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“Useless” seems to be the hardest word Two Sogdian loanwords in Old Uyghur*

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Abstract: *The amount of loanwords in Old Uyghur borrowed from various languages is considerable. Since Uyghur Manichaeism was largely dependent on Iranian Manichaean literary traditions, Manichaean technical terms borrowed from Middle Iranian languages abound in Old Uyghur. The article traces for the first time the etymology of two Old Uyghur words borrowed from Sogdian that do not belong to the religious vocabulary of Manichaeism. All examples are found in Uyghur Buddhist texts. The Old Uyghur words show a broader semantic spectrum than their Sogdian counterparts.*

Keywords: *Old Uyghur, Sogdian, language contact, Buddhism.*

“Yararsız” En Zor Kelime Gibi Görünüyor

Eski Uyğurcada Soğudca İki Alıntı Kelime

Özet: *Eski Uyğurcada çeşitli dillerden alıntılanmış ödünçleme kelimelerin sayısı oldukça fazladır. Uyğur Maniheizmi büyük ölçüde İran Maniheizmi edebî geleneğine bağlı olduğundan, Eski Uyğurcada Orta İran dillerinden ödünçlenmiş olan sayısız Maniheizmi teknik terim bulunmaktadır. Bu makale, Soğudcadan ödünçlenen ve Maniheizm’in dinî söz varlığına ait olmayan Eski Uyğurca iki kelimenin etimolojisinin izini ilk kez sürmektedir. Bütün örnekler Uyğur Budist metinlerinde bulunmaktadır. Eski Uyğurca bu kelimeler Soğudca karşılıklarından daha geniş bir anlam yelpazesi göstermektedir.*

Anahtar sözcükler: *Eski Uyğurca, Soğudca, dil ilişkisi, Budizm.*

1. Introduction

The number of publications making Old Uyghur materials accessible in editions has increased remarkably in recent years. These newly edited texts have greatly enhanced our knowledge of this ancient language that was an important vernacular in the Tarim Basin, the Gansu Corridor and adjacent areas in medieval times. Language

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contact on various levels was a significant factor for speakers of Old Uyghur over many centuries. The proportion of loanwords that were borrowed at different stages from other languages is very high. But a not insignificant number of Old Uyghur lexemes has so far eluded etymological explanation. The article aims to elucidate the etymological origin of two semantically closely related words that are sometimes attested together and proposes two new Sogdian etymologies for them.¹

2. The first loanword

The first word to be discussed occurs in various spellings although it is not particularly frequently attested. All editors and scholars relying in their work on the editions have so far transcribed the word with an initial *b-*. Until now the vocalization has been regarded as uncertain due to the variants.² Among several works of secondary literature we can quote the *Uigurisches Wörterbuch* as an example which supplies a letter *u* in brackets when the vowel of the first syllable is not spelled out.³ However, a variant with this particular vocalization has not turned up so far.⁴ All occurrences are found in texts from the late classical period of Old Uyghur (ca. 12th century) until the era of the Yuan Dynasty (13th–14th centuries). In early translations the word is not encountered at all. All sources in which the lexical item occurs are Buddhist in content. Before explaining the etymological origin of the word, I am going to give it in bold letters in transliteration while reviewing all recorded occurrences.

Very interesting is the first example from the *Kšanti klguluk nom bitig*, a translation of the Chinese 慈悲道場懺法 *Cibei daochang chanfa*, because six semantically closely related words occur in adverbial position, one of which, *šu*, is of Chinese origin:⁵

(01) *munuŋ ätözi šu yoksuz QYRY⁶ asıgsız tususuz PD'TY ölti* “his body died uselessly⁶” (Wilkens, 2007/1: 90, lines 0609–0610).

¹ In the text examples square brackets [] are used when damaged parts in the manuscripts are restored. Parentheses () denote vowels not written in the manuscripts. Angle brackets < > supply letters to be expected but left out by the scribe. Braces { } indicate (a) superfluous letter(s) in the MS. In the translations parentheses are used to supply the text with extra information for the sake of clarity. In the translations a subscript number refers to words with (nearly) identical semantics. A letter *t* stands for <*d*> in the MS when from an etymological point of view *t* is expected, while *d* represents <*t*> in the MS when in classical Old Uyghur we usually find *d*. And finally, the letter *z* transcribes the spelling with <*s*> when it corresponds to *z* in texts without confusion of dentals and sibilants.

² Temir, Kudara & Röhrborn, 1984: 25.

