Andrew Shimonek

Languages of Ancient Southern Mongolia and North China

A Historical-Comparative Study of the Serbi or Xianbei Branch of the Serbi-Mongolic Language Family, with an Analysis of Northeastern Frontier Chinese and Old Tibetan Phonology

2017

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden
Contents

Front Matter ........................................................................................................... xiii
Figures ....................................................................................................................... xiii
Tables ......................................................................................................................... xiii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................... xix
Fonts Used in this Book ............................................................................................ xx
General Abbreviations and Symbols ....................................................................... xxii
General Sigla .............................................................................................................. xxix
Sigla for Chinese Primary Sources .......................................................................... xxxi
Sigla for Old Tibetan Texts ....................................................................................... xxxiii
Kitan Assembled Script Sigla .................................................................................... xxxv
Sigla for Mongol Texts ............................................................................................... xxxvii
Apparatus Criticus .................................................................................................... xli
Transcription and Transliteration Conventions ....................................................... xliii

1. Previous Theories on the Origins of the Mongolic Languages ...................... 1

2. A Brief Ethnolinguistic History of the Serbi-Mongolic Peoples .................... 37
   2.1. The early Serbi-Mongolic peoples ................................................................. 37
   2.2. Rise of the Serbi peoples and conquest of North China ............................ 46
   2.3. The Awar during the Serbi expansion ......................................................... 55
   2.4. The Kitan (or ‘Kitanic’) Peoples ................................................................ 57
       2.4.1. Qay ........................................................................................................ 61
           2.4.1.1. Early Qay ....................................................................................... 61
           2.4.1.2. Late Qay ..................................................................................... 63
       2.4.2. Shirwi .................................................................................................... 64
       2.4.3. The Kitan after the Kitan Empire ......................................................... 66
   2.5. The early Mongolic peoples and their languages ...................................... 68

3. Early Northern Frontier Varieties of Chinese ................................................. 79
   3.1. Introduction ................................................................................................... 79
   3.2. Brief notes on Northeastern Late Old Chinese phonology ...................... 79
3.3. Northeastern Early Middle Chinese phonology
3.3.1. Syllable-initial segments (syllable onsets and #V)
3.3.2. Syllable nuclei
3.3.3. Syllable codas
3.3.4. Revisions of tradition-based reconstructions
3.4. The Phonology of Late Middle Chinese
3.5. The Phonology of Early Old Mandarin
3.5.1. Syllable Onsets
3.5.2. Syllable Nuclei
3.5.3. Syllable Codas
4. Notes on the Phonology of Old Tibetan
4.1. Introduction
4.2. Syllable Onsets
4.3. Syllable Nuclei
4.4. Syllable Codas
5. Taghbach and other Middle Serbi Dialects of the Northern Wei
5.1. Introduction
5.2. The Taghbach onomasticon in the Wei Shu
5.2.1. Glossed transcriptions
5.2.2. Problematic transcriptions
5.2.3. Unglossed (abbreviated) transcriptions
5.2.4. Transcriptions elsewhere in the Wei Shu
5.3. Taghbach Titles and Names in the Nan Ch’i Shu
5.3.1. Resolved transcriptions
5.3.2. Problematic transcriptions (unresolved)
5.4. Transcriptions in the Serbi Cave Inscription
5.5. Taghbach Phonology
5.6. Taghbach lexicon
5.6.1. Taghbach functional morphemes
5.6.2. Taghbach words
6. The T’u-yü-hun (‘Azha) Language .................................................................169
  6.1. Historical background .............................................................................169
  6.2. Sources on the T’u-yü-hun language .......................................................172
       6.2.1. Old Tibetan sources on the T’u-yü-hun language .........................173
              6.2.1.1. T’u-yü-hun toponyms in Old Tibetan transcription ............175
              6.2.1.2. T’u-yü-hun onomastica in Old Tibetan transcription ..........182
       6.2.2. Chinese sources on the T’u-yü-hun language ..................................184
              6.2.2.1. Glossed Chinese transcriptions of T’u-yü-hun .....................185
              6.2.2.2. Unglossed Chinese transcriptions of T’u-yü-hun ..............189
       6.2.3. Possible T’u-yü-hun elements in Amdo Tibetan ..........................191
  6.3. Notes on T’u-yü-hun phonology ............................................................192
       6.3.1. Phoneme inventory ..........................................................................192
       6.3.2. Salient consonant clusters ...............................................................193
       6.3.3. Glide + vowel sequences ..................................................................193
       6.3.4. Other phonological points of interest ..............................................193
  6.4. Concluding remarks ................................................................................194
  6.5. The T’u-yü-hun lexicon ..........................................................................194
       6.5.1. T’u-yü-hun functional morphemes ................................................195
       6.5.2. T’u-yü-hun words............................................................................195
              6.5.2.1. Glossed or semantically known T’u-yü-hun words ..........195
              6.5.2.2. Unglossed T’u-yü-hun words ...........................................195

