

TURKIC–ALANIAN–HUNGARIAN CONTACTS*

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From the Turkic loanwords in Hungarian the author selected those botanic terms which are present in Turkic and/or in Ossetic. Preference was given to those tree names which have palaeobotanic data. Twelve Hungarian tree names display Old Chuvash traits. Out of these names five, or perhaps six, can also be attested in Ossetic: the names of the ‘ash tree’, ‘cornel’, ‘pear’, ‘blackthorn’, ‘bulrush’, and ‘hazel’. The name of the ‘oak’ is an Alanian loanword in Hungarian. The name of the ‘reed’ is not present in Hungarian, but the corresponding Ossetic word is a Turkic borrowing with Chuvash traits. On the basis of these data the author tried to fix a region where Hungarians, Turks, and Alans may have lived together in the 5th–7th centuries.

Key words: Turkic loans in Hungarian, Turkic tree names, Old Chuvash, Ossetic, Palaeobotany.

1. A personal remark on Julius Németh and the Turkic tree names

Some 50 years ago, when I frequented the second course in Turkology, Professor Julius Németh gave me a seminar-work with the title: “The role of the Turkic tree names in the determination of the Turkic *Urheimat*”. The topic was modish, the role of the tree names in the determination of the Indo-European and Finno-Ugric *Urheimat* was on the agenda. When I threw a glance at the relevant literature I soon realised that a lengthy article on the Finno-Ugric tree names has just been published by Mrs Németh (N. Sebestyén 1951). I collected the most important tree names of the Turkic languages from the Russian–Turkic dictionaries and began to work on them with great zeal and expectations. After a few weeks I realised that the Turkic languages have no common tree names, and the whole task cannot be properly executed – at least for me. I gave back the topic and got another. After years, I asked Németh why he had given this subject to a young scholar. – “I could do nothing with it and

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hoped you will have some ideas” – he said. Then I swore never to deal with the Turkic names of trees but now I have to take back my oath.

2. The Turkic loan words in Hungarian

With my former student, Professor Árpád Berta, we work on a comprehensive monograph on the more than 400 hundred basic Turkic loanwords in Hungarian (for more details see Berta–Róna-Tas 2002). As we proceeded in alphabetical order soon we were confronted with several Hungarian tree names and botanical terms of Turkic origin.

3. Over 40 botanical terms

In the present *Handlist* containing 400 and odd words we can find more than 40 Hungarian botanical names of Turkic origin. A small minority of these terms are of Cumanian origin and they exist only as dialectal words in the so-called Lesser and Greater Cumania (Hungarian *Kiskunság* and *Nagykunság*) of Central Hungary. None of them can be of later, Ottoman origin. But the dominant part of this terminology pertains to the old layer of Turkic loanwords in Hungarian, and display traits which point to a borrowing before or not much later than the Conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarians in 895. Many of them have clear-cut Old Chuvash traits. For the reconstruction of the mediaeval history of the Eurasian Steppe the tree names play an important role.

4. Fifteen botanical terms to be dealt with

In this paper I shall deal with 15 botanical terms which help us locate the place where the great quantity of these terms may have been taken over. Many of the trees and plants are not specific for a geographical region, but in some cases palaeobotanical researches can either exclude certain regions or delineate the borders of distribution of a plant in a given period.

I have no time and space here to deal with general problems of the botanical names and their relationship with the denoted plants. I will do that in a longer paper in print (Róna-Tas 2004). Similarly, I cannot go into the details of the recent progress in the palaeobotanical research.

I have selected the following 15 botanical names because they have some relevance to the Hungarian–Turkic–Alanian contacts and/or their geobotanical distribution is of special interest for our topic.

5. Two Hungarian words for ‘oak’ of Iranian origin

In modern Hungarian we find only one word for ‘oak’ **tölgy** (No. 13 in the Appendix). This word had in Old Hungarian a closed labial and was pronounced as **tülgy** [töld']. In the Old Hungarian sources of the 12th–14th centuries we find a second word for ‘oak’ and this was **tül** (No. 12). This word is present also in Zyrian and Udmurt and the Proto-Permian form can be reconstructed as **tül'ě*. Scholars have for long suggested the Iranian origin of the Proto-Permian and Hungarian words. The word may be connected with the Indo-European word for ‘tree’ and ‘oak’ (**t'e/orw*, see English *tree*, Russian *derevo*), through the mediation of an Iranian dialect where a change *r > l* occurred. The fact that the word is present in both Proto-Permian and Hungarian points to a place where the two language groups lived in one region. This is not the only Proto-Permian–Hungarian common isogloss (on details see Rédei 1964, 1969). Chronologically, Hungarian *tül* is an earlier borrowing than *tölgy*.