³ Röhrborn, 2015: 301 s.v. *asıgsız*.

⁴ Perhaps the author thought of a Sogdian loanword, too. For the Sogdian prefix (*ʾ*)*pw* see §§ 1164–1166 in Gershevitch, 1954: 176. However, this is a prefix different from the one postulated below.

⁵ On Chinese 輸 *shu* as the etymon of Old Uyghur *šu* see Wilkens, 2007/1: 91, note to line 0609.

⁶ This word, for which a new etymology is proposed below, has hitherto been read as *kırı*. I give it provisionally in transliteration here before suggesting a new transcription after the discussion presented below.

All six (quasi-)synonyms render only one Chinese character, namely 徒 *tu* ‘in vain, futilely’. There is another instance in the *Kšanti kılğuluk nom bitig*, also in adverbial position but combined with another (quasi-)synonym:

(02) *kamağ adın b(ä)k bukağulukta yazoksuz PT'DY solalmış b(ä)klälmış busuşlug kadğulug ämgäklig sıkıglıglar* “all the other suffering and grieving people who are innocently and unlawfully fettered and bound in an everlasting prison” (Wilkens, 2007/1: 242, lines 3120–3123).

In this phrase, *yazoksuz PT'DY* renders Chinese 徒 *tu*. Because of the combination with *yazoksuz PT'DY* cannot be translated accurately as ‘in vain, futilely’ but rather as ‘unlawfully, illegitimately’. This specific meaning is not attested elsewhere but it reflects the semantics of the borrowed lexical item discussed below.

Another example has come up recently in the context of a text displaying the feature of strophic alliteration (German ‘Stabreim’). Unlike the examples quoted above the poetic section from which the following quotation is taken is most likely not a translation from Chinese but rather an Old Uyghur original work:

(03) *[arıtı] kılmağ PYD'TY alp ärür yalğok aşını* “difficult (to obtain) is human existence (but deeds leading to it) are absolutely not done in vain” (Zhang & Zieme, 2019: 201, lines 10–11).

Peter Zieme recently published a poem in strophic alliteration in which stanza IV shows rhymes with words beginning in *p ~ b*. This poetic text hails from the Mongol period:

(04) *piratya bilgä biligi äñilmış bilgä p(a)nđitlarnıñ nomların biligsizi küädmiş beçinkäyä PYT'DY öğünmiş täğ täğinür* “it is as if the little monkey whose ignorance was strong pointlessly parroted the doctrines of the wise₂ whose wisdom₂ was crooked?” (Zieme, 2019: 43, lines 04–06).

The most recent example is from the Old Uyghur translation of the *Avatamsakasūtra* in 80 volumes, which is also a translation from Chinese:

(05) *alku yertinčütäkilärkä sävä taplayu körgülük bolmaklarınta kördäçi tnl(i)glar QYRY PYT'DY asıgsı<z> ärtmädin tüzügin bir täğ turulmak yavalmakka tägdilär* “because they are a pleasure₂ to behold to those living in all the worlds, the beings who perceive (them) all attain as one₂ tranquility₂ without living (their lives) in vain;” (Yakup, 2021: 94, lines A0627–0629).

The adverb consisting of three semantically similar words (*QYRY PYT'DY asıgsız*) translates the single Chinese character 虛 *xu*. (The first Old Uyghur word, here also given only in transliteration, is discussed below.) Two texts in strophic alliteration show similar phrases in a different word order:

(06) *amtu bo kılmiş işimni asıgsız PYD'TY kılmañlar* “now do not let the deed I have done be futile;” (Zieme, 1985: 46, text 3:41–42).

⁷ As the verb is spelled ʼNKLʼ-, a reading *añla-* is not excluded.

(07) *asıgsız PYT'DY üd kün káčürmäkim üzä* “given the fact that I let hours and days go by uselessly₂ ...” (Zieme, 1985: 98, text 13:99).

An example similar to no. 07 is a passage from the *Abitake* in which *PYT'DY* occurs as an adverb modifying the verb *káčür-*:

(08) ... *näñ kim bo bir aźunug⁸ PYT'DY⁹ káčürüp ken yänä ö{k}{r}ünčlüg bolmazunlar tep* “... so that they do not let this one existence (as a human being) pass by in vain and later on be regretful” (Temir, Kudara & Röhrborn, 1984: 19, lines 17–19)

In their commentary the editors quote from two Abhidharma texts the examples *yoksuz PYD'TY urmak üzä keñ savıg* “by uselessly₂ using rambling words” and *yooksuz PD'TY ~ yoksuz PD'TY* and add that the etymology is unclear (Temir, Kudara & Röhrborn, 1984: 25).

