Notes on Mari etymology with reference to Chuvash and Permian

Among the Mari lexicon, borrowings from the neighbors of the Mari in the Volga-Kama region are myriad. Loans from Chuvash are treated by Räsänen (1920) and Fedotov (1990), and a large number of Permian > Mari loan etymologies have been proposed by Bereczki (1977; 1987; 1992–1994: II 97–129; 2003; 2004; 2005; see also Bereczki et al. 2013). However, these efforts have not exhausted the amount of Mari words still in need of an etymology, and the publication of newer lexical references has brought new items to scholars’ attention. This modest contribution to the Festschrift of a great scholar and teacher offers four new or updated etymologies of Mari vocabulary as loanwords from Chuvash or Permian.

1. MariE šorémβondo ‘rake’ < Permian

The most frequently encountered form of the Mari word ‘rake’ in the Meadow Mari standard language and dialects is šorβondo. The UEW (783) compares this Mari word with Finnish hara ‘Schwendegge’ and Estonian haro etc. and derives all these from a Proto-Uralic word *šara ‘Egge, Rechen, Harke’. This etymology was upheld by the editors of Tscheremissisches Wörterbuch (TschWb 710) who list the Mari dialectal forms of this word under an otherwise unattested headword šor-. An alternative approach was taken by the editors of the Mari–English Dictionary, who view Mari šorβondo as a compound of šor ‘filth’ and pondo ‘stick, pole’, but this could only be a folk etymology, because the Mari generally use the designated tool in haymaking and not raking filth.

1. Accessed 5 December 2019. The Mari–English Dictionary is an online dictionary of literary Meadow Mari created at the University of Vienna and located at ‹http://dict.mari-language.com›.
The UEW etymology is rejected by Bereczki et al. (2013: 247), who note that the initial s in the Malmyž dialect form speaks against the comparison with the Finnic forms. Fin. *hara and Estonian *hara reflect initial *s, but the array of Mari dialectal data appears to point instead to *š.

Of key importance in providing an etymology for this word are the forms where the initial member of the compound consists of two syllables, though none of these forms are shown in the TschWb entry. These are MariE šoromondo ‘грабли’ from the 1775 Mari grammar (Sebeok & Raun 1956: 61), MariE soromondo ‘грабли’ in an unpublished 18th-century manuscript by Gerhard Friedrich Müller that represents the Malmyž dialect (Isanbaev 1973: 67), and MariNW Uržum šorumbondā and Yarang šarm-pandā ‘Rechen, Harke’ in Beke’s Mari dialectal dictionary. Taking these forms into account, we can assume syncope of a second-syllable reduced vowel. As this development led to an intolerable cluster -rmp-, the cluster underwent simplification to -rβ- (with voicing assimilation of the original consonant *p) in some dialects and to -rm- in the Malyj Kilmez form šormondo attested in TschWb.

Thus we are clearly dealing with a compound of which the second element is pondo ‘stick’, a commonly used noun in Mari (of Uralic origin, see Bereczki et al. 2013: 193) and the second member of other compounds as well. Yet the first element, which we are seemingly led to reconstruct as PMari *sårə̑m, requires explanation. No standalone lexical item šorə̑m, šarə̑m is known across the Meadow Mari and North-western Mari dialects. Furthermore, the phonetic shape of the word is unusual for Mari. There is no productive derivational suffix -ə̑m in Mari, and nouns ending in -ə̑m overwhelmingly represent loanwords.

It was this that led Bereczki et al. to claim that the origin of this word must be sought in Volga Bulgarian or Chuvash. Were Chuvash the source, one would expect to find an original Chuvash V sorə̑m A surə̑m, as this would represent the regular source of our hypothetical MariE šorə̑m Malmyž šorə̑m NW sarə̑m, but no such material is attested in the Chuvash sources.

We might instead seek a source for the first element of Mari šorβondo in other languages with which Mari has been in contact, namely Permian and Russian – it must be noted that Mari šorβondo is attested in its various forms from Northwestern Mari, Meadow Mari and Eastern Mari dialects bordering on the Permian languages. Indeed, we find a candidate for the origin of the Mari word in Komi šore ̮ m ‘скирд, скирда, долгая клад’ ~ Udmurt šuri ̮ - ‘с kir dovat’. As Rédei & Róna-Tas (1982: 176–177) note, this word was borrowed into Chuvash as Cv. V šore ̮ m A šurə̑m ‘bundle of flax or hemp’ via an assumed Udmurt derivation *šurem (the suffix -Vm in the Permian

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2. A nearly complete list of Mari words ending in -ə̑m can be obtained from the Mari–English Dictionary. By executing the wildcard search %ym, one finds that after discarding those dictionary headwords where -ə̑m is the accusative case marker or first person singular possessive marker, or the numeral šə̑m; ‘7’, what remains are mainly borrowings from Turkic, e.g. kurə̑m ‘wheel rim’ < Tatar (Isanbaev 1994: 153) and parə̑m ‘debt’ < Chuvash (Fedotov 1990: 206).
languages denotes the perfect/passive participle of the verb). Furthermore, as these authors explain, the Udmurt word was borrowed also into local Russian dialects as шором ‘скирда хлеба’ and шоромы ‘составленные в козлы жерди для просушки в поле гороха в китинах’.

