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*A Hungarian word of Turkic origin  
coming from India: bors 'pepper'*



**T**HE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE has about 400 early, i. e. pre-Ottoman Turkic loanwords. A new monograph on these Hungarian words is in preparation by Árpád Berta and myself (see BERTA-RÓNA-TAS 2002). In this monograph we set as our task to give the etymology of all Turkic elements occurring in Hungarian. In those cases where the word is of ultimately Turkic origin we give the base or stem and the suffix if it exists and remark its productivity. In cases where the Turkic word itself is a loan we try to clear the origin and the way how did the word come into the Turkic language. This is of essential importance, because if the word is an early loan in Hungarian, the word existed in West Old Turkic. Until now our knowledge on Old Turkic (the Turkic languages until the Mongolian invasion), was based practically on East Old Turkic. This contained the Runiform inscriptions, Old Uigur texts, Manichean texts in Uigur and Manichean scripts, Buddhist text in Uigur and Brahmi script and the two texts in Arabic script: the *Dīvān* of al-Kāshgarī and the *Kutadgu bilig* of Yūsuf Khāss Hājib. The scattered and scanty material of West Old Turkic, the few words in the Greek inscriptions of the Danube- or Proto-Bulgars, some dubious names and titles of West Old Turkic persons and the distorted List of Danube Bulgarian rulers did not entitle us to draw any conclusion on West Old Turkic. From historical sources we know that at least from the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century we have to count with Turkic peoples and languages West from the eastern border of Europe, West from the mountain range of the Ural and the river Yayik or Ural. The presence of a word in this layer of the Hungarian lexicon ensures a chronology. If the word is present in both East and West Turkic it can be supposed that it was, at least, present from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century on in Turkic. However this we cannot take for granted in case of the cultural or trade migrating words. The trade routes were open until the Mongolian invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and even if they changed, they existed until the Ottoman Empire did not take over their control. Therefore a thorough analysis of the Turkic data and the mediation of the Turkic word from its original into Turkic may offer additional data to the chronology of the word.

The Turkic origin of the Hungarian word for 'pepper': *borš* (orthographically *bors*) was accepted by all Hungarian scholars who dealt with the word. Already Vámbéry (VÁMBÉRY 1870, 133) stated the Turkic origin, and Munkácsi (MUNKÁCSI 1905, 376) recognized the 'Aryan' origin of the Turkic

word. This was then accepted by Gombocz (GOMBOCZ 1912, 51–52) and later by Németh, Ligeti, Benkő and others. Nobody tried, however, to draw the way from India to Turcia and nobody has investigated the chronological implications of all known data. This will be the aim of this paper. Let us see first the Turkic data (in the order and with the abbreviations used by us, see BERTA–RÓNA-TAS 2002).