Hungarian *tölgy* is of Alanian origin. The word is present in Ossetian. There was a discussion between Joki (1973, p. 330) and Abaev (1979/III, pp. 315–316) concerning the etymology of the Ossetian word. Abaev was right in pointing out that the morpheme *-dž-* in Ossetian is not a special suffix forming tree names, as was claimed by Joki, but the suffix may have formed, among others, also tree names. Now I refrain myself from any further discussion of the Ossetian word, since the only relevant point for us is that the Hungarian word was copied from Alanian (together with many other Hungarian words) in a region where the oak was present in the first millennium AD.

6. A Turkic word of Iranian origin: ‘cornel’

The Hungarian word for ‘cornel’ is **som** (No. 2). This word is evidently of Turkic origin, though it can be attested in a very restricted area of Turcia, it can be found only in Kumuck, Karachai-Balkar, Turkmen and as a Turkic loan in Kalmuck. The Turkic form is *čum* and the Hungarian *š* in *som* [šom] shows an Old Chuvash trait (see also Hungarian *sajt* ‘cheese’ ← T *šiγt* < *čigüt* ← Alan *čigit* (< **tik-*) > Ossetian *ciγt/cigd*). The word for ‘cornel’ is present in Ossetian as *cym/cumae* which is a regular continuation of an Alanian **čum*. The word is, according to Abaev (1958/I, p. 321) a Caucasian word present in Lezgian and Tabasaran. A possible connection with Persian is not clear. We have here to reconstruct a Caucasian → Alan → Turkic → Hungarian way of copying.

7. Five Ossetian words of Turkic origin: ‘ash tree’, ‘pear’, ‘blackthorn’, ‘bulrush’ and ‘reed’

Four Ossetian botanical terms are of Turkic origin and simultaneously present in Hungarian. They are the name of the ‘ash tree’, Hungarian **kőrís** [kő:riš], Ossetian

kaerz, *kaerzæ* (No. 1), the ‘pear’, Hungarian **körte** [körtä], Ossetian *kaerdo/kaerttu* (No. 3), ‘blackthorn’, Hungarian **kökény** [kökén], Ossetian *kakon/kokojæ*, *koko* (No. 4) and ‘bulrush’ Hungarian **gyékény** [d’ëkëñ], Ossetian *jegeŋ/jegejnae*. The fifth botanical term is not present in Hungarian, but shows a clear Chuvash character (*l* in place of *š* of the other Turkic languages). This word is Turkic *qamiš* ‘reed’ which occurs as *qamıl/qamil* in Ossetian, see Chuvash *čämăš* ‘reed’ (← Tatar), but Chuvash *čämäl* ‘stalk’.

8. Problems around the Hungarian name of the ‘beech’

The Hungarian name of the ‘beech’ *bükk* has hitherto been considered to be of unknown origin. According to the two etymological dictionaries, the *TESz* and the *EWUng* both edited by Benkő, the word *bükk* should have been borrowed in a territory west of the line connecting the delta of the Danube and Königsberg since the beech is present only in that area. According to the recent palaeobotanical researches, however, this is true only for the *Fagus sylvaticus* or European beech. The *Fagus orientalis* or Oriental beech was and is present to the north of Caucasia and in the SE corner of the Crimean peninsula.

Hungarian *bükk* goes back to an earlier Old Hungarian form *bik*. This Hungarian word is of Turkic origin. The word is present only in Crimean Tatar and Nogai in the form *bik* and denotes in both languages ‘beech’. Since the word does not occur in any other Kipchak language in this form and meaning, we have to suppose that the word pertains to an older local layer of Turkic languages.

Its etymology seems to be clear. The word goes back to the Turkic word *bük* ‘forest, thicket’ present already in Kashgari’s *Divan* and in numerous Middle and New Turkic languages. The delabialisation may have occurred in Khazar or Bulghar Turkic, in any case it is an areal feature. Though the Hungarian word *bükk*, *bik* is not present in Ossetian, the geobotanic area is the same as of those dealt with above.