Another example from a text in strophic alliteration, which is damaged at the end, has the combination *QYRY PYT'DY*:

(09) *kılmış kılınčım(ı)znı ökünmädin kıy äv sayu yorırbiz QYRY PYT'DY yertinčü* /// “without repenting the deeds we have done we walk from street to street and from house to house. Uselessly₂ ... world ///” (Zieme, 1985: 111, text 16:43).¹⁰

The next example is highly difficult to understand. The translation offered here is only preliminary:

(10) *ikinti munıñ¹¹ atı ol ögräñtätäçi ätözüg asıgsız kılđaçı savlarta uñunlarınıñ törösindä PYT'DY¹² tägintürdäçitä asıgsız tususuz esilmäk¹³ korulmak* “Second: its designation is as follows: (it is) the (person) who practices and (thereby) makes the body useless in (all) matters, (namely practice which relies) on the teaching of the shameless ones and on those who let (other people) attain (the human body) in vain, (which is therefore) uselessly₂ (and equivalent with) harm₂” (Zhang, 2001: 39, lines 55–56).¹⁴

The word under discussion again renders Chinese 徒 *tu*. The punctuation of the Chinese original found in the Taishō edition differs from the one the Uyghur translator

⁸ The editors read *aźunıg* with the penultimate letter marked as uncertain. The MS is slightly damaged, so we can supply the expected labial vowel here.

⁹ The transliteration in the commentary on p. 25 (PYTDY) is a typo.

¹⁰ As all other examples point to an adverbial usage of the word under discussion, a similar interpretation is to be assumed for this sentence. Thus *QYRY PYT'DY* is in all likelihood not an attribute of *yertinčü*.

¹¹ Reading not certain.

¹² Read *boštı* in the edition. Zhang (2001: 45) assumes in his commentary an adverbial formation derived by the suffix *+tl* from *boš* ‘free’ and compares *ädgüti*.

¹³ Read *äzilmäk* in the edition.

¹⁴ The edition standardizes the spellings. I indicate the instances of confusion of dentals.

had in his source text. The Chinese parallel is from the beginning of sūtra 127 in T. 100. The corresponding characters are in bold letters:¹⁵

此世間中多有眾生，依二種法：一、貪欲樂，二名習於無益身事，非聖之法，徒受無益損滅。習於欲樂，是名下賤、繫累之法。(T. 100, p. 421c)

Since the exact interpretation of the Chinese original still presents some difficulties I will abstain from offering one here. The Uyghur translator understood 徒 *tu* as being an adverb to 受 *shou* and chose *PYT'DY* as a translation, as we have already seen in other examples.

The word in question appears often in texts translated from Chinese and is usually combined with (quasi-)synonyms. Looking for a suitable candidate to explain the etymology of the Old Uyghur lexeme, the privative (')*p*(') from Old Iranian *apa-*discussed in Gershevitch (1954: 176, § 1163) can be considered the most likely starting point from a semantic as well as from a morphological angle. Gershevitch points to the Christian Sogdian adjective *pd'ty* 'unrighteous, unlawful' and the adverb (')*pd'ty* in Buddhist Sogdian.¹⁶ He also refers to the Christian compound term *pd'tqry* 'unjust' and compares already Modern Persian *balād*. Sims-Williams and Durkin-Meisterernst (2012: 137a) give the translation "injustice" for *pd'ty*. Sims-Williams (1985: 219b) translates Christian Sogdian *pd't-q'ry*¹⁷ with "doer of iniquity, wrong-doer" and *pd'ty* with "iniquity".¹⁸

Manichaean Sogdian has many etymologically related words without a privative prefix: *δ't'yk* 'just', *δ't'br* 'judge',¹⁹ *δ'tcyk* 'lawful, concerning the law' *δ'tkry* 'law-maker, judge', *δ'tnm'n* 'judging justly'. Nicholas Sims-Williams kindly refers me to the hapax *δ't pd't* 'for good or for ill, willy-nilly' in the tale of the two snakes from the Sogdian *Āzandnāmē* (Benkato, 2017: 82, line 153). The sentence runs as follows: *p'rZ-Y δ't pd't xyδ pwskβty xyδ r'δ xrt(y)[γw] rty xw 'yδcw 'z-w'rty knph L' wm't*, translated by the editor as "But for good or for ill, without protest, it was necessary to go that way, and in no way was there the means of turning back" (Benkato, 2017: 83). The literal meaning of the adverbial phrase is 'rightly-wrongly' (Benkato, 2017: 92). In his commentary Benkato quotes the form *'pd'ty* ('unhappily') with the adverbial *-y* from the Buddhist *Vessantarajātaka*.

