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ON THE ALTAIC INITIAL *P*-*

by

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Neither the Turkic nor the Mongolian languages possess an initial *p*- in old original words. Where we find this sound, we have to do with a loan word, a newly created descriptive word or some other recent formation.

There is evidence, however, that such an initial consonant once existed but was later lost through the development $p > f > h > O$. The main lines of this phonetical law were first established by Ramstedt. He offered two kinds of evidence to prove that the Altaic languages once had a *p*-: 1) the analogy of the initial series $k : g, t : d$, which suggests also a $*p : b$; and 2) – which is in fact more convincing – the facts in Tungus, where in words evidently related to Mongolian and Turkic words beginning with a vowel we meet *h*- ~ *x*-, *f*- and *p*- in an initial position. The oldest monuments of Mongolian often show an *h*- in words of this category as a last remnant of the original $*p$ -. Ramstedt, however, could only offer one such instance from MNT: *huja'ur* “root, origin”.

Pelliot, who later re-opened the question, approved the general findings of Ramstedt. Of his instances Pelliot considered to be the most convincing those such as e.g.:

mo. *oro* “top”: tung. *horon*, ma. *foron*, olča *poro* id.;

mo. *aluqa* “hammer”: ma. *folgo*, oroč. *xaluka*, go. *palū* (cf. below p. 12);

mo. *ünür* “scent”, *ünüs*- “to scent”: ma. *funsun*, oroč. *xunke* “perfume”, olča *pünse*- “to scent”.

Pelliot again based his study for the most part on the ancient Mongolian words which in the Chinese transcription or in the Phagspa-writing show an initial *h*-. He proposed 96 such instances and subjected them to the critical examination of his great erudition. The Middle Mongolian

* This paper was read in the Altaic Section of the 23rd International Congress of Orientalists at Cambridge in August 1954. Before publication some minor alterations and additions have been made.

literary monuments published later furnish us with more material of this kind, e.g. about 100 instances in the MNT. Though agreeing in principle with Ramstedt, Pelliot contested some of his Chinese etymologies. This poses an important and difficult problem, one which is encountered also in several Korean etymologies presented by Ramstedt and which needs further detailed investigation.¹

The newest handbooks of various Altaic languages provide us with abundant information about the initial *p*-. E.g. the introduction to the Mongolian historical phonetics by Poppe (at present in print) gives (§ 46) a detailed survey of the representation of this sound in various Mongolian dialects.² According to Poppe the original Altaic **p*- ~ **φ*- was still preserved in Ancient or Common Mongolian. In Middle Mongolian, known to us through the oldest literary monuments, it had already become an *h*-. In the Monguor language, spoken in Kansu, however, we meet as a continuation of the *p*- a spirant *f*-, *x*-, *š*- or *s*-, depending on the quality of the following sound. In San-Tchuan and Shera-Yögür we still find an *h*-, while Moghol, Urdus, Kharcin, Chakhar, Khalkha, Buryat and Kalmuck have lost all trace of the **p*-. In the Daghur dialects the representation of the **p*- varies. The picture drawn by Poppe can here be completed with details communicated by Barnes, who distinguishes 3 dialects of Daghur:

1. Barga (influenced by Mongolian),
2. Mergen (influenced by Tungus and Manchu),
3. Butekha (nearest to the original Daghur).

The Daghurs living west of the Nonni River in the Numen Valley have thus preserved the **p*- as *h*-, and we find in their speech such forms as *hodun* "a star", *haraban* ~ *harban* "ten", *hunuy u* ~ *hunu'u* "a fox". East of the Nonni the development is more obscure, since the *h*- seems later to have become a *k*'-.³ The dialect spoken in the Hailar district

¹ Following the explanations given by Zakharov in his Manchu dictionary, Ramstedt e.g. connected ma. *fujuri*, mo. MNT *hujā'ur* with chin. *fu-fu*, which Pelliot considers totally improbable. In his *Studies in Korean Etymology* (p. 200) Ramstedt presents as starting point for the ma. and mo. forms a Sino-Korean word *pī-čō* "ancestor". This hypothesis presumes, in my opinion, that the loan must be of very old date since the Altaic forms show the suffix **-wur(i)*. It is to be noted further that Mongolian has two forms of the word, i.e. MNT *hujā'ur*, kalm. *jozūr*, šir. *oějōr* (which conform with ma. *fujuri*) and mo. *ijagur*, kalm. *idzōr*. This difference is not explained through the etymologies suggested.