The Permian > Chuvash etymology serves to show that Permian speakers had agricultural techniques that would have motivated speakers of other languages to adopt their terminology. The Chuvash word, ‘bundle of flax or hemp’, is semantically very specific, however, while the first element of Mari šorə̑mβondo – if we interpret it as ‘haymaking’ – is rather more general. Also, Meadow Mari š ~ Malmyž Mari ʃ would be an unexpected reflection of Chuvash š (see Räsänen 1920: 26 for the general treatment of Chuvash sibilants in Mari).

Therefore, we might derive the Mari word from the Permian verb ‘to make hay’ directly, without Chuvash mediation. The correspondence Permian š ~ Meadow Mari š ~ Malmyž Mari ʃ is found also in the array of dialect forms underlying MariE lit. šujem ‘draufstellen, ausstrecken’ < Komi šujni ‘einstechen, hineinstecken’ (Bereczki 1992–1994: II 110). This requires us to adjust our reconstruction somewhat, as instead of a true PMari form *sârôm, we must now reckon with a borrowing after the Proto-Mari stage where the word was borrowed into now separate dialects and the Permian consonant š was reflected in most dialects as š but as s in Malmyž.

According to the most recent reconstruction of Permian vocalism by Zhivlov (2014: 122–124), the correspondence Komi o ~ Udm. u goes back to Proto-Permian *ő. Consequently we can reconstruct *sôr- ‘make hay’ for the Permian verb. As Proto-Mari and the subsequent Mari dialects have lacked a mid central labialized vowel, we can reckon with its replacement by *á sometime before the shift of PMari *á > o in the Meadow Mari dialects. Support for such a Mari adaptation of Proto-Permian *ő is provided by the etymology MariE oδar NW aδar ‘dicht belaubt; Ast; Trieb’ < Komi od ~ Udm. ud id. (Bereczki 1992–1994: II 105).

With regard to the second-syllable -ə̑m of Mari šorə̑m as a reflection of the Permian past participle suffix Komi -em Udm. -em, we find an analogue in MariE mal ˊə̑m ‘picky about food (animals)’, see below.

Consequently, the first element of Mari šorə̑mβondo ‘rake’ can acceptably be explained as a loan from Permian and the UEW etymology – or indeed any etymology at all by which the Mari word would have been inherited from Proto-Uralic – can be discarded.

3. On the reconstruction of *á in Proto-Mari, see Aikio (2014: 140).
2. **MariW ol’a ‘meat’ < Chuvash**

This word is found in various late 19th-century sources and early 20th-century sources for Hill Mari, e.g. in Zemljaniitsky’s Hill Mari manuscript dictionary from the 1870s it appears as ol’a ‘мясо, говядина’ (Sergeev 2002: 53–55, 179). While it was included in the recent Hill Mari dictionary of Savatkova (2008), there is it is already marked “устарое”, i.e. archaic.

Räsänen (1920: 160–161) assumed that MariW ol’a goes back to an unattested Chuvash word *xolya* on the basis of Turkic material such as Tatar *kalǯa* ‘ein stück fleisch’, Bashkir *kal’ya* ‘ein Stück gekochtes fleisch’, Kirghiz *kalža* ‘кушанье роженицъ (свѣжее мясо или бульонъ)’, and Turkish *kalya* ‘eine speise aus mit butter gekochtem gemüse’, which all represent a borrowing of a Perso-Arabic word. Räsänen’s suggestion is simply reiterated by Veršinin (2017: 377) in his Mari etymological dictionary.

Though it has passed unnoticed so far, support for Räsänen’s hypothesis of a Chuvash–Mari borrowing ultimately appeared in the Chuvash dialectal dictionaries of Ašmarin (X 155) and Sergeev (1968: 82). In both of those references, Cv. *xulya* ‘варёный жицкий горох’ is documented from the Viryal dialect of Chuvash, namely the village of Šerbaši in the Morgauši district of Chuvashia in relative proximity to where Hill Mari is spoken. Axmet’janov (2015: I 351), in his etymological dictionary of Tatar that specifies that Persian *qalya* ‘meat dish’ is ultimately the source of this material across the Turkic languages, lists some additional meanings of Tatar *kalǯa*: ‘жирный кусок; творог из молозива; особенно питательная пища для больных и рожениц’. Consequently, by assuming a more general meaning of ‘food dish (e.g. for the ill and child-bearing women)’ for this word in the Volga-Kama region, we can still relate the Mari and Chuvash words in spite of the fact that the dictionary definitions of the former refer to meat and the latter to a vegetable dish. Chuvash *x* is regularly reflected as Mari *∅*- in loans (Räsänen 1920: 21ff; Fedotov 1990: 259–270), and therefore the direction of borrowing can be established as Chuvash > Hill Mari. Hill Mari *∅* is a known reflections of Chuvash *u* in borrowings (see Räsänen 1920: 83).