The quoted Sogdian words are etymologically connected with Old and Younger Avestan as well as Old Persian *dāta-* 'law'.²⁰ Semantically, the Old and Middle

¹⁵ I am grateful to Marcus Bingenheimer (Philadelphia) who shared his thoughts on the punctuation and translation of this difficult passage with me. The punctuation follows his suggestion.

¹⁶ See also Gharib 2004, 49b (no. 1260), 271b (no. 6770): "unlawful, illicit, unicity".

¹⁷ In the manuscript in the direct plural spelled *wpd't-qryt* (104R18) (Sims-Williams, 1985: 172).

¹⁸ Cf. also his translation of the phrase *pd'ty 't bžnq'ry*' (40V6) as "unrighteousness and wickedness" (Sims-Williams, 1985: 81).

¹⁹ Cf. also Christian Sogdian *d'tbr* (Sims-Williams, 1985: 209b).

²⁰ Schmitt, 1994. For Khotanese *dāta-* "placed, established; law" and further etymologically related words in Iranian languages see Bailey, 1979: 156a.

Iranian terms are rather restricted since most of them belong to the sphere of law. (We have seen that only in example no. 02 the Old Uyghur lexeme displays similar semantics.) Recently Pavel Lurje and Ilya Yakubovich reviewed Walter Bruno Henning's list of Sogdian loanwords in Early New Persian, among which we encounter *balād* ~ *balāda* ~ *balāya* 'contemptible, corrupted, perverted' (< Sogdian (¹)*pδ'ty*) mentioned already by Gershevitch.²¹ Etymologically related is Bactrian *αβηλαδο* 'unlawful' which appears in documents (e.g., in Sims-Williams & la Vaissière, 2011: 42, lines Uv12 and Uv20 [twice]). The Bactrian manuscript in Manichaean script provides us with the noun *'βyl'd* 'iniquity' (Sims-Williams, 2009: 261a). Furthermore, the Middle Iranian loan *apirat* ('wicked, iniquitous, useless, unfit' < Middle Persian *'pyd't*) in Armenian should be mentioned (Meyer, 2017: 46, footnote 95). Kurdish has *bēdad* 'unlawful, cruel' and *bēdadi* 'injustice'. We can thus expect that the range of meanings was already somewhat broader in Sogdian than the examples in the edited texts with the exception of the *Vessantarajātaka* ('unhappily') would make us believe. For a similar semantic spectrum see Latin *inīquus* ranging from 'unjust, unfair, unequal, uneven' to 'unfavorable, disadvantageous, unsuitable' etc.

How can we update the transcription of the Old Uyghur word under discussion? The 'defective' spellings in the first syllable reflect the Sogdian origin perfectly and the vowels that are sometimes inserted in Old Uyghur texts are merely epenthetic to avoid the – for speakers of a Turkic language – unfamiliar double consonant cluster. Considering the etymology a reading with an initial *p-* is preferable. Although Gharib's Sogdian dictionary (2004: 271b, no. 6770) has the transcription *paḍātē*, other scholars transcribe the adverbial *-y* in a different way. Yoshida (2009: 294), for his part, assumes a long *-ī*. This leads us to an updated transcription *p(a)dati* for the Old Uyghur word, which is never spelled with an initial Aleph.

3. The second loanword

Now that *p(a)dati* can be identified as a Sogdian loan, the semantically related word transliterated above as *QYRY* in example 01 and *QYRY* in examples 05 and 09 too presents itself as a possible loanword. The single diacritical dot in *QYRY* as found in the *Kšanti kalguluk nom bitig* already points to a word beginning with /h/. Thus the transcription *kırı* in the edition is highly questionable and should be corrected.²² Two further instances with a single diacritical dot are found in the same text:²³

(11) *bo bir azunta yoksuzın [kurugsuzı]n²⁴ QYRY yorıp ärtürmägülük ol* "one should not let (human existence) pass by uselessly₃ in this one life" (Wilkens, 2007/1: 96, lines 0684–0685)

²¹ Lurje & Yakubovich, 2017: 324.