7. The Kitan Language .....................................................................................197
  7.1. Introduction ..............................................................................................197
  7.2. Old Kitan ..................................................................................................198
       7.2.1. Glossed (and semantically discernable) Old Kitan words .........199
       7.2.2. Unglossed Old Kitan names in Early MChi transcription ..........204
       7.2.3. Unglossed Old Kitan names in Late MChi transcription ..........206
  7.3. Middle Kitan ............................................................................................209
       7.3.1. Notes on Middle Kitan Phonology .................................................212
       7.3.2. Middle Kitan Morphology ...............................................................221
              7.3.2.1. Word Classes .........................................................................222
7.3.2.1.1. Nouns ...........................................................................................................222
7.3.2.1.2. Demonstratives ..............................................................................................222
7.3.2.1.3. Adjectives ......................................................................................................226
7.3.2.1.4. Adverbs .........................................................................................................227
7.3.2.1.5. Numerals .......................................................................................................228
7.3.2.1.5.1. Ordinal Numerals ......................................................................................228
7.3.2.1.5.2. Cardinal Numerals ...................................................................................232
7.3.2.1.6. Verbs ..............................................................................................................241
7.3.2.2. Case ................................................................................................................247
7.3.2.3. Number ............................................................................................................264
7.3.3. Middle Kitan syntax ...........................................................................................266
7.3.3.1. Clausal Order ....................................................................................................266
7.3.3.2. Phrasal Order ...................................................................................................268
7.3.3.3. Pro-Drop ...........................................................................................................270
7.3.3.4. Relative Clauses ...............................................................................................270
7.3.3.5. Subordination and Conjunctions ....................................................................272
7.3.3.6. Negation ..........................................................................................................272
7.3.4. A Middle Kitan text: The Lang-chūn Inscription ................................................274
7.4. Late Kitan ...............................................................................................................278
7.5. The Kitan Lexicon ..................................................................................................281

8. Toward a Reconstruction of Common Serbi-Mongolic ...........................................283
8.1. Shared Functional Morphophonology ....................................................................283
8.2. Common Serbi-Mongolic Phonology .....................................................................288
8.2.1. Serbi-Mongolic Sound Correspondences ..........................................................288
8.2.2. Common Serbi-Mongolic Phoneme Inventory ....................................................292
8.3. Common Serbi-Mongolic Morphosyntax ...............................................................295
8.3.1. Verbal suffixal morphosyntax ............................................................................295
8.3.2. Case suffixal morphosyntax ...............................................................................296
8.3.3. Number in Common Serbi-Mongolic .................................................................298
8.4. Common Serbi-Mongolic Syntax ..........................................................................301
8.4.1 Common Serbi-Mongolic word order ..................................................................302
8.4.1.1. Common Serbi-Mongolic clausal order ..................................302
8.4.1.2. Common Serbi-Mongolic phrasal order ..................................306
8.4.3. Null subjects (‘Pro-Drop’) in Common Serbi-Mongolic ..........312
8.5. The Common Serbi-Mongolic Lexicon ..................................313
8.5.1. Common Serbi suffixes and grammatical morphemes .........315
8.5.2. Common Serbi words ..........................................................315
8.5.3. Common Serbi-Mongolic grammatical morphemes ...........317
8.5.4. Common Serbi-Mongolic words .............................................326
8.6. Reconstructed Sentences in Common Serbi-Mongolic ..........380