² Sandžeev deals (p. 29) with this question very briefly.

³ According to Barnes, further north on the Nonni the initial *x*- (< *q*-) too begins to disappear; *xar* (< *qara*) is pronounced *ar*~*a'*. He therefore suggests that the name of the River *Amur* perhaps derives from some such dialect, where mo. *Qara müren*, Daghur *Xarmur* was pronounced *A'mur*.

lost the *h*-. The situation in Mongolian may be illustrated by the noun for "year", CM **pon* ~ **qon* (= ma. *fon* "time", kor. *pom* "spring"): MM (MNT etc.) *hon*, Monguor *fän*, San-Tchuan *huan*, Daghur (Ivanovskij) *xuan* ~ *xon*, Dagh. Butekha (Barnes) *hon*, Dagh. Hailar (Poppe) *ōη*, Moghol Urdus Kalmuck *on*, Khalkha Buryat *oη*.

The position in the Turkic languages is examined by Räsänen (pp. 21 and 167 ff.).⁴ Here we find no *p*- nor *f*-, but in certain words some dialects show an *h*-, which seems to be relic of the original **p*-, e.g. osm. *čag*. Eturk. *hür*- "to blow", trkm. *üjr*-, -*čuv.vir*-, yak. *ür*-: tung. go. *purl*- id.; Eturk. *hördäk* "a duck", mo. MNT *hörene* "west", mo. *örene* ~ *örtne* id.: tung. ol. *puri*- "to dive", kor. *pul-li*- id.

We possess information about the Turkic languages of far earlier date than about Mongolian or Tungus. The Chinese sources write some Hunnic words with an initial *p*-, but this can transliterate an original *b*- as well.⁵ The Byzantine sources examined by Sophocles, Triandaphyllidis, and Moravcsik⁶ quote only the Khazar titles (*πέκης*) *πέχ* and (*μπέης*) *πέχ*, which obviously render the known title *Beg* (cf. below). In any case, there seems to have been no trace left of the initial **p*- in the oldest Turkic and Uigurian monuments.⁷

The situation in Tungus is treated by Tsintsius (pp. 148 ff.), who gives us statistics of the words with an initial *p*- found in various Tungus dictionaries. A great number of them are obvious loan words or descriptive-onomatopoeic formations. In the modern vocabulary Russian loans of course play a great rôle. In the dictionary of Vasilevits, for instance, we meet 90 words with a *p*-, of which 40 are of Russian origin; in the Lamut dictionary in manuscript by Bogoraz 40 of the 48 instances are Russian loans. Shirokogoroff, whose dictionary has not been used by Tsintsius, quotes (p. 216 ff.) 114 instances of the *p*-, of which 16 are marked as

⁴ Some instances might also be considered Middle Mongolian loan words, as Mr Clauson suggested in the discussion following the lecture. So the above *hördäk* would be a Mongolian Nomen usus of the verb **hör*- "to dive": **hör-däg* "one who usually dives".

⁵ In my opinion the Wei title (about 350 A.D.) *fu-tuh-chen* (< **för-teg-čī*) "a post official" (Shiratori, p. 33, Pelliot, p. 255 fn., Kotwicz, *RO*, XVI, p. 336 ff.), because of its young age, cannot belong to any (Proto-) Turkic language but to a (Proto-) Mongolian language, cf. mo. kalm. *örtētsi*.

