

the best of the collection. Sinor gathered some Old Turkic features, which did not seem to be Turkic so far, as they are not present in the language and/or culture of the later and the present Turks. Such features are the Eastern orientation, the so called *Oberstufenzählung* (13 is the third of the twenties), non Turkic personal and clan names of some of the leaders of the Turks in the 6th to 8th centuries, a few words which figure in the Old Turkic runiform inscriptions but are elsewhere not present in other Turkic sources, three different ancestral legends on the origin of the Turks. In addition Sinor lists those data which hint at different types of Turks, mostly in Chinese sources. I do not think that all these "non Turkic" features belong to the same source. Moreover, most of the statements are not valid. We find the Eastern orientation in all Turkic groups that were not subject to Islamisation, Sinor himself refers to Yakut, Yellow Uighur and Chuvash. The orientation of the tombs of Turks, where they can be identified, is also towards the East. Words like *sab* 'word' do not occur only in the "solemn language of their funerary inscriptions". The word *sab* is present in Buddhist texts, in the Divan of Kashgari, in the work of Abu Hayyan and in Old Ottoman texts. Chuvash *sāvā* 'song, verse, text' should also pertain to *sab*. The derivation *savči* 'go-between, prophet, messenger etc.' is present not only in the Old and Middle Turkic sources but also in some modern Turkic languages as the Tatar dialects of Tobol and Tümen, in Kazak and Halaj. Nevertheless the idea is good and one can only subscribe Sinor's conclusion "I think it is safe to say that not all the inhabitants of the Türk state were Türks or even Turkic speaking, and that not all the Türks belonged to the ruling stratum of the Türk state" (III, p. 157). The detection of the complicated ethnogenetic processes is more fruitful than the search for the origins of a people. Sinor is looking to the North and is supposing groups of Uralic and/or Samoyed origin as constituents of the Old Turkic Empire. At the same time I would add two others. One of them is Ogur Turkic, the other is Iranian. Not all Ogur speaking groups went to the West in

the 4th to 6th centuries, we have now good reason to suppose that a smaller part remained in the East. On the other hand contacts with Iranian speaking groups e.g. with the Sakas can be well demonstrated. Sinor is referring to such data that can be used in the search for Ogur and Iranian components of the Old Turkic Empire. Papers as *The Making of the Great Khan*, the *Interpreters in Medieval Inner Asia*, or the *Diplomatic Practices in Mediaeval Inner Asia* will interest an even broader circle of readers. A special field where Sinor is at home is the group of Western sources on the people of the steppe. The historical Attila, Western information on several groups of the Khitans, Mongols as seen by the West or Latin sources on the Khanate of Uzbek offer plenty of new insights into Western sources and the history of the nomads of the East. Sinor is one of the few scholars who is able to visit sources from Europe and from China and use information hidden in them with the same ease. The volume will give the reader plenty of new information and fun.

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GYULA DÉCSY, *The Turkic Protolanguage: a Computational Reconstruction*. Eurolingua. P.O. Box 101. Bloomington, Indiana. 1998. (Bibliotheca Nostratica 11.), 216 pp.

It is always a kind duty and an awarding challenge to review a good book. A book is good if it brings new material, new insights, new methodological approach. A book deserves a review also in case if it is a textbook, a handbook that summarises the valid knowledge of previous researches. But what to do with a book which is simply bad? In most cases the editor decides not to write or not to let to write a review. I have decided to write at least a warning notice for several reasons. First Gyula Décsy is a person of reputable professional career. He got his first scientific degree in Hungary in Slavistics. Later he was professor of Finno-Ugrian studies in Hamburg and in Bloomington. Second, the reconstruction of the Turkic Protolanguage is an

important topic and many new attempts have been made lately to clarify the way towards its reconstruction. Third, the book is written in an easy, readable language and the danger that scholars in general and comparative linguistics will accept its results on its face value is great.

The book consists of six chapters. After an Introduction, the second chapter has the heading Phonetics/Phonology, the third Morphology, the fourth Syntax. The fifth chapter deals with Proto-Turkic Semantics. Chapter Six is a Vocabulary with a Proto-Turkic-English and an English-Proto-Turkic Wordlist respectively.

