

Written Mongolian *čamča* ‘shirt’ and its etymological counterparts in Europe

Seventy five years ago G. J. Ramstedt wrote on the origin of Kalmyk *tsamtsv* ‘shirt’ as follows: “viell. **sam,ča* zu ma. *samsu* ‘hanfgewebe’, kor. *sam* ‘hanf’” (KW 421b).¹ Approximately a decade later, in 1947, Leonardo Olschi suggested that the Written Mongolian word *čamča* ‘shirt’ possibly reflected a Greek etymon and was connected with French *chemise* and Italian *camicia* id. (cited after de Rachewiltz 2004: 309). Two years later, G. J. Ramstedt repeated his opinion that this word is a reflex of a proto-form **samča*, being a derivative of a **sam* in the proto-language, attested only in Korean. Thus, **sam* (> Kor. *sam* ‘hemp’) > **samča* > Mo. *čamča* ‘shirt’ (~ Ma. *samsu* ‘thin hempcloth’) > Ma. Nan. *čamči* ‘shirt’ (SKE 222).

Neither Ramstedt nor Olschi explained the sound changes and morphological problems involved. In this situation, readers had at their disposal no precise arguments for or against Ramstedt and Olschi. It could thus be expected that some of them preferred the European etymology and others the Altaic. Indeed, this was the case.

Pavel Poucha (1956: 47sq.) devoted a discussion of some length to this Mongolic word. However, some of his formulations are not really clear and unequivocal or easily acceptable:

- (1) “[...] nach Ramstedt vielleicht aus *sam-ča* zu manj. *samsu* ‘Hanfgewebe’, kor. *sam* ‘Hanf’, dann könnte man das mong. *čamča* aus dem Chinesischen herleiten, wo *šan* < *šām* ‘Hemd’ vorkommt.” (Poucha l.c.).

There can be no question that Ramstedt’s task when publishing his SKE was to show the Altaic genetic unity, rather than Chinese loanwords in Korean and Mongolic.

- (2) “Obwohl Ramstedts Etymologie verführerisch aussieht, so ist doch zu erwägen, daß dieser gemeinmongolische² Ausdruck dem europäischen ‘Hemd’ sehr nahe kommt: neugriech. (ύπο) κάμισον aus

1. Ramstedt used the sign () to indicate that the preceding part of a word is a nominal stem. Thus, his **sam,ča* is what we would today write **sam+ča*, in contrast to the deverbal derivative **sam-ča*. However, in the fragment cited after Poucha below, the word is traditionally transcribed **sam-ča*.

2. Poucha (l. c.) adduces the following Mongolic forms: Dörbet-bejse *šams(e)*, “udschumtsin” (= Üžümüčin) *čamč(i)*, “dschastu” (= Žasagtu) *šamži*, Ordos *čamča* ‘shirt’ and Dagur *čančhi* ‘overall, coat’. The modern Khalkha form *camc*, Buryat *samsa* and Kalmuk *camcv* ‘shirt’ (mentioned as *camca* in Poucha l.c.) are to be added here.

dem Romanischen, spanisch *camis(ol)a*, franz. *chemise* aus vulgärlat. *camisia* [...] ‘Männerhemd’ < Gall. < Germ. (urgerm. **kamitja* > ahd. *hemidi* > nhd. *Hemd*) [...]. Und so wäre es nichts Außerordentliches, wenn man annehmen wollte, was ich anzunehmen geneigt bin, nämlich, daß das mongolische Wort *čamča* letzten Endes mit deutschem ‘Hemd’ verwandt ist [...]” (Poucha l.c.).

Poucha, like Olschi, does not explain the sound differences observed here, nor does he settle the order of transitional languages. One cannot even determine what specific European word is to be regarded as the etymon of the Mongolic word.

In 1969, Martti Räsänen (VEWT 98a) continues, as was only to be expected, the “Altaic tradition” in that he repeats Ramstedt’s suggestions, albeit in a somewhat more cautious way and without reconstructed forms: “mo. [...] *čamča* ‘Hemd’ (> ma. *čamči* ‘Weiberhemd’) ~ ma. *samsu* ‘Hanfgewebe’ ~ kor. [...] *sam* ‘hemp’” (VEWT 98a). The real relationship between these forms remains unclear.