⁶ Cf. R. Hartmann, *Zur Wiedergabe türkischer Namen und Wörter in den byzantinischen Quellen*, ADAW, Nr. 6, Berlin 1952).

⁷ If the name of the Huns is derived from their own language, it seems to have begun with an *h*-: Chinese *Hiung-nu*, Sanskrit *Hūna*, Greek *Χουννί* (*Οὐαρχωῖται*) ~ (*Οὔννοι* ~ *Οῦννοι*, Latin *Hunni*). On the other side, there are in Tungus dialects (already in Jurchen) words with an initial *h*-, which is not to be traced back to a **p*-. Perhaps the common Altaic did possess an initial *h*- too?

Russian loans and 16 as Chinese. Some of the Chinese loans may be very old; in later loan words *b-* and *f-* also have been replaced by a *p-*. The representation of the original **p-* in modern Tungus dialects can be illustrated by the word "hammer" mentioned above: Solon *alxa*, Negidal *xalka*, Ewenki *halka*, Lamut *halka*, Oročon *xaluka*, Udehe *xaluga*, Manchu *folxo*, Orok *paloa*, Goldi *paloa*⁸, Olča *paloa*⁸ ~ *palau*⁸ (Tsintsius, p. 156 f.). This word is, according to Poppe and Menges, a very old loan from Accadian. In a highly instructive way Poppe has shown how the various Altaic forms mo. tung. **paluqa*, mo. turk. *balta* and čuv. *purde* have through different channels been borrowed from the Accadian *pilaqu* and *paltu*.⁸ In general I would consider all the words where a *b-* seems to represent an original **p-* as loans which have been taken either after the law *p->f->h->O* had ceased to apply or through languages where the development *p->b-* was regular. These two rules, supposed by Pelliot and Sinor to have been simultaneous, originally belonged, as Ramstedt had thought, to different periods and/or to different languages (cf. Pelliot, p. 253 f. and 262). We know several loan words of Chinese origin which also attest the development *p->b-*, e.g. turk. *beg*: sk. *paik*; mo. *bagsi*, turk. *baqsy*, ma. *faksi*, ž. *fâh-sîh*: sk. *paksa*, etc.

The genealogical affinity of the Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungus languages has often been doubted. Benzing (p. 2) quotes Willi Bang-Kaup, and the citation may represent his own opinion too: "Die Verwandtschaft zwischen dem Türkischen und Mongolischen ist einfach ein Axiom, bewiesen ist sie noch nicht." He quotes a similar opinion by Širokogoroff: "Aus den obigen Tatsachen und Schlüssen ist offensichtlich, dass das Prinzip des Wechsels *f-p-h-O* nichts zu tun hat mit dem Problem des gemeinsamen Ursprungs der türkisch-mongolisch-tungusischen Sprachen. Das Problem bleibt noch die Beweise für gemeinsame Wurzeln aufzufinden." The meaning of the latter statement is not very clear: the principle of the change of the initial *p-* is of course not an isolated and independent phenomenon. On the contrary, it does show just that affinity of certain words, and this in a very convincing way. The affinity is in some cases obviously based on a common loan (e.g. in

⁸ In the discussion following the lecture Mr. Sinor categorically stated that there does not exist any word *pilaqu* in the Accadian language. In view of the numerous occurrences of *pilaqu*, Pl. *pilaqqâte* in Accadian texts and dictionaries, this statement, however, seems to be of doubtful value; see e.g. Fr. Delitzsch, *Assyrisches Handwörterbuch* (Leipzig 1896), p. 529; W. Muss-Arnolt, *Assyrisch-englisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch* (Berlin 1905), II, p. 810; A. Deimel, *Sumerisches Lexikon*, II, 1 (Roma 1927), p. 30, III, 1 (Roma 1934), p. 24, III, 2 (Roma 1937), p. 349; Zimmern, p. 12; cf. also the picture and inscription of a votive *pilaqu* in *Revue d'Assyriologie*, vol. 14, p. 91.

the word for "hammer" quoted above), but in others no doubt on an affinity between the languages themselves.