Turkic Protolanguage is, according to Décsy, the ancestral common form of 27 languages representing ca. 110 million native speakers: and the enumeration of the languages follows with their estimated number of speakers and the world-ranking of the particular language. Drawing the borderline between a language and different dialects is always a disputable question, but important languages are missing as Afshar (45,000 people in Afghanistan), Yellow Uigur (5000 people in China, extremely interesting language for the reconstruction of Proto-Turkic), Kashkay (570,000 people in Iran), Khorasan Turkic (400,000 in Iran, the latter two languages known since long, but described only recently). On the next page we get the definition of Old Turkic which according to Décsy "was a language spoken by a group of Oguz tribes and the forebears of the ancient Uigurs in the present-day Mongolia (Seven-Stream-Land, see 1.5, Northeast of Almaty) between ca. 700 A.D. and 1000 to 1100 A.D.". I cannot imagine any definition of "present-day Mongolia" which would include the Seven-Stream-Land. Later the Primordial Home of the Turks is defined as: "A closer definition would be the area south from the Upper Yenisei, so-called the Seven-Stream-land and the Talas Valley" (the definition follows more or less the introduction of von Gabain's *Alttürkische Grammatik*, cf. Gabain: "Die Inschriften stammen aus der nördlichen Mongolei, aus dem oberen Jenissei, dem Siebenstrom-Land und aus dem Tal des Talas", p. 1). The claim that Old Turkic was spoken "by a group of Oghuz tribes and the forebears of an-

cient Uigurs" is at least arbitrary. If the forebears of ancient Uigurs spoke Old Turkic what did the ancient Uigurs speak? What was the language of the ancient Kipchaks, or the forebears of the ancient Kipchaks? Then we learn "[t]heoretically, Old Turkic should be close to the present-day Turkic languages or dialects spoken in Xinjiang(...), East Kazakhstan and Tuva." Under 1.3, on page 10 we read: "The main source of reconstruction of the Turkic Protolanguage is Old Turkic" and "Old Turkic and Proto-Turkic represent basically the same language form"... Later there is a distinction made between Early (pre-Islamic) and Late Old Turkic, the latter represented by Mahmud al-Kashgari. In the book written by Décsy "...only Early (pre-Islamic) Old Turkic was considered for the Proto-Turkic reconstruction". The reason is that the Arabic Islam influenced the language of Kashgari (On the Kutadgu Bilig, a work written in Karakhanid Turkic a few years earlier than the Divan of Kashgari no words are spent). One would think that until the 11th century Old Turkic, whatever this means, was a pure, untouched language (something which does not exist at all). But this would exclude the Buddhist, Nestorian and Manichean texts, which are included in the corpus labelled by Décsy as Early Old Turkic, based on a misunderstanding of the essence of the *Alttürkische Grammatik* of Annemarie von Gabain. One has the impression that Décsy has never read the beautiful Old Turkic poems and proverbs, included among others, in the work of Kashgari, neither did he count the Arabic elements in Kashgari, a negligibly small amount.

According to Décsy the "inherited" Old-Turkic/Proto-Turkic vocabulary comprises close to 3,400 indigenous words – the largest of the lexicon of any well-established proto-language as proved by the following comparison (Proto-Slavic and Proto-Germanic data estimated): Uralic, around 4000 B.C., ca. 500 words, Finno-Ugric, around 3000 B.C., ca. 1200 words, Indo-European, around 4000/3000 B.C., ca. 2400 words, Proto-Slavic, around 800 A.D., ca. 2000 words, Proto-Germanic, around 500 A.D., ca. 1800 words. The arbitrary and unfounded

