



OSSETIC LANGUAGE II. OSSETIC LOANWORDS IN HUNGARIAN

ii. Ossetic Loanwords in Hungarian

One of the features of Ossetic is the number of lexical traces that show ancient contacts with many, often very diverse, ethnic groups. Conversely, Ossetic loanwords can also be observed in the languages of those groups. One of these languages is Hungarian, whose speakers came into contact with Ossetic speakers, when they were still settled in the Don-Kuban area (near the Caucasus). These contacts probably dated to the 4th-6th centuries CE, well before the Hungarian settlement of the Carpathian Basin in 896 (cf. Fehér, p. 23). Afterwards, small groups of Ossetians, the so-called *Jász*, arrived with the Cumans, a Turkic-speaking tribe, in Hungary (13th century). Most of the Ossetic borrowings in Hungarian apparently stem from the earlier period, although a small word-list and some names relating to these *Jász* have survived in Hungarian chronicles (cf. Németh, pp. 5-38).

Establishing the number of probable Ossetic loanwords in Hungarian proves to be problematic, as the similarity may be sheer chance. Even if we are dealing with borrowing, it may well stem from a third source. It is therefore not surprising to find major disagreements in the handbooks.



The following Hungarian forms are considered to be likely borrowings from an earlier stage of Ossetic, following L. Benkő (see Bibliog.): Hung. *asszony* “mistress, madam” ~ Oss. *æxsin/æxsijnæ* “lady, mistress” (< Ir. **xšaiθnī*-); *egész* “healthy, whole(some)” ~ *ægas/ægas, igas* “whole(some), healthy, alive” (< **wi-kāsa*-); *ezer* “thousand; regiment” ~ *ærzæ, ærʒæ* “thousand; a countless number” (< **hazahrā*); *gazdag* “rich, wealthy” ~ *qæznyg, qæzdyg/ǵæzdug* “rich” (< **gazna*- + *-yg/-ug*); *legény* “young man, apprentice” ~ *læg* “man, male, human” (< Caucasian ?); *méreg* “poison” ~ *marg* “poison” (< **marka*-); *tölgy* ~ *tulʒ/tolʒæ* “oak” (see below); *üveg* “glass” ~ *avg/avgæ* “glass, bottle” (< **āpa-kā*-); *vért* “shield, mail” ~ *wart* “shield” (< **warθra*-).

Other Hungarian forms that have been cited as ancient Ossetic loanwords in earlier studies (notably Munkácsi, 1904; Sköld) are disputed or declined by Benkő: *éd-es* “sweet” (~ Oss. *ad* “taste”); *esztendő* “year” (~ *az* “year”); *fizet* “to pay” (~ *fizyn/fezun* “to pay”); *gond* “care” (~ *kond* “work, act”); *keszeg* “white fish” (~ *kæsaɡ/kæsalgæ* “fish”); *mély* “deep, depth” (~ *mal* “deep spot in a river, sea”); *mén* “stallion” (~ *moj/mojnæ* “man, husband”); *nép* “people, nation, populace” (~ *Naf* “divine protector of a settlement”); *rég* “long” (~ *rag* “long”); *részeg* “drunk” (~ *rasyg/rasug* “drunk”); *zöld* “green” (~ Dig. *zældæ* “(young) grass, turf”). Hung. *bűz* (Benkő, I, p. 405) “smell, bad odor” may indeed have an Iranian origin, perhaps Parthian *bwd* rather than pre-Ossetic (cf. *bud/bodæ* “fragrance, incense”). Another disputed form is Hung. *mű* “work,” which is considered a borrowing from Oss. *mi*, Dig. *miwæ* “thing; work” by V. I. Abaev (1958, II, pp. 112 f.). According to Benkő (II, p. 987), the etymology of Hung. *mű* is unclear; it may be inherited, whereas the connection of Oss. form *mi* to Skt. *mīv* “to press on,” Khot. *mvīr*- “to move,” etc. is semantically unconvincing.

A large number of similar forms without a good (Finno-)Ugric or Iranian etymology are also shared by Ossetic and Hungarian, e.g., Hung. *ezüst* “silver” ~ Oss. *ævzist* (cf. Udmurt *azveś*, Komi *ezyś*), *kőris* ~ *kærz/kærzæ* “ash tree” (cf. Kalmuck *kürsn*, Nogay *küyriš*, Chuvash *kavārš*, etc.; Bläsing, pp. 8 ff.), *körte* ~ *kærdo/kærttu* “pear” (cf. Cuman *kärtmä*, Darginian *qjart*, Ingush *qor*). In these cases there are very few conclusive clues to prove a direct donor/borrower relationship between Ossetic and Hungarian, except for two forms. The “oak” word, *tölgy*, is probably a loanword from Oss. *tulʒ/tolʒæ*, as it contains an Ossetic suff. *-ʒ/-ʒæ*; for the etymology see A. Loma (pp. 112 ff.). Oss. *læg*, probably from Caucasian, may be the source of Hung. *legény* “young man,” in view of the Ossetian proximity to the Caucasus and the semantic agreement between *læg* and *legény*.



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