The question becomes more complicated when we examine Ramstedt's Korean hypothesis from this point of view. In Korean we meet no initial *b*-, which in most cases seems to be represented by a *p*-, in some others by an *m*-. On the other side Altaic languages show a *b*- also in cases where the *m*- is original as is proved by such loan words as e.g. mo. turk. *bal* "honey", kor. *mil* id. < Indo-European **mel*, and ma. *beve*, mo. *beke*, mt. *mäkkäh* < sk. *mek* "China-ink". Korean, moreover, has developed an aspirated *ph*-, which also can represent an original *p*-. The dropping of a short vowel from an open first syllable has caused an assimilation of the initial consonant as a laryngal clusile with the consonant of the second syllable and has thus resulted in a geminate consonant. The former component of the geminata was earlier often written with the sign *s*; in the new orthography the sign of the second consonant is doubled. Older sources also use etymological writing and from such instances we can conclude the quality of the original initial consonant.⁹

From the words with an initial *p*- we can make e.g. etymological combinations of the following types:

kor. *pai* "a boat", *pai* "a cup": tung. *ha-magða* "material for boats", MM *hai-ŷuga* "a boat", uig. mo. *ajaq* ~ *ajaya* "a cup" (< **pajaya*), lung. *hajō* "a ship" (Räsänen, *UJ*, 19, p. 103);

kor. *pal* "a tooth", *nippal* "the teeth": go. *paru*, *palu*, olča *pali*, *palu*, mo. *araga*, *ariga*, turk. *azau* (< **azay*), čuv. *urle* id.;

kor. *pegim* "secundus": turk. *eki* ~ *iki* "two", mo. *ikire* "twins", turk. *ekiz* ~ *ikiz* id.;

kor. *pil*- "to pray": ma. *firu*- id., tung. *hiruri* "a shaman", *hiruge*- "to pray", MM *hiru'e*-, mo. *irüge*- "to pray";

kor. *pulgin* "red": ma. *fulgijan*, ž. *fûh-lâh-kiãŋ* and *huoh-lah-hû*, MM *hula'an*, mo. *ulagan*, kalm. *ulân*, Mturk. *ulas*, tung. *xolajin*, *xulajin*, *holajin*, *xuliñña*, *ulama*, *ularin* (Shirokogoroff, p. 38);

kor. *phul* "grass": tung. *huli* "fresh", mo. *öli* ~ *öle* id., turk. *öl* "fresh", *ölin* "fresh grass", čuv. *valëm* "a meadow";

kor. *phul*- "to scratch": ma. *furu*-, mo. *ürü*-, turk. *üz*- id.;

⁹ Some geminata cases, however, have arisen in sandhi or through metathesis (Ramstedt, *KGr.*, § 9-10). Another explanation of certain Korean words with an initial consonant cluster has recently been given by Seung-bog Cho (in *Scandinavica et Fenno-Ugrica, Studier tillägnade Björn Collinder den 22 Juli 1954*, Stockholm 1954, p. 171 ff.), who considers them original compounds.

kor. *kkiltha* "to cook, to boil": go. *peku* "hot", ma. *fekčuxun*, tung. *heku* id., mo. *ekü-gün* "biting, bitter", MM *he'ü-sije-* "to suffer from heat";

kor. *ssi* "writing": ma. *fusixen* "writing table", mo. *üsüg* "a letter";