In the early 21st century Igor de Rachewiltz (2004: 309) derived the Mongolic word – with a question mark – from Chinese *shan-tzu* ‘woman’s dress, shirt’, and this explanation was accepted by V. Rybatzki (2006: 307b). Thus, a third etymological suggestion emerged.

An element common to all these explanations is the fact that Turkic data are always reported to be loans from Mongolic. This does not of course mean that words like Oyr., Leb. *čamča* ‘Hemd’, Tel. *čamča* ‘Rock’, Brb. *camca* ‘Kleid’, Eastern Tk. *čamča* ‘hemdartiges Kleidungsstück’, Saryg-Uyg. *čamža* ‘кафтан, верхняя одежда’, Čag. *čumča* ‘Hemd’ (VEWT 98a); Sal. *čamža* ‘surtout simple des femmes; chemise; pèlerine’ (Drimba 1976: 418) have not been borrowed from Mongolic. They certainly have. Nevertheless, the opposite borrowing direction seems possible as well, if one is ready to consider one further source of the Mongolic word, namely the word *čamašyr* ‘underwear’,³ present in numerous Turkic languages, i.e. Turkic > Mongolic > Turkic.

The Uygur language with its *y* > *i* palatalization⁴ and loss of word-final *r* (*čamašyr* > *čamaši*)⁵, as well as vowel raising (*čamaši* > *čamiši*)⁶ seems to

3. For the semantics cf. Fr. *chemise* and its English reflex *chemise*.

4. In Turkic words, the letter ⟨y⟩ stands for the velar counterpart of *i* (i.e. = Tksh. *ɪ*, Russ. *ы*), often rendered also by ⟨i⟩ in other Turkological works. In non-Turkic examples, ⟨y⟩ = *j*.

5. A degree symbol (°) is used to signal that a form is a modern and perfectly possible, although unrecorded variant, rather than a protolinguistic reconstruction (see Anikin 1997).

6. Both phenomena can easily be observed in the Uygur name of the desert in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China: (*Täklimakan* < and ~) *Taklimakan* < **Taklamakan* < **Taklarmakan*, lit. ‘place of arches’ (< *taklar* ‘arches’ [pl. < *tak* ‘arch archit.’] + *makan* ‘place’) because winds occasionally blow the sands away and expose some remains of old buildings, namely arches jutting out of walls (Jarring 1997: 447). The modern pronunciation *Täkli...* (instead of *Takli...*) results from a secondary vocalic harmonization. It cannot possibly be interpreted as the result of the so-called “Uygur umlauting” because this process does not work “before an *i* that is the result of raising” (Hahn 1991: 51). Even if one assumes that *i* in *Takli...* was, at some stage, no longer perceived as secondary (easily imaginable in an old compound), was no longer etymologically transparent and used only as a geographical name, the umlauting would yield an *e* – *i* sequence (as in **baš* ‘head’ + *-im* ‘my’ > Uyg. *bešim* ‘my head’), rather than *ä* – *i* (Hahn l.c.).

best fit into the imaginable borrowing channel and the train of sound changes, because the subsequent syncope of a narrow vowel in the second syllable of a three-syllable word, usually called *Mittelsilbenschwund* in Turkic linguistics (*°čamiši* > *°čamši*) is quite a regular tendency on the brink of being a rule. The frequent alternation *-a ~ -y* (> *-i*) makes the occurrence of *°čamši* and *°čamša* side by side quite possible. The only problem is that neither *°čamši* nor *°čamiši* could actually be found in Uyğur. On the other hand, Eastern Turkic ("turc oriental") forms like *žumžār* (Zenker 375a: *ğumğar* راجموج 'chemise, vêtement / Hemd, Kleid') and *žumžāh* (Zenker 365b: *ğumğah* راجموج 'chemise / Hemd') seem to support our conjecture about the existence of a former Persian-Turkic form *°čamašy(r) ~ °čamša* or the like.

