

Editor's Foreword

Birth of the Mari Grammar

In his letter to Johan Vilhelm Snellman 18th October 1844, Matthias Alexander Castrén explains the life's work he has chosen: "There is only one thing that has moved me deeply, and it is the only thing to devote my life to, all other things are mere secondary to me. I have decided to show the people of Finland that we are not devoid of connections to the world and world history, an orphan nation from the swamp, but instead we represent, at least through our kinship relations, one sixth of mankind. The grammars do not embody my most important aim, but without grammars I cannot reach my goal." (*Epistulae* 1: 369.) Linguistic kinship cannot be proven without knowledge of the language structures to be compared, and grammar is the description of language structure. By drafting grammars, Castrén wanted to prove the kinship between the Uralic languages.

Castrén began work on his Mari or Cheremis grammar in Helsinki, in the autumn of 1844. The first, laconic mention of this work can be found in his letter to Adolf Edvard Arppe, dated 25th December 1844. In the long letter, he tells of his recovery with the help of the cod liver oil Arppe had given him, and that he intended to set out on his journey for Siberia in a couple months' time, a place he called his promised land. After this he states in passing that he is now working with "Cheremis and various other small matters". (*Epistulae* 1: 381.)

As Castrén mentions in the preface of this grammar, he had heard in the autumn of 1844 that there was "a certain Cheremis born in the Koz'modem'jansk Okrug, Principality of Kazan" serving among the Russian soldiers gathered in Helsinki. The man's identity is unknown. The Mari in question did not know Russian or any other languages, so working with him was very difficult. Castrén's primary sources were two grammars published earlier in Russia: *Сочинения принадлежащія къ грамматикѣ черемискаго языка*, Saint Petersburg 1775, and Andrej Al'binskij's grammar *Черемисская грамматика*, published in Kazan' 1837, and he went through these with his informant. In addition, he also had a few texts, mainly religious ones, such as Gospels, which he lists in his preface. Castrén describes the books as seen from the perspective of the language as "totally worthless".

The grammar of 1775 is often ascribed to the Archbishop Venjamin Pucek-Grigorovič, as are the grammars of Udmurt and Chuvash published at the same time. Thomas Sebeok and Alo Raun (1956: 12–13) have shown that they are not the product of the same author.

1 The first comparative presentation of Mari dialects and their phonetic differences was first published in 1889 by the Estonian linguist Mihkel Veske when he worked at the University of Kazan'.

Archbishop Pucek-Grigorovič, who was actively devoted to the conversion of the peoples of the Volga region, may have indirectly influenced the drafting of the Mari grammar. The dialect basis of the grammar has been contemplated at an early stage: József Budenz (1867: 191–212) stated that it represented a meadow dialect, but he also saw many deviant features. Sebeok and Raun (1956: 13–17) arrive at the same conclusion, but they demonstrate the anomalies suggest the dialectal influence of Northwestern Mari. Ivan Ivanov (1975: 16–17), on the other hand, considers the language form to represent the Meadow Mari dialect of Joškar-Ola, which shows features of Hill and Northwestern Mari. For Castrén, this was a problematic source, because in addition to the non-established orthography, the dialect base is clearly different from that of Hill Mari, and this, for example, was the source of reflections in Castrén's work on irregularities in the vowels. He correctly suspected that there might be dialect differences behind them.¹

Al'binskij's grammar was intended as a reader for Mari-language classes in the Kazan' Uezd and Čeboksary. The author himself states in the beginning of the book that it teaches one to read, write and understand the Mari language correctly. The grammar is based on Hill Mari. It has been applauded for being the first time to attempt to give one character, oftentimes character combinations, to represent each sound, even those that were not found in Russian. 39 characters were needed to describe the sounds of Hill Mari. (Ivanov 1975: 22–23.) The verbal description of the sounds is quite unsatisfactory, but in any case the work showed the Mari-language students how the language could be written. For a foreign speaker, for example, it does not give enough basis for perceiving the quality of different vowels. The description of grammatical elements in both the grammar of 1775 and 1837 follows the Russian model, for example in terms of the number of cases.

In the preface of his own grammar of Mari, Castrén tells of having concentrated on the study of Mari for some weeks and having written down observations for later work. He intended to set off on a second expedition, which would take him as far as Siberia in the beginning of 1845. The itinerary included passing through Kazan' and over the Ural Mountains. Since Mari settlements were located in the Kazan' area, Castrén had planned on improving the grammar manuscript there.

Castrén set off eastward from Helsinki on 27th February 1845 accompanied by Johan Reinhold Bergstadi. At first, the trip progressed slowly, with a group of friends and a farewell party in Porvoo as well. On 6th March, the troika arrived in St Petersburg. (Bergstadi 1884: LVIII–LXII, 1, 8.) The journey could not be resumed until more than two weeks later, on 24th March, when the documents were finally in

order and the travel money had been received. The itinerary included Moscow, Vladimir and Nižnij Novgorod on the way to Kazan', where the travellers arrived on 10th April. (*Epistulae* 1: 391.)

They met the first Maris on the journey along the Volga in Koz'-modem'jansk and Čeboksary (Bergstadi 1884: 15). According to Castrén, the number of Maris at that time was "somewhat over 200,000 souls", and only 67,657 lived in the Kazan' Governorate (*Itineraria* 2: 711.)