Etymological combinations of this kind very often show an obvious regularity and thus support the hypothesis of the affinity of the languages. Consequently the same type of words has been used by some scholars in comparing the Altaic group of languages with other language groups. Sinor presents several words with an initial *p-* as related in the Altaic, the Uralian, and the Indo-European families of languages, e.g. votyak *pyd* "foot", süry. *pod*: ie. **ped* ~ **pod*, gr. *ποδ-*, lat. *ped-*, skr. *pāda*: turk. *adaq* ~ *ajaq* "foot", mo. *adag* "Flussmündung", ma. *fatxa* "the sole of the foot", to which we can add kor. *padak* "the sole, the bottom". Ma *fatan* "the sole, the bottom", connected with these by Ramstedt and Poppe, could also be more closely related to kor. *ttan*. The Uralian forms here are obvious loans from some Indo-European languages. Ramstedt has compared e.g. kor. *pul* "fire", mo. *ör* "flame" with ie. gr. *πῦρ*, OHG *fiur*, *fūir*, arm. *hur* id., etc.

Menges connected the Kitan noun *wa-li* "an administrative unity" with mo. *ajil* "camp", turk. *aγyl* "hamlet", assuming a lost initial **p-* and a metathesis of the intervocalic consonants. The word might thus be identified with ma. *falga*, hung. *falu* and the Uralian relatives of the latter. The Hungarian etymological dictionary of Gombocz-Melich quotes under *falu* also turk. *balyq*, mo. *balgasun*. I feel that these can be related only if they were late loans from (ma.) **falga*, with *b-* as a substitute for *f-*, as already suggested by Ramstedt. We have, however, in Middle Mongolian (MNT § 64) a word *halha* (according to the transliteration of Haenisch, who connects it with the word for "shield"), which must have the meaning "hamlet, camp", and could in my opinion be read **halha* (i.e. **halga*) thus corresponding completely to ma. *falga*. Perhaps we must assume that there were two different words originally, **pagyl* and **palga*?

A phonetical law similar to the development of the initial *p-* in the Altaic languages is known in many other languages. Among the Indo-European languages the German group has developed an *f-* from it, Armenian an *h-*; in Celtic the *p-* had totally disappeared before historical time (i.e. in ancient British, while ancient Irish had partially preserved the *p-* as *h-*); other languages have preserved it unchanged. This law may be illustrated among others by the following instances:

gr. *πατῆρ*, lat. *pater*, skr. *pitar-*, goth. *fadar*, arm. *hayr*, OIr. *athir*;

ukr. *plavate* "he swims", gr. *πλέω* "I swim", arm. *lulim* "I swim",
 OIr. *luath* "quick", ON *fljótr* id., OHG *flouwen* "to wash", gr. *πλύνω*
 "I wash", arm. *luanam* id.;

ukr. *para-s* "jenseitig", gr. *πέραν* "jenseits", goth. *fairra* "far off",
 arm. *heri* id., OIr. *hire* "ulterior".

In the South Semitic languages (i.e. in Arabic and Abessinian) the *p* has always become an *f* (Brockelmann, *Vgl. Grammatik*, I, p. 136).

The old Iberian language knew no initial *p*- or *f*-, and probably this substratum has caused the development of the initial *f*- to *h*- in Spanish and Gascon. A similar development is known in Etruscan, in Lydian as well as in some Latin dialects. Ramstedt quotes similar trends also from Japanese and Yenissey-Ostyak. In Hungarian we find an *f*- corresponding to the *p*- of the other Uralian languages.

Ipsen has treated this phonetical feature in the Western languages from Iberian and Celtic to Armenian. Based on this parallelism he proposes a hypothesis of a uniform ethnic substratum: "Wir haben an einen gemeinsamen Grundstock der Bevölkerung zu denken, dessen Artikulationsbasis ähnlich war." As shown by the facts presented above, we meet this phonetical law also in distant regions, and can no longer explain it through the supposition of a common substratum. It seems rather to be due to a general phonetical tendency in the human speech, perhaps some kind of "laziness in articulation".¹⁰

¹⁰ Cf. H. Pedersen, 'Weshalb ist *p*- ein unstabiler Laut?' *Festschrift zur Feier des zweihundertjährigen Bestehens der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, II, Heft III-Göttingen-Heidelberg 1951, pp. 32-35, not available to me.

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