9. Four Hungarian words of Turkic origin: ‘hawthorn’, ‘hornbeam’, ‘maple’ and ‘nut’

In Hungarian there are four further botanical terms which clearly show Old Chuvash traits: ‘hawthorn’ **gyümölcsény** [d’ümölcšëñ] (No. 7), ‘hornbeam’ **gyertyán** [d’ert’än] (No. 8), ‘maple’: **gyűrű-fa** [d’ürü-fa] (No. 9), ‘nut’: **dió** [dió:] (No. 10).

Interesting is *gyümölcsény*, a derivation from the Old Chuvash equivalent of Turkic *yemiš* ‘fruit’ present in Hungarian as **gyümölcs** [d’ümölcš]. Hungarian *gyertyán* is a derivative from the Old Chuvash corresponding form of Turkic *yarta* ‘candle’, also present in Hungarian as **gyertya** [d’ert’a]. Both have the same suffix *-An*, which is present also in Hungarian *kökény* ‘blackthorn’ (← T *köken*) and *gyékény* ‘bulrush’ (← T *jäkän* < *yäkän*). However *yemišen* is present in several Turkic languages while **yartan* or its developments did not come to light until now.

10. A debated etymology: ‘hazel’

The Hungarian word for ‘hazelnut’ is *mogyoró* [mod’orō]. It occurs in the earliest Latin documents from the middle of the 11th century on in the form *monyorou* [mońorou] (see Bárczi 1951, p. 29). For a long time it has been derived from the Old Hungarian word for ‘egg’ *mony*. However, already D. Bartha pointed to some of the difficulties with this etymology (D. Bartha 1962, p. 29). Recently Professor Benkő expressed his doubts concerning the Hungarian etymology (personal communication).

In Chuvash we find a word denoting ‘hazel’ which has the forms: *măyăr*, *măyără*, *măyră*, *muyăr*, *muyără*, *mur’ă*, *murě*, *mır’ă* (Ashmarin 1935/VIII, pp. 235, 256, 257, 275, 290; Fedotov 1996, p. 346). According to Paasonen (1908, pp. 271–272) and Gombocz (1912, pp. 220–221) the Chuvash word is of Hungarian origin, while Jegorov (1964, p. 130) and Fedotov (1996, p. 346) claimed that the Hungarian word is of Chuvash origin.

Until now the Chuvash word had no Turkic etymology. I am suggesting that the word has the same origin as the Chuvash word for ‘horn’ which is *măyra* (Ashmarin 1935/VIII, p. 293), *măyraka*, *mıyraka*, *mıraka*, *mıryaka*. This word goes back to an earlier PT **boŋ’uz* which became in most Turkic languages *boynuz*, but also *müñüz*, *müüs* etc. The Chuvash word *măyra-ka* ‘horn’ goes back to a form *mońur* < **boŋ’uz*. The word for ‘horn’ is occurring in botanical terms, see e.g. Tkm *boynuz* ‘leptaleum nitelistyj, *Leptaleum filifolium*’, Tt *boynuz ađaci* ‘Judas tree, *Cercis siliquatum*’, *boynuz otu* ‘hellebore *Helleborus*, hunyor’. In many languages do we find the name of the horn associated with plants as in Hungarian: *szarvasagancsgomba* (*Xylaria hypoxylon*), *szarvasagancspáfrány*, *agancspáfrány*, *jávorszarv* (*Platycerium alcicorne*) (*agancs* ‘horn’, Csapody–Prieszter 1966, p. 176). Both the ‘horn’ and the ‘hazel’ are “bony” and ‘hazel-nut’ is a “bony fruit”, see Hungarian *csonthéj* ‘bony shell’, Russian *kostočka* ‘small bone’, while English calls it *stone fruit*, German *Steinfrucht* etc. The final *-ó* in the Hungarian word is pointing to a Turkic diminutive suffix, this means that we have to reconstruct a **muńuraq*. In the Chuvash word for ‘horn’ *măyarka* we also find a diminutive suffix. To sum up: the change was: *mogyoró* < *mońaró* << *muńarau* < **muńaray* ← T **muńarađ* < **muńaraq* < **buńaraq* < **buŋ’uz+(A)q*.

The Ossetian name of the ‘nut’ is *aengūz/aengozae*. Though Abaev suggested to connect the Ossetian word with Turkic *qoz*, the origin of the prefixed *aen-* remained unclear. In my paper on the Hungarian tree names I suggested that the Ossetian word is of Turkic origin and goes back to Turkic *buŋuz* > Alan **vŋuz* > Ossetian *aenguz* but I admit that this may be uncertain (see No. 11).