OT *murč* ‘pepper’ (UHI 7 149, II 1 46), *mīrč* (UHI 134, II 1 114), *murč* (UTT VII 22, 3), *murč* ‘pepper’ (AK); MT – (UOg), – (UY), *murč* ‘poivre noir’ (UHy), – (UHyS), – (UCiv), – (ABF), – (AGul), – (AHMA), – (AHŠF), – (AIM), – (AIMI), – (AKD), – (AKor), – (AM), – (ANehF), – (ARbg), – (ATef), – (AYC); *burj* ‘poivre’ (AChag), – (AChagAbV), – (AChagB), – (AChagMA), *burč* ‘Pfeffer’ (AChagR), *burj*/ *burč* ‘–’ (AChagS), *burj* ‘Pfeffer’ (AChagŠS), *burč* ‘Pfeffer’ (LCC), *burč* ‘kara biber’ (AAH), – (AAHI), *burč* ‘poivre’ (ABul), *burč* ‘poivre’ (ADur), *burč* ‘Pfeffer’ (AHou), – (AKav), – (AMGh), – (ATuh), – (AmTr), – (AmD), – (AmCh), – (AmE); *burj* ‘taze dal, filiz; okse otu’ (AOtT see Tt), *burč* ‘pepper’ (AOtT apud CLAUSON 1972, 772), *burç* ‘karabiber’ (TtD-Karaçay aşireti \*Emirdag); NT *Chuv pārāš* ‘perec’ (Chuv); *NW borič* ‘perec’ (Tat), *boros* ‘perec’ (Bashk), *buruc* ‘perec’ (SibT), *murč* ‘černyj perec’ (Kirg), *buris* ‘pepper’ (Kaz), *buris* ‘perec’ (Kkalp), *buris* ‘perec’ (Nog), – (CrTat), *burc* ‘perec’ (KarH), *burč* ‘perec’ (KarT), *burč* ‘perec’ (RKum), *purč* ~ *burč* ‘perec’ (Krch-Blk), *burc* ~ *burš* ‘Pfeffer’ (KrchP); *SW burč* ‘perec’ (Tkm), – (Az), *purč* ‘pepper’ (Az apud LIGETI 1986, 303), *murč* ‘poivre’ (Afshar, LIGETI 1986, 303), *burç* ‘mistletoe (Lat *Viscum album*), shoot, sprout’ (Tt), – (Gag), – (Khor), – (SOgh); *Kh* – (Kh); *Turk murč* ‘černyj perec’ (Uzb), *murč* ~ *mūč* ‘pepper’ (TurkiJ), *murč* ‘perec’ (MUig), – (Sal), – (YUig); *S mirč* ‘perec’ (Alt), *mīrč* ~ *pīrč* ~ *purč* ‘perec’ (AltQK), *mīrs* ‘perec’ (KhakS), – (FY), – (Tuv), – (Tof); *Y* – (Y), – (Dlg).

**Mongolian:** *burš* ‘Pfeffer’ (Kalmuck) ← Kazak.

**Ossetian:** *byrc*, *burcae* ‘černyj perec’ ← Turkic.

From the Turkic data we can reconstruct the inner Turkic history of the word. The original form was *murč*. In most Turkic languages an initial *m*- is possible only before a nasal (*-n* or *-ŋ*). In all other cases the foreign *m*- changes into *b*-. Thus the second step was a change from *murč* to *burč*. The final *-rč* is rare, but existed in OT, see e. g. *kurč* ‘taugh, hard’, later in *kurč temür* and also alone ‘steel’, *jurč* ‘one’s wife’s younger brother’, *sürč*- ‘to stumble’ and in a few onomatopoeic stems. In some languages because of the bisyllabic tendency and also because of the unusual final, an epenthetic vowel was inserted, thus *burč* changed to *buruč*. The final *-č* regularly changed in some Turkic languages into *-c* (some Tatar and Karaim dialects), into *-š* (Kazakh, Karakalpak and Nogai), into *-s* (Khakass-Sagai). In some Turkic languages we can observe a delabialization *u* > *i*. Chuvash has a bisyllabic form with a regular *č* >> *ś* change \**buruč* >> *pārāš*. The earlier Chuvash form is, however a secondary one. It developed from *burč*. This can be seen in Ossetic *byrc* which clearly points to a final *-rč*, and the *č* > *c* is an inner Ossetic change. It is of importance that Turkic *kevrič* (> Hungarian *kőrís*) ‘ash-tree’ is in Ossetic: *kaerz* or *kaerzæ* ‘jasen’. Here Ossetic *-z*- is reflecting a West

Old Turkic sibilant (most probably an *š*), that is, a Turkic form like *\*kēriš* and not *kevič* which would have become *\*kaerc*. This means that Ossetic *kaerz* is a later copy than Ossetic *byrc* / *burcae*. We can follow the West Old Turkic change *-rč > -rš*. Thus now we can reconstruct for Chuvash the following steps of change *murč > burč* (→ Ossetic *\*burč > byrc* / *burcae*) > *burš* (→ Hungarian *burš > borš*) > *\*buruš* > Chuvash *pārāš*.

The Kalmuck is clearly a Kazakh loan, the word does not exist in other Mongolian languages.

