zastavit' videt' na javu to ego ne možet byt' v dejstvitel'nosti (gov. o fokusnikah, o spektakle)', in the new dictionary of Skvorcov (1982) simply 'gipnotizirovat' is noted. These meanings developed from the meaning 'to cast spell, to bewitch by the eyes'. The Chuvash word goes back to a former **bağ-* 'to bind'.

In Chuvash we also find *pāya* 'verēvka (korotka i tolstaja), bolezn' gorla', *pāyav* 'id.'. Both forms are loanwords from Tatar. In Tatar we find side by side *bau* 'verēvka, šnur, žgut' and *bäy* 'privjaz'. The same occur in Bashkir. The form *bäy* goes back to *bay*, and in fact in some Tatar dialects the older form *bay* is preserved (see *Tatar teleney dialektologik süzlege*. 1969, 65). The noun *bay* had earlier a broader distribution which can be seen from the derivation *bayla-* 'to bind, tie, tie up, attach, weave, twist, to dress (a wound), to train (horses), to fatten (cattle) /tr./, to separate (mares) for milking, to aim (rifles etc.), to create obstacles, to hinder' which can be found in Kazak (Shnitnikov 1966, 41), all secondary meanings developed from 'to tie, bind'. The verb *bayla-* with the same or similar meanings was present in Middle Turkic (Chagatai, At-Tuhfat), it is present in Kirgiz, Karaim, Kumük, Karachai-Balkar, Üzbek, New Uighur, Altai, Yakut, while the verb has the form *bäylä-* in Tatar and Bashkir. In Karaim the expression *köz bayladı* has the meaning 'on zakoldoval ego'. In some languages the form **bağ* and **bay* coexist. In Kirgiz we find *köz bayla-* 'to deceive, to deceive the eyes' and *köz booču* (< *bağiči*) 'the one who deceives the eyes, illusionist, juggler', in Yakut *ba:y-* 'vjazat', *svjazyvat'*, *bayi* 'svjaz', *zavjazka, uzy, vjazka, privjazka*, but. *biä* (< **bağ*) 'verēvka'.

This means that we have three forms, *bağ*, *bay* and *bağı* > *bayi* the latter in Ottoman. The first two are derivatives from a verb **ba-* as already supposed by Clauson (1972, 310) in case of *bağ*. The noun *bay* is a deverbal noun with the suffix -I (i.e. *bai*). The suffix was dealt with by Erdal (1991, 340–41) and by me

in *Magyar Nyelv* (90, 1994, 138–146) in connection with the word *uri*. Both *bağ* and *bay* also had the meaning ‘magic bond’.

Up till now we were confronted with the fact that Hungarian *báj* had no comparable equivalent in Turkic or Slavic, now we see that in both language groups there did exist a noun **bay* with the semantics near to the Hungarian word.

Returning to the Slavic word one has to ask: did the meaning ‘to cast spell, to enchant, bewitch’ develop spontaneously? One cannot exclude this since we find similar semantic developments in other languages. However, morphologically the “Indo-European solution” is always the use of a preverb as in Latin *cantare* > *incantare*, and this was the rule in Slavic as in **govoriti* ‘to speak’ > **zagovoriti* among others also ‘to charm’, **bavati* ‘to speak’ > **obavati* ‘to bewitch’. And from *bajati* ‘to speak etc.’ the noun *obajanie* is formed with the meaning ‘charm, charming’. On the other hand the derivation of Slavic *baj/bajb* from *bajati* is not usual. Trubačov (1974, 140) supposed the influence of the *-jo-* base of the nouns. He surely thought of such old pairs where *o* is in the nominal and **e* in the verbal stem as in **bojъ* ‘battle’ and **biti* < **bei-* ‘to beat’, **gnojъ* ‘pus’ and **gniti* ‘to rot, foul’ < **gnei-* < **ghnei-* etc. see also Bernštejn 1974, 282–288 (I owe this bibliographical data to Klára Agyagási). With the exception of a few onomatopoeic words such as **grajb* ‘karkanie’ from **grajati* ‘karkat’, there was no noun with *-a-* base in Slavic in such corresponding forms. (Trubačov 7, 1980).

Thus we can suppose that the Southern Slavic meanings of *baj/bajb* developed under the influence of Turkic languages with which early Slavs lived together among others in the Balkans and in Pannonia.

It is more difficult to answer the question: from which language did the Hungarians borrow the word? Since the Hungarian word *báj* ‘charm’ occurs together with the Hungarian word *bű* as in *bű-báj*, *bűvöl-bájol*, *bűbájos* etc. and *bű* is of Turkic origin (← OT *bügü* ‘sage, wizard, witchcraft’ see also Hungarian *bölcs* ‘wise’ ← OT *bügüči*) I consider more probable the Turkic origin. We cannot exclude, however, the Slavic origin and even we can suppose that the word was borrowed from Turkic people living in Pannonia who were on the way to Slavicization, people of the late Avar Empire I guess. The “Avar” origin or more precisely the Turkic origin of the word from the Late Avar Empire would not be an isolated case.

Whatever will be the final solution of the enigmatic origin of Hungarian *báj* its prototype was **bay* and not **bağ*.

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