²² A supposed form **kırı* cannot be derived from *kir-* "to scrape" (a fossilized aorist) because we find the aorist *kira* in Yakup, 2021: 366, line E109.

²³ But note that in line 0742 (Wilkens, 2007/1: 100) back vocalic *g* is also represented by <q> with a single diacritic (in *asıgi*).

²⁴ At the end of the lacuna the remnants of a single character are visible. The traces cannot be interpreted as being a letter <y> so it is impossible to restore *p(a)dati* here. Because *yoksuz kurugsuz* is found quite often as a binomial the latter is restored here.

(12) *QYRY luvlan ärür ärmäz temäk üzä* “by saying it is useless₂ and uncertain (lit. existing and non-existing)” (Wilkens, 2007/1: 100, line 0741)

The etymology of *luvlan* in example (12) is still unexplained. The corresponding Chinese text of the whole phrase as quoted in example (12) has 空構是非 *kong gou shi fei*. Thus *QYRY luvlan* translates the first character 空 *kong* (‘empty, void, without substance’).

Peter Zieme (1985: 111) has already pointed out in a note to line 43 of his poetic text no. 16 that a phrase in the *Altun Yaruk Sudur* should be compared. This is actually the only instance where the word is used as a substantive:

(13) *ilinčü mänji oyun QYRY²⁵ ugrinta* “because of enjoyment₂ and (idle) amusement₂” (Radloff & Malov 1913–1917: fol. 101:20)

The corresponding Chinese original is 或因諸戲樂 *huo yin zhu xi le* “or if because of fun and amusement ...” (T. 665, p. 411c19).

Similar to the first word discussed above, a Sogdian origin of the word under discussion can be assumed. In Sogdian Manichaean texts the spellings *xyr’k* and *xyry* ‘stupid’ in Sogdian script are attested (Sims-Williams & Durkin-Meisterernst, 2012: 226a). Older and by now outdated transliterations of occurrences in Buddhist texts are *γyr’k* (Gharib, 2004: 181a, no. 4532), *γyr’k* (Gharib 2004, 181a, no. 4534), *γyr’y* (Gharib, 2004: 181b, no. 4536) and *γyry* (Gharib, 2004: 181b, no. 4539).²⁶ But in this dictionary we already find the transcription *xīrē/xērē* and the reference to Khotanese *khīra*, Khwarezmian *xyr’w* and Yaghnobi *xīra*. Bailey’s (1979: 74b–75a) Khotanese dictionary has the entry *khīraa-* ‘depressed, sad’ and already refers to the Sogdian equivalents as well as to New Persian *xīrah* ‘dark, dim, moody’.²⁷ Similar to the first word discussed above in section 2 we can expect a broader range of meanings for the Iranian side. An indication is the entry *xīra* in the Persian-English dictionary by Steingass (1892: 491–492 s.v. *khīra*). Among the many recorded meanings are, e.g., “malevolent, malignant, quarrelsome, moody, contumacious” but also “dazzled, fatigued; dark, cloudy; causeless, groundless” and “vacant, indolent, idle” etc.

With this etymology in mind we are now in a position to bring the examples quoted above together with the hitherto unexplained Old Uyghur word *he ri* in Brāhmī script in Gabain, 1954: 9 (text A, line 9) which is combined with *yoksuz*. The phrase *yoksoz heri bolmamakındın ärür* corresponds to Sanskrit *avandhyatvāt* “because it is not futile”. As a preliminary transcription based on the Brāhmī instance *heri* can be suggested for Old Uyghur. To conclude, both entries in the *Handwörterbuch des Altuirigischen* (Wilkens, 2021: 373a) – i.e. ¹*kırı* and ²*kırı* – should better appear under the lemma *heri*.

²⁵ The fragment from the Turfan Collection in Berlin U 1526, which runs parallel, has the spelling *QYRY Y* (with line filler) in line verso 12. See plate 35 in Raschmann, 2000 (with a catalogue description of this piece under no. 110).

²⁶ See also the entry *γyr’kwn’y* ‘foolishness’ (Gharib, 2004: 181a, no. 4533).

²⁷ Ossetic *xæræ* ‘dark’ (Blažek, 2013: 55) which seems etymologically related at first glance is perhaps rather a loan from Turkic *kara* ‘black’. I owe this observation to Nicholas Sims-Williams.

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