According to the Hungarian historical-etymological dictionary, edited by Benkő (BENKŐ 1967–1984, I, 349; BENKŐ 1993–1997, I, 129) the Hungarian data for *bors* [borš] ‘pepper’ first appeared as a geographical name in a document which was written in 1075, but copied many times and preserved in a copy from the year 1550 in a geographical name in the form *Borsu* [boršu]. The second data is from 1215 and copied in 1550, also in a geographic name as *Burs* [burš]. As a common noun it appeared in 1395 as *bors* [borš] ‘pepper, black pepper’. It is doubtful that the first Hungarian data, the geographic name *Borsu* pertains here. Not because of the final vowel, this could be accounted for, but because the vowel *-o-* in the first syllable. The *-u- > -o-* is a regular Middle Hungarian development: *bors* < Old Hungarian *\*burš* ← West Old Turkic *\*burš* < *burč* < Early Old Turkic *murč*.

The word has been connected already by Munkácsi (see above) with Skrt *marīca* ‘pepper’. Mayrhofer (MAYRHOFER 1986–2001, II, 321) is surely right when he stresses that this word is not of Indo-European origin, but we do not need to follow the further history of our word to South East Asia. Into Central Asia it surely came through Indian mediation. The Tibetan *mar-rci* ‘red pepper, guinea pepper’ quoted also by Ligeti (LIGETI 1986, 303) from (DAS 1960, 1270, s. v. *su-ru phan-tsha*) is a Tibetanized and vulgar form under the influence of *mar* ‘butter’ and *rci* ‘fruit’ and is going back to a form *\*ma-ri-ca*. The usual Tibetan name of the black pepper is *pho-ba-ri* going back to the same word as English *pepper*. This word is known in many languages of Central Asia, but we put it now aside.

More interesting are the Persian literary form: *marīč* ‘pepper’ (STEINGASS 1981, 1211), the Tajik literary *murč* ‘black pepper’ and Persian dialectal *murč*, Afghan *murč*, *mārč*, *mrāč* quoted by Ligeti (LIGETI 1986, 303), Khotanese *mireṃjsya*, Sogdian *marēnčka*, (GHARIB 1995, 216), the data from the Iranian dialects of the South-East: Ishkashim *mərč* (ABAEV 1958–1989, I, 282), Sarikol *mīrč*, *murč* (PAHALINA 1971, 105), Wahan *mīrč* (GRJUNBERG–STEBLIN-KAMENSKIJ 1976, 394) and the data of several Caucasian languages (Avar *purč*, Chechen *burč*, Ingush *burč*, Kabard *burč* all quoted in ABAEV 1958–1989, I, 282 and coming through Turkic → Alan mediation into the languages of Caucasia). Tocharian B *mrañco* ‘Piper nigrum’ (ADAMS 1999, 477) is pertaining to the Saka and Sogdian forms, which seem to go back to a form like *\*marinča*. Without going into details of the inner Iranian relations, it is clear, that there are two traditions, one with a nasal (Saka, Sogdian and from one of them Tocharian B) and the other without the nasal. The Turkic follows the forms without nasal present in the Persian and the South East Iranian dialects. Since the word is surely a word of trade, a migrating word, it is possible that the exact way of mediation will never be cleared.

However we were able to point to the chronology of the word. The word of Indian origin had to be borrowed before the Middle Persian loss of the vowel of the last syllable about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A. D. (see RASTORGUEVA–MOLČANOVA 1981, 51). Ind *marica* → Iranian \**mariča* > Middle Persian *marič* > *mirč* > *murč*. The borrowing into Turkic (Middle Iranian *murč* → Turkic *murč*) had to occur before the 5<sup>th</sup> century A. D. because it is present in both East and West Old Turkic, but only after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century because it reflects the loss of the final vowel in the Iranian word. This is the beginning of the Sassanid period, which shows in archaeology a great revival of trade. The borrowing into Hungarian can be dated only after the 5<sup>th</sup> century, because of the Turkic change *m* > *b* which is reflected not only in Hungarian, but also in Ossetic. The word was borrowed into Hungarian somewhat later then it was copied by Ossetic, after the Old Chuvash change *č* > *š*, but before the word became disyllabic. This points to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century. Of course all these dates are relative ones, and the only sure thing is their sequential order.

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