Having two names for “bony fruits” Hungarian *mogyoró* ‘hazel’ and *dió* ‘nut’ we have to state that both have special Chuvash traits and may have denoted different types of stone fruits. The meaning ‘nut’ could be associated with the word *dió* only to the west of the Dniester (Csapody–Csapody–Rott 1966, p. 259).

11. Linguistic summary

Practically all 11 Hungarian tree names of Turkic origin show clear Chuvash traits. Out of the 11 Hungarian botanical terms of Turkic origin 5 or perhaps 6 are also present in Ossetian: the names of the *ash tree*, *cornel*, *pear*, *blackthorn*, *bulrush*, and perhaps *hazel*. They form an interesting common isogloss. The name of the ‘oak’ is an Alanian loanword in Hungarian.

12. Palaeobotanical remarks

Palaeobotanic researches show that some of the 13 trees and plants can be located to very clearly defined regions. The ash tree, the oak and the beech could be met with in three regions (1) the Kuban–Don region, (2) the SE part of the Crimean peninsula and (3) the region west of the Dniester. For historical reasons we have to exclude the Crimean peninsula. The Hungarians never stayed there for long. If they appeared there it was only for military or trade purposes.

Thus from the palaeobotanical point of view we are left with two regions: the Kuban–Don region and the region west of the Dniester.

13. Historical conclusions

If we also include the linguistic bearings of the terminology we have to seek a region where people speaking three different languages lived together: the Indo-European Alans, the Turkic Bulgars and Khazars and the Finno-Ugrian Hungarians. At present we have no sources which would allow this co-existence west to the Dniester.

Taking into account all the linguistic, palaeobotanic and historical data, we have to come to the conclusion that the region of the Turkic–Alanian–Hungarian co-existence could be only the Kuban–Don region. This may have lasted from the middle of the 5th century until the end of the 7th century. After the destruction of the Bulgar Turkic rule of Kuvrat around 670 by the Khazars and Hungarians, the Hungarians moved to the regions earlier ruled by the Bulgars, west to the Doniec, around the Dniester and down to the mouth of the Danube.

I would add one more remark. The names of trees disappear from a language if the speakers do not see the denoted trees for two–three generations. This means that the Hungarian speaking community could not live between the Don and Dniester for a longer time than 20–30 years, if at all, otherwise the names of the beech and the ash tree together with some other botanical terms would have disappeared.

In my book published in 1999 on the early history of the Hungarians I claimed that the Hungarians moved from the Don–Kuban region to the region called later *Etelköz*, west of the Dniester and they did not stop in a region called *Levedia*. I think the newest researches on the place of Kuvrat’s Kingdom (see Róna-Tas 2000, pp. 1–22) and the research into the tree names of the Hungarian language, offer new support to my earlier considerations.

Appendix 1

Some Hungarian botanical names of Turkic origin

1. H *kőrís* [kő:riš] ‘ash tree (*Fraxinus*)’ ← T **kevriš* (< **kebrüč*) → Alan **kevriš* > Ossetian *kaerz*.
2. H *som* [šom] ‘cornel (*Cornus*)’ ← T **šum* < **čum* ← Alan **čum* (> Ossetian *cym/cumae*) ← (? Lezg, Tabasaran ? ← Pers).
3. H *körte*, *körtvély* [körte, körtve:y] ‘pear (*Pyrus*)’ ← T **kertve*, **kertvelig* ← Alan **kertve* > Ossetian *kaerdo/kaerttu* (? ← Caucasian Dargin, Lak, Arčín, Ingush).
4. H *komló* [komlo:] ‘hop (*Humulus lupulus*)’ < **komlau* ← T **komlag* (< T *komlak*) ← Alan **χumalag* > Ossetian *χ_oymaellaeg/xumaellaeg*.
5. H *kökény* [köke:ń] ‘blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)’ ← T **köken* (< *kök* + *An*) → Alan **köken* > Ossetian *kakon/kokojae, koko*.
6. H *gyékény* [d’e:ke:ń] ‘bulrush (*Typha*)’ ← T **jek(k)en* → Alan **jeken* > Ossetian *jegeń, jegejnae*.
7. H *bükk* [bük] ‘beech (*Fagus*)’ < *bik* ← T **bik* ‘beech’ (Crimean Tatar, Nogai ← ?Kazar) < *bük* ‘forest, wood, thicket’.
8. H *gyümölcsény* [d’ümölcse:ń] ‘hawthorn (*Crataegus*)’ ← T **jemišen* < *jemiš* ‘fruit’ + *An*.
9. H *gyertyán* [d’ert’āń] ‘hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*)’ ← T **jartan* < *jarta* ‘candle’ + *An*.
10. H *gyűrű(-fa)* [d’ü:ri: -fa] ‘a tree like the maple (*Acer*) or the cornel (*Cornus*)’ ← T **jerik* > Chuv *širék* ‘alder (*Alnus*)’.
11. H *dió* [dio:] ‘nut, walnut (*Juglans*)’ < **jiō* < **jiay* < **jiγay* ← T **jiğag* (→ Mong *ji’ag*) < < *yajaq*.
12. H *mogyoró* [mod’oro:] ‘hazel nut (*Corylus avellana*)’ < **muńorau* ← T **muńurag* (> Chuv *măyără* ‘hazel’) <? *muńuz*+*Ak* < *buńuz* ‘horn, bony’ (> Chuv *măyra-ka* ‘horn’) → ?? Alan **vńuz* > Ossetian *aengūz/aengozae* ‘walnut’.