   9.1. Introduction .............................................................................383
   9.2. Vocabulary ............................................................................384
   9.2.1. Cultural Vocabulary ..........................................................385
   9.2.2. Primary Vocabulary ...........................................................397
   9.3. A Possible Homeland .........................................................412

10. Conclusion .................................................................................415

Appendix A: Revised Analysis of the Kitan Assembled Script ......419
Appendix B: Kitan Assembled Script Common Typographical Errors ....445
Appendix C: Gloss Formulae ..............................................................447
Appendix D: Pre-Proto-Mongolic Morphological Innovations ......449
Bibliography ....................................................................................461
Language Index ................................................................................491
General Index ..................................................................................495
Western theories on the origins of the Mongolic languages date back nearly three centuries to the precursors of the ‘Altaic’ theories (i.e. the ‘Tartar’, ‘Seythian’, and ‘Turanian’ theories). Since the ‘Altaic’ divergence and convergence theories have been thoroughly disproven on scientific grounds, I will not discuss them in detail in this book.

Outside the sphere of ‘Altaic’ divergence and convergence theories, a number of hypotheses have been put forth on the immediate origins of the Mongolic languages. The majority of these theories are methodologically flawed, with the notable exception of the ‘Ancient Mongol’ Theory and the

---

1 For a history of the ‘Altaic’ theories, see de Rachewiltz & Rybatzki (2010: 348-355).
2 For important studies disproving the various ‘Altaic’ theories, see Clauson (1956), Beckwith (2007a), Georg (2004a), Vovin (2005, 2009), and others. Probably the earliest critic was Abel-Rémusat, writing in the early 19th century, who seriously questioned the hypothesis which would later become known as the ‘Altaic’ theory:

“...La ressemblance de quelques expressions Turkes, Mongoles et Mandchoues entre elles, ne doit pas faire penser qu’il existe entre les trois langues une analogie essentielle et fondamentale. Il est au contraire facile de se convaincre qu’à l’exception d’un très-petit nombre de mots communs, et d’une légère conformité dans quelques règles grammaticales, il y a entre elles plus de différences qu’il n’y en a entre le russe, l’italien et l’allemand, et qu’aussi, loin d’être des dialectes d’une même langue, elles sont au fond des idioms tout-à-fait distincts” (Abel-Rémusat 1820: 138).

According to Abel-Rémusat, the similarities between the Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic languages are not comparable to the differences between Indo-European languages like Russian, Italian, and German—‘dialects’ (i.e. daughter languages) of Proto-Indo-European. Instead, these languages are so vastly different from each other that they should be considered distinct, unrelated languages in their own right.
‘Para-Mongolic’ Theory. As will be demonstrated, a careful historical-comparative linguistic and philological study of the Serbi languages is necessary to elucidate the origins of the Mongolic languages. We must follow the scientific methods established for the historical-comparative study of languages, as done for Indo-European, Uralic, Semitic, Japanese-Koguryoic, and other language families, before a scientific understanding of the origins of the Mongolic and Serbi languages can be reached.