In repeating Räsänen’s hypothesis that the Hill Mari word was borrowed from a lost Chuvash intermediary, Veršinin (2017: 377) suggests that that lost intermediary may have represented an inheritance from Volga Bulgarian. However, in the case of Chuvash *xulya* we cannot be dealing with an early loan of Perso-Arabic *qalya* into Volga Bulgarian, as the Volga Bulgarian shift of *-y-* to an affricate after a resonant was still operative in early loans, cf. Persian *dunyā* ‘world’ > Cv. *tênčē* id., Old Russian *мурья* ‘chimney’ > Cv. *mârcē* id. (Agyagási 2018: 188). Instead, Chuvash must have borrowed the word from a Tatar dialect in which *y* remained *y* (as in Bashkir), instead of shifting to *ξ*, and then subsequently transmitted it to Hill Mari.
3. **MariE** *malʻm* ‘picky about food (used of animals)’ < Permian

This Mari word is sparsely attested. It is found in the dictionary of Üpömarij (1926) as *malʻm* ‘разборчивая на пищу (корова)’ and ascribed to Meadow Mari. It has entered the modern Meadow Mari literary language as *мальым* ‘fastidious, picky about food (animals)’. Finally, it is attested in TschWb from the Volga dialect of Meadow Mari with a different initial consonant: *palʻm* ‘мäklig (die nur den besten Teil des Futters wählt und den Rest verschmäht)’.4

Gábor Bereczki has often noted (see e.g. Bereczki 2005: 195) that PU *l*’ underwent depalatalization in word stems in Mari, and only in Eastern Mari dialects did *l*’ reappear in the inherited lexicon in the position after *i*. Consequently, palatalized *l*’ in other environments points to a borrowing from another language. As MariE *malʻm* irregularly features *l*’ in the position after *a*, we can compare it to Udm. *milʻi* ‘насытиться’, namely its past participle *milʻem*. The semantic extension from ‘sated’ to ‘unwilling to eat’ is straightforward.

While it may seem unusual that Permian material where Udmurt shows a high vowel in the first syllable would be borrowed as a low *a* in Mari, such a case is known from MariE *panʻ* ‘spoon’ < Permian, cf. Udm. *punij* (Bereczki 1992–1994: II 106). The reflection of the Udm. past participle *-em* by Mari *-ə̑m* has been discussed above in the etymology for Mari *šorʻmβondo* ‘rake’.

Finally, with regard to the vacillation between initial *m* and *p* in Mari, not only is this found elsewhere in the Mari lexicon, e.g. MariE *muńč ʻałem* NW *pŭndzaltem* ‘to slide, to glide’ (TschWb), but the same vacillation is sometimes found in Udmurt, cf. *malʻpoti ᾣ ~ palʻpoti ᾣ* ‘to smile’ in the dictionary of Vakhrušev (1983).

4. **MariE** *ńumal(a)* ‘fish/animal slime’ < Permian

In TschWb we find MariE *ńumula* ‘Schleim (am Fisch)’ from the Volga dialect and *ńūmul* ‘(zur Brunzeit aus dem Geschlechtsorgan eins weiblichen Tiers, einer Kuh, laufend)’ from the Upša dialect. Additionally, the dictionary of Troitskij (1895) attests MariE <ńumala> ‘слизистый’ from an unspecified Meadow Mari source.

As Bereczki (1977: 59) notes, PU *ń*- underwent depalatalization in Mari, and therefore a Mari word with *ń* is indicative of borrowing from Permian. This Meadow Mari material can therefore be traced to Udm. *ńumles* ‘мягкий, ослизлый’, *ńumilʻ-ńumilʻ* id. (see e.g. the Udmurt dictionary of Vakhrušev). The Udmurt word is in turn of Permian origin, cf. Komi *ńimles* (KESK 199).

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4. In spite of the initial *p*, the editors of TschWb appear to assume that this represents a variant of the same word *malʻm* known from literary Meadow Mari and consequently they list Volga *palʻm* under a headword *malʻm*. 
Abbreviations

Cv.    Chuvash
A      Anatri dialect of Chuvash
V      Viryal dialect of Chuvash
MariE  Meadow and Eastern Mari
W      Hill Mari
NW     Northwestern Mari
PMari  Proto-Mari
PU     Proto-Uralic
Udm.   Udmurt

References

Notes on Mari etymology


Troitskij = Троицкий, В. П. 1895: Черемисско-русский словарь. Казань.


Üpōmarij = Ùпы̆марий (В. М. Васильев) 1926: Марий мутэр. Москва.