Provided that we accept this etymological possibility for the time being, we may go a step further back because the Turkic word *čamašyr* 'underwear' is a loan from Persian. Interestingly enough, most sources adduce only Pers. *žāmašuy* 'laundress' as the source of the Turkic word (the non-trivial semantic change has probably never been explained or at least discussed⁷). A. Tietze (2002: 471) even resorts to an inorganic (i.e. non-etymological) *r* that as hypercorrection occurs after a vowel and refers to the Turkish word pair *alengilli ~ alengirli* (argot) 'distinguished, noble'. Some mistakes have to be corrected here:

- (3) In his Turkish formulation ("inorganik bir /r/" = 'an inorganic /r/'), Tietze, for unknown reasons, uses a phonological notation /r/, which certainly is incorrect in this context. As a matter of fact, an etymologist does not care whether an inserted unetymological consonant is a phoneme or an allophone in the given linguistic system.
- (4) In case of *alengilli ~ alengirli* one should invoke a dissimilation (*ll* > *rl*) or assimilation (*rl* > *ll*), i.e. focus on the consonant cluster, rather than the postvocalic position of the *r*. Besides, there is no "inorganic *r*" in *alengirli*, even if this variant really goes back to *alengilli*.
- (5) Since the etymology of *alengilli ~ alengirli* remains unknown, one cannot decide whether *-r-* actually is secondary here (cf. Tietze 2002: 149ab).⁸

Additionally, the assumption of a hypercorrect insertion of *r* is, in point of fact, totally unnecessary. The Persian word consists of *žāma* 'clothes, dress; clothing, apparel' and *šuy*, the present tense stem of *šustan* (~ *šostan*) 'to wash'. But this stem has, in reality, three forms: *šu*, *šuy* and *šur* (PRS 2: 101), so that one can expect *žāmašuy* to have two other variants as well. Indeed, Pers. *žāmašur* 'laun-

7. However, this is not the only case of such a change. An interesting parallel is Turkish *kaşar* '(wheel of) fat sheep milk cheese' < Romanian *căşăr* 'a shepherd who produces cheese' (< *caş* 'fresh, i.e. unsalted sheep milk cheese; single wheel of cheese'). I would like to sincerely thank Corinna Leschber (Berlin) for her help with the Romanian word material.

8. The explanation of /r/ (written again as a phoneme) given by Tietze sub *alengilli* requires further critical commentary (for one, Turkish *çamaşır* is the only example where *r* is not followed by a consonant). This would, however, lead us too far astray.

dress' is attested too (PRS 1: 425; this form is also given in PLOT). The only form I could not find is the variant ^o*žāmašu* but this seems to be nothing more than a phonetic variant of *žāmašuy*.

It is of no great importance whether we take Pers. *žāmašur*, *žāmašuy* or ^o*žāmašu* as our starting point. The Uygur reflex would have probably always been ^o*čamašu*, and this would in its turn change, according to rules of the Turkic vowel harmony, into ^o*čamašy*. The further phonetic evolution of the word is suggested above.

In view of these data, Germ. *Hemd* 'shirt' cannot be considered a European cognate of Mo. *čamča* id. This does not, however, mean that no correspondence of *čamča* is known in Europe. Another Persian derivative of *žāma* 'clothing' is *žāmadān* '1. wardrobe; 2. portmanteau, suitcase'. This word was borrowed into Russian as *чемодан* 'portmanteau, suitcase', probably via some Turkic language(s). Thus, *čem-* in the Russian word *чемодан* is the European etymological counterpart of *čam-* in the Written Mongolian word *čamča*.

On the other hand, Pers. *žāmadān* was also borrowed into Manchu as *čamda* 'portmanteau, suitcase' (Anikin 1997, 2000 s.v. *чемодан*), so that this language has reflexes of two derivatives of Pers. *žāma* 'clothing':

Russ. *чемодан* = Ma. *čamda* 'suitcase' < Pers. *žāmadān* id. < *žāma* 'dress' > *žāmašu(y)* ~ *žāmašur* 'laundress' > various Turkic languages *čamašyr* 'underwear' ~ Uyg. ^o*čamašu* ~ (**čamašy* >) ^o*čamaši* ~ ^o*čamaša* > ^o*čamišu* ~ ^o*čamiši* ~ ^o*čamiša* > ^o*čamšu* (> Ma. *samsu* 'hemp fabric') ~ ^o*čamši* (> Üžümüčün *čamč(i)*, Žasagtu *šamži*, etc.) ~ ^o*čamša* (> Written Mo. *čamča* 'shirt' > Khamnigan Evenki *camca* id. [Janhunen 1991: 104]).