equation of Proto-Turkic with Old Turkic makes of course, things relatively easy. Neither is it defined what Décsy understands under "word". Sometimes he does not make difference between basic words and derivations. In fact he remarks on p. 92 that all words were eliminated from the corpus which appeared to be questionable (late derivatives, words denoting relatively new concepts, most loan words and proper names). As we shall see later Décsy has a very scanty knowledge on Turkic word derivation. The whole material is based on A. von Gabain's *Glossar* to be found in her *Alttürkische Grammatik*. In addition the three (now four) existing volumes of Severtjan's Etymological dictionary and the *Drevnetjurkskij Slovar'* was used. To demonstrate the possible primordial homeland of the Turks, Décsy cites the names of animals in Proto-Turkic/Old Turkic, to which "Some Late Old Turkic words were also added..." with no reason given. Under 4.5.2 the names of horse and donkey are listed. Here we find *adghyr* (I retain the transcription of Décsy) 'stallion', *adghyrtlyq* 'stud', *äshgäk* 'donkey' and as a separate item *eshgek* 'donkey'. The second item is a derivative of the first, the fourth is the same as the third. One wonders what the numeric relationship between the different groups then show. I am afraid, nothing. Even less can this material be compared with lists from Proto-Uralic or Proto-Indo-European.

I shall not dwell on the historical sketch given by Décsy. Views that he claims to be "generally accepted" are mostly outdated if ever existed. But he even does not seem to know the older views e.g. that of J. Németh, one time the boss of Décsy in the Institute of Linguistics in Budapest on the primordial homeland of the Turks (*Probleme der Türkischen Urzeit*, in: *Analecta Orientalia memoriae Alexandri de Kőrös dicata. Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica, Budapestini, 1942-1947*, pp. 57-102). It is true that many non-Turkic ethnic groups were Turkicised. But if he mentions among them "...as the perhaps most significant, all Anatolia (present-day Turkey) and North Africa (Egypt, Maghreb)" (p. 18), one is tempted to give up reading the book. Three totally different cases, Anatolia

(great majority of the Turkish speaking population), Egypt (once had a ruling dynasty of Turkic origin) and Maghreb (never under serious Turkic influence) under the same hat is too much.

There does exist a discussion on the history of Avars in the 9th century. But on what ground Décsy claims (p. 24) that the Avars or their groups may have retreated to the East and built up (or just enhanced) the historically well known Volga-Bulghar and the Kazar "empires" remains enigmatic. One does not wonder that Décsy is mixing the On Ok 'Ten Tribes' with the Onogur, the 'Ten Ogur' with reference to Golden (*An Introduction to the history of the Turkic people*, Wiesbaden 1992, p. 22, where no trace of such claim is to be found).

The chapter on Phonetics/Phonology (what does the backslash mean?) is based on the corpus of Proto-Turkic words on pp. 93-172 prepared for computational operation. I shall come back to the wordlist, but first let us throw a glance on the phonology. According to Décsy Proto-Turkic did not have closed *e* and vowel length. He found 24 occurrences of closed *e* (mainly from Yenissei-Runic and from Brahmi-script), but according to him these are incorrect denotations for *ä* or *i* and were disregarded. We have ample evidence that closed /*e*/ was part of the phonological system of Old Turkic as long vowels were. Décsy seems to have never heard about the discussion on the closed *e* (J. Németh, *Zur Kenntnis des geschlossenen e im Türkischen*, Kőrösi Csoma Archivum I. Erf. Bd. 1939, pp 515-531, L. Ligeti, *Sur la langue des Afchars d'Afghanistan*, *Acta Orient. Hung.* 7, 1957, pp. 115-116, here quoted the earlier works on the closed *e* of K. Foy, M. Räsänen, R. Arat and K. Thomsen). Though he is following mostly Gabain, I have the impression that even her works were not read with attention. Gabain wrote in the *Fundamenta* (listed by Décsy in his References on p. 216) "In den Inschriften gibt es folgende Vokale: *a, ä, e, i, i, o, ö, u* und *ü*. Es gab lange und auch reduzierte Vokale" (*Das Altürkische*, in: *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta I*, Aquis Mattiacis, 1959, p. 24). The etymological dictionary of G. Clauson