The Indo-European–Mongolic Hypothesis

After the various ‘Altaic’ theories, another early proposal on the ethnolinguistic origins of the Mongols is what may be termed the ‘Indo-European–Mongolic Hypothesis’, proposed by Edkins (1871), who states that “The special interest of the Mongolian type consists in the fact that it comes nearest of all the three Turanian branches to the Indo-European” (1871: 205). Edkins proposed what he believed to be “many remarkable resemblances in words between the Tartar languages and the Greek and Latin”, including the following, which I have arranged in table format for easy comparison:³

³ Edkins (1871: 208-209, 211). Note that Edkins’ ‘Tartar’ and ‘Turanian’ are synonyms denoting what was later traditionally termed ‘Altaic’, i.e. Mongolic, Turkic, and Tungusic, although the data he presents here is Mongolic.
Table 1. Mongol-Greek-Latin “resemblances” according to Edkins (1871)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Mongol</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Latin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nom ‘sacred book’ [sic]</td>
<td>νόμος (nómos) ‘law’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sara ‘moon’</td>
<td>σελήνη (sélēne) ‘moon’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dalai ‘sea’</td>
<td>θάλασσα (tʰálassa) ‘sea’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γar ‘hand, arm’</td>
<td>χείρ (kʰeír) ‘hand, arm’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nege- ‘to open’</td>
<td>ἀνοίγω (anoígo) ‘to open’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ĉi ‘thou’</td>
<td>σύ (sý) ‘you’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ere ‘male’</td>
<td>ἀρρην (arrhen) ‘male’</td>
<td>vir ‘man, male person’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kūmün ‘human’</td>
<td>homo ‘man, human’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ta ‘ye’</td>
<td>tu ‘you’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ebür [!] ‘horn’*</td>
<td>ebur ‘ivory’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the majority of the comparanda proposed by Edkins are unwarranted for phonological or semantic reasons (i.e. ‘open’, ‘hand’, ‘sea’, ‘horn’, and ‘moon’), several of his comparisons are reasonable when additional evidence is taken into consideration:

- Middle English were ‘man’ < Old English wer < Common Germanic (cf. Gothic wair, Old High German wer, Old Norse verr) : Latin vir : Old Irish fer, Welsh gŵr : Lithuanian vyras : Sanskrit vīrā ‘man, hero’.  
  5 Proto-Indo-European *wī-ro- ‘male, man’ (AHD 101).  
  6 There may be some connection among this IE word, Old Turkic ār ‘man, men, people’,  
  7 and Middle Mongol ere ‘man, male’. Given the apparent western origins of the Türk people,  
  8 one cannot rule out the possibility of an IE

---

* Edkins quotes an erroneous Mongol form here. Attested Middle Mongol has eber [額別児] ‘horn (角)’ as distinct from ebür [額不児] ‘south part of a mountain range (嶺⋿)’. The Middle Mongol forms I cite here are from HIIY.


6 See also Pok. 1177-1178 *yūro-s ‘Mann’, i.e. *yūr-o-s.

7 The word is attested in 8th c. Old Turkic (GOkt 325).

8 Beckwith (2011b).
dialect reflex of this word for ‘man, male’ as the origin of the attested Old Turkic and Mongolic words.  

- Middle Mongol nom ‘law, dharma’ and later ‘book’ (not merely “sacred book” as Edkins glossed it) is a well-known Indo-European element in Old Uygur and Mongolic, ultimately from Greek.

In addition to connecting Written Mongol či “thou” and ta “ye” with Indo-European, quoting Greek σῦ (sý) and Latin tu, Edkins also proposed a connection among the Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic, and Indo-European first-person personal pronouns. Based on this comparanda, he concluded that “It is probable… that at some distant epoch a strong Turanian influence was exerted specially upon the Greek and Latin sections of the Indo-European family…” (209). Beckwith (2006b, 2011a) has provided modern support for some of Edkins’ personal pronoun etymologies, but within the context of interfamily convergence.

There clearly has been some degree of convergence and borrowing among Serbi-Mongolic, Turkic, Tungusic, Uralic, and Indo-European at various points in the past, but they are demonstrably separate language families that do not descend from a common proto-language.

---

11 See discussion below in the section ‘The Lexical Immunity Theory’.
12 Edkins (1871: 211, 214-215).