Hungarian botanical names of Iranian origin

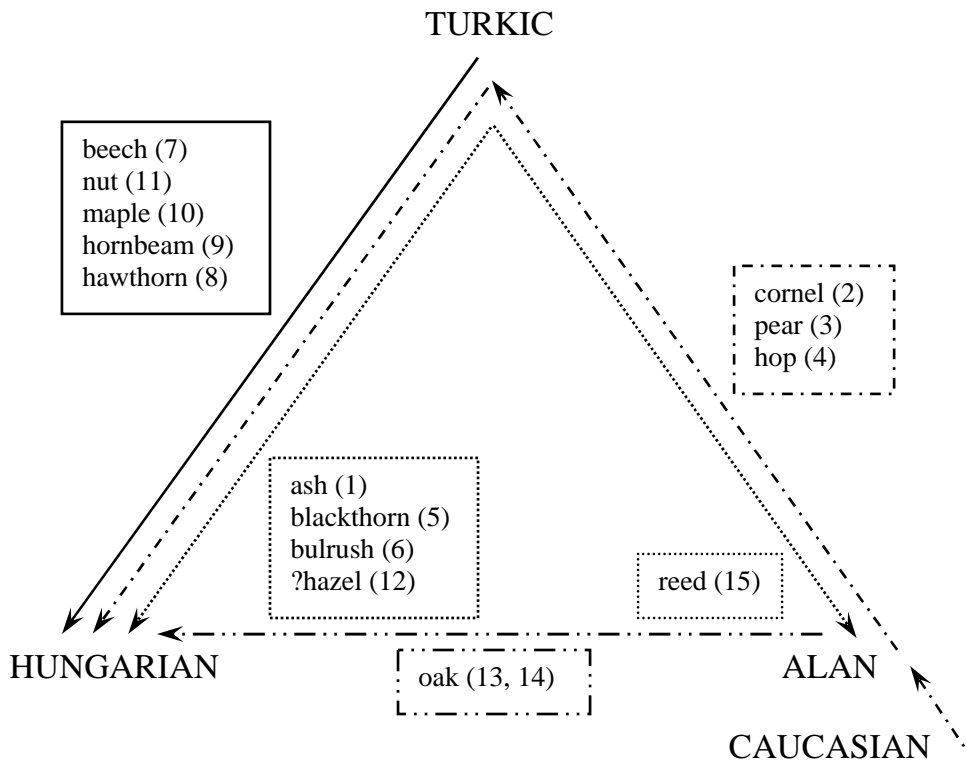
13. H *arch. tül* [tül] ‘oak (*Quercus*)’ ← Iranian **tülē* (→ Proto-permian **tiil’e* > Zyrian *til’*, Udmurt *tel’*) > Alan *tül* + *ǰ* > Ossetian *tüldz, toldzae*.
14. H *tölgy* [töld’] ‘oak (*Quercus*)’ ← Alan **tiilǰ* (**tiilV* + *ǰ*) > Ossetian *tüldz, toldzae*.

Ossetian botanical name of Turkic origin not in Hungarian

15. T *qamiš* ‘reed’ (*Phragmites communis*) > **qamil* (> Chuv *χāmāl*) → Alan **qamil* > Ossetian *qamil, qamil*.

Appendix 2

The Turkic–Alanian–Hungarian triangle



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