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A NOTE ON THE TURKMEN NAME FOR DRAGON / MONSTER / SNAKE

Among words illustrating his theses, S. A. Starostin (1997: 332) gives also the following entry:

« [Proto-Altaic] **ǰabda* 'a k. [= kind] of snake' (Turc. > Turkm. *juvdarxā* 'monster, a k. of dragon' (?); Tung. **ǰabdar*) > Jap. **datua* »

The very formulation raises doubts about the correctness of the reconstruction: if the question mark is justified, the Turkmen word does not belong here – are there then any other reflexes of the word in Turkic languages? (if there are not, the Tunguz **ǰabdar* is not enough to postulate the existence of a Proto-Altaic etymon); what is the historical status of *-r(-) ? (it is absent from the Proto-Altaic and the Japanese etymon, but it turns up in Tunguz and Turkmen); what is the -(r)xā suffix in Turkic?; are there any other derivatives in -(r)xā ?

However, the main goal of our study is not to evaluate the correctness of the Proto-Altaic etymon **ǰabda* (cf. esp. Miller 2000:71) but, instead, to discuss the etymology of the Turkmen word.

First of all, we should complete the word material. It is not especially weighty that the Turkmen *juvdarxā* has also an adjectival meaning of 'never surfeited, ravenous, greedy' since it can be derived from the sense of 'dragon' (however, as the etymology presented below shows, the semantic connection between 'dragon' and 'ravenous' may have also played a role in the development of the Turkmen word).

It appears more important that the word *juvdarxā* has also another phonetic variant: *aždarxā* ~ *aždar* '1. snake; 2. dragon'. This not only shows that the word-final -xā probably is an independent segment but also makes it possible (or even inevitable) to equate the Turkmen words *juvdarxā* ~ *aždar(xā)* with Ottoman-Turkish 1603 *āštārha*, 1680 *āždār(hā)*, 1730 *aždār*,

1790 *aždär* ~ *aždär* 'dragon' (Stachowski 1974: No 134) = Karaim *aždaya* id. = New Uyghur *äçtär* id. and to etymologize them from the Persian word *aždar* (Pl. *aždarhā*) 'dragon'.

Now, the question arises, how the word-initial *juv-* came into being. The fact that *juv-*, as it seems, does not occur in the equivalents of the Turkmen word in other Turkic languages suggests the idea of an individual and sporadic change in Turkmen alone. We would like to explain it as a result of two psychic processes: association and folk-etymology.

First, the word-initial *až-* of the Turkmen *aždar(xā)* has probably been associated with Turkmen *aš* 'food, meal', so that the entire word could have been interpreted as a designation of a being which is, this way or another, connected with eating or devouring. All the more as the rest of the word could then have been understood as a suffix composition: *-dar* (< Persian *dār* 'having; habend', cf. Turkmen *māldār* [-ll-] 'cattle-breeder' < *māl* 'cattle', *dükāndār* [-nn-] 'shop-keeper' < *dükān* 'shop' (Clark 1998: 521); Ottoman-Turkish *veznedar* 'cashier' < *vezne* 'cash desk', *defterdar* 'minister of finance' < *defter* 'register, tax list/register, booklet, copy book') and *-hā*, Persian plural suffix.

This folk-etymology (partially correct, because the Turkmen segment *-xā* actually is a reflex of the Persian plural suffix) made then possible a contamination of the segment *až(d)-*, misunderstood as a variant of *aš* 'food, meal', with *juv(d)-*, being a part of the Turkmen *juvut-* (~ *juvdV-*) 'to swallow, to gulp', *juvd-ul-* 'to be swallowed', *juvd-un-* 'to swallow the spit (e.g. in fear)', *juvd-um* 'a gulp'. The result was a new word *juvdarxā* whose word-initial syllable suggested a creature that swallows (its victims).

In the light of what has been said above there exists no possibility of reconstructing a Proto-Altaic etymon of the Turkmen word *juvdarxā*.

L i t e r a t u r e

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