Yet another trace of Pers. *žāma* is hidden in English *pyjamas* ~ *pajamas*,⁹ a word borrowed – via Urdu – from Pers. *pāžāma* (PRS 258a) ~ *pāyžāma* (PRS 271a) ~ *payžāma* (PRS 321a) < Pers. *pā(y)* ~ *pay* 'foot; leg' + *žāma* 'clothing'.¹⁰ Since this English word was afterwards borrowed into numerous languages, an etymological counterpart of Mongolic *čamča* can easily be found virtually all over Europe.

An additional problem to be solved in the future is whether the Siberian Turkic forms like Oyr. *čamča* 'shirt' should be better derived directly from Uyg. ^o*čamša* or via Mongolic *čamča*. At least the *č* – *č* sequence in Oyrot etc. seems to point towards Mongolic mediation.

Yet another problem is whether both the phonetic form and the meaning of Ma. *samsu* 'hemp fabric' actually were influenced by Kor. *sam* 'hemp' – a question that I do not feel competent to answer.

9. I would like to warmly thank Andrzej Pisowicz (Kraków) for directing my attention to this reflex of the Persian word.

10. The fact that Pers. *pāy*+*žāma* originally was a piece of clothing that covered legs, i.e. a sort of trousers is also reflected in the structure of Engl. *pyjama*+*s* like *trouser*+*s*, *drawer*+*s*, *breech*+*es*.

In any case, if these words *are* cognates in an Altaistic spirit, the word-initial *s-* is original, and the *č-* of all other variants must be explained. If they are not, the origin of the Manchu *s-* is to be explained because Manchu does tolerate a word-initial *č-*, and this appears to be a case more complicated than the former one.

Furthermore, there exists a homonym *čamča* (~ *čömče*) ‘spoon, ladle’ in Turkic, attested also in Persian (*čumča* id.). The etymology and the conduits of transmission (TMEN 3: 95 Nr. 1121; Doerfer 1968–69 Nr. 68: Ar. *čimča*) are not ultimately settled, and two aspects are possibly of special importance to *čamča* ‘shirt’. One is the phonetic shape of the word: Can our understanding of one *čamča* word be effectively used in order to explain the origins and evolution of the other *čamča* word? The other aspect is of contactological nature: Is it possible that these words affected each other, e.g. in phonetic terms?

All in all, I do not actually think that the Persian-Turkic word *čamašy(r)* is the only source of the Mongolic word *čamča*. Rather, *čamašy(r)* was one of the forms involved, and the whole word family of Siberian *čamca* ~ *samsa* ~ *čamži* and so on, is arguably to be viewed as the result of blending of different words¹¹ whose more detailed analysis requires further research (although it is not certain that this etymological knot can ever be ultimately untied).¹²

Even if Mongolic *čamča* and its counterparts in other languages are no Oriental reflexes of German *Hemd* and French *chemise*, they build a set of phonetic and semantic variants that certainly merit our attention.

11. This concerns both the genesis of the Mongolic word and the precise establishing of a source of its reflexes in Turkic. It is thus easily understandable that V. Drimba (1976: 426) adduces Sal. *čamža* in the context characterized in the following way: “Il existe un assez grand nombre de mots qui ne nous permettent pas de préciser à quelle langue mongole ils ont été empruntés [...]”.

12. A good example of such a special blending (fortunately, a solved one) is the semantic history of Siberian words with the meaning ‘1. Russian; 2. monster’ or, sometimes, ‘1. monster; 2. Russian’ (Janhunen 1997).

Abbreviations

Ar.	= Arabic	Nan.	= Nanay
Brb.	= Baraba	Oyr.	= Oyrat
Čag.	= Chagatay	Pers.	= Persian
Engl.	= English	Russ.	= Russian
Fr.	= French	Sal.	= Salar
Germ.	= German	Tel.	= Teleut
Leb.	= Lebed	Tkc.	= Turkic
Kor.	= Korean	Tksh.	= Turkish
Ma.	= Manchurian	Uyg.	= Uygur
Mo.	= Mongolic		

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