(*An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, Oxford, 1972) is sometimes quoted, but Décsy did not realise that Clauson is consequently marking that both the closed *e* and the long vowels are quoting Old Turkic data. The discovery of the Proto-Turkic long vowels by Polivanov (K voprosu o dolgih glasnyh v obščetjurkskom prajazyke, *Doklady AN ser. V*, 1927:4), Räsänen (Über die lange Vokale der türkischen Lehnwörter im Ungarischen, *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen* 24, 1937, pp. 246–255), and Ligeti (Les voyelles long en turc, *Journal Asiatique* 1938, pp. 177–204) did not impress Décsy if he has ever read these papers. The reconstruction of the Proto-Turkic vocalism by Shcherbak (*Sravnitel'naja fonetika tjurkskih jazykov*, Leningrad, 1970), by Serebrennikov and Gadzhieva (*Sravnitel'no-istoričeskaja grammatika tjurksih jazykov*, Baku 1979), by Tenishev (*Sravnitel'no-istoričeskaja grammatika tjurksih jazykov. Fonetika*, Moskva 1984) are unknown or disregarded by Décsy, as are the works of G. Doerfer (e.g. Proto-Turkic: Reconstruction Problems, *Türk Dili Arasturmalari Yilligi Belleten*, 1975–76, pp. 1–59), M. Erdal (e.g. *Old Turkic Word Formation*, Wiesbaden 1991) or L. Johanson (e.g. *Alttürkisch als "dissimilierende Sprache"*, Wiesbaden 1979) to mention only some of the most important ones. If he had ever read any of these works he would have not written the following sentence: "It is well known from Turkic historical phonology that *b* (*cp*) and *m* are interchangeable" (p. 26). The conclusion on p. 27 that *p* had as its allophones *w*, *b*, and *m* is simply a factual error.

I would select from the Morphology only one paragraph. On p. 60 Décsy writes "In predicative use the 3rd person singular was *ol* or *o*, and the 3rd person plural *ol* or *olar*. This *ol* (plural *olar*) may be connected on a preprotolinguistic basis with *är* II 'to be, to exist, to take place, to concern' (an auxiliary high frequency word), if we accept the possibility of an alternation *l-r* and of a vertical vowel harmony (*u* for *a* interpreted as *o*)." If words have any common sense, then vowel harmony should mean at least harmony of two vowels. How would it be possible to get from the verb *är-*

the demonstrative pronoun *ol*, which later replaced an earlier pronoun of the third person, will remain in darkness. It is further totally unsubstantiated to speak about an alternation *l-r*, whatever this *preprotolinguistic basis* may mean. With similar tools one can derive any noun from any verb and any phonetic form from any other.

The Wordlist is full of misunderstandings, improper use of Gabain's Glossar, ghost words etc. On p. 124 we find *qara* I 'domesticated animal', *qara* II 'black, dark', *qara* III 'people'. These are of course not three homophonous, but different words. The first and the third are the same as the second. From the expression *qara bodun* 'the black i.e. the ordinary people' sometimes the qualified is lacking, the ordinary people are simply called "the blacks". Décsy forgets that Gabain gave a Glossary to Old Turkic readings and not a linguistically organised wordlist. The Wordlist contains loanwords, as e.g. *jinchü* 'pearl', which is of Chinese origin. The Wordlist is ill organised. According to Décsy he has 14 words beginning with *jat*, (p. 108), in fact only two are listed.

Without continuing further one can only regret that such a great endeavour has been invested into a work which is unreliable and superficial. Turkologists will not use the work, but it would be good if it would not deceive the non-Turkologists. The name of the series "Bibliotheca Nostratica" is a bad omen. This is the only reason for writing this review.

András Róna-Tas

*Présence arabe dans le Croissant Fertile avant l'Hégire*. Actes de la table ronde internationale organisée par l'Unité de recherche associée 1062 du CNRS, *Études sémitiques*, au Collège de France, le 13 novembre 1993. Textes réunis par Hélène Lozachmeur. Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris 1995, 148 pp. ISBN 2 86538 254 0

The appearance of Arabs and Arabic on the scene of world history is usually associated