In his letter to Anders Johan Sjögren on 12th April 1845, Castrén complains that there is a dearth of Maris in Kazan'. The Active State Councillor Karl Fuchs suggested that Castrén travel to his own farm, which was located 72 versts from Kazan', in the middle of a dense Mari area. Castrén, however, rejected the idea, as travelling would be difficult and time consuming. He considered the study of the Samoyed to be his main goal and chose not to take the State Councillor's offer, although he admitted that a stay in the Mari territory would have provided him with a deeper understanding of the language. (*Epistulae* 1: 391.) The decision was undoubtedly influenced by Castrén's poor condition and constant illness, of which he reports in many of his letters.

Bergstadi (1884: 18) described the situation: "It has been difficult for Castrén to find Mari people to help, as they do not live in cities, nor do the Chuvash either, but in the countryside. Many willing speculators have appeared, but they have been half Tatars or Russians who have learned a few words of Mari. At last, Alcenius² found a young native Mari, who is a clerk at an agency. He is very witty and brisk. So the work is going fast." There is no definite information about the name of this informant either, but at the end of the Swedish vocabulary manuscript which is in alphabetical order (p. 236) there is a note "Cheremis from the Governorate of Kazan', Kusma Jemjänskij, Bolšoj Junjskoj (Болше-Юнь[ин]ский) Uezd". There are no other names of the persons in the manuscripts, so it can be assumed that this is the language informant.

Work on the grammar actually made quick progress. In a letter to Sjögren from 8th May 1845, Castrén writes that he was sending the grammar manuscript to Helsinki with Alcenius (*Epistulae* 1: 394). In a letter to Frans Johan Rabbe from 11th May 1845, Castrén asks him to submit the Cheremis grammar to Elias Lönnrot, who has promised to see to its printing. In his playful style, he states that he has not left Rabbe without a role either, as he should ask the University Consistory for funds to print it (70 silver rubles would be needed for printing 400 copies). If the university did not take a positive view, Rabbe should turn to the Finnish Literary Society. (*Epistulae* 1: 396.) In his letter to Lönnrot from 11th May, Castrén asks him to go through and

2 Master of Arts Carl Alexander Alcenius studied oriental languages in Kazan'.

check that the orthographies in the grammar and vocabulary sections correspond to one another and to have the quality of the Latin translation checked during printing. (*Epistulae* 1: 400–401.) On 12th May, Castrén and Bergstadi set out to continue their journey through Perm to Tobol'sk (Bergstadi 1884: 21–22).

The *Elementa grammatices Tscheremissæ* grammar, dated 1st May 1845, Kazan', appeared in the autumn of 1845 in the publications of the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki.

The Manuscript

Castrén's manuscript Vol. IV in the Finnish National Library consists of several versions of the grammar and of the vocabulary both in Swedish and in Latin. The grammar section (pp. 1–169) contains a total of 169 small pages. It includes a Latin version of the preface, and both a Latin and Swedish version of the grammar descriptions and inflectional formulas. The vocabulary section (pp. 171–276) is 105 pages long and contains word lists in both Latin and Swedish.

There are two versions of the latter, alphabetical and organized by part of speech. There are also two versions of the Latin word lists, a messy and a handwritten version for printing.

The Latin versions are direct translations of the Swedish originals, meaning that there are few differences to be found. The Latin versions, as well as the printed work, have resulted in incorrect forms of the Mari language due to the work of several copyists. If the original correct form can be found in the Swedish manuscript, I have made a correction and provided a footnote.

The Critical Edition

This critical edition contains an English-translated version of Castrén's Mari grammar published in 1845 with comments marked in the margins. It has double page numbering: running page numbers at the bottom of the page and original page numbers from the printed grammar of 1845 at the top.

The second part consists of Castrén's vocabulary *Index Vocabulorum*. The vocabulary is commented with a special method of its own, and this method is described in the beginning of it (page 87). The same method was used in Castrén's *Ostiacica* (2018).

All references used in the grammar parts and in the vocabulary are presented together at the end of the volume.

The Mari-language materials in both the grammar section and the vocabulary are written for the most part the same way as Castrén wrote them. The greatest deviation from this rule, however, are the two schwa vowels, front and back. They did not have their own character in the orthography, and there was no precise information about their quality. In many cases, Castrén refers to their weaker articulation, but he still indicates them in his writing with full vowels. In terms of the modern language, their correct word form is difficult to identify. If they had been retained as such, virtually every word would have had to be given the correct form in footnotes. Therefore, in this edition the schwa vowels are indicated with their established diacritical marks, the front schwa in *ä* and the back in *ə*. The only exception is the beginning of Castrén's Preface up to point 5 on page VIII. There, for example, he reflects on the quality of vowels, so the examples given had to be left unchanged for the sake of clarity.

In the case of consonants, the same practice has been followed as in the critical edition of Castrén's Zyrian grammar: *c*, *s*, *z* have been replaced by *č*, *š*, *ž*, respectively, as Castrén has clearly stated that it is an issue of one hushing affricate and two shibilants.

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