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**AGYAGÁSI, K. Chuvash Historical Phonetics, an Areal Linguistic Study, with an Appendix on the Role of Proto-Mari in the History of Chuvash Vocalism, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2019, XII+334 pp.
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The book under review here, by Klára AGYAGÁSI, named *Chuvash Historical Phonetics* bears the subtitle of *An areal linguistic study, with an Appendix of the Role of Proto-Mari in the History of Chuvash Vocalism*. The volume is 333 pages in total, and I have had the pleasure of reading and reviewing it. Indeed, it is true that any discussion about historical Chuvash must also include the neighbouring Uralic languages of the Mari and the Permic languages, as well as Turkic Tatar due to historical reasons. Since this is an anthology book of her previous research (starting in the 1980s), the style is much the same as in her published papers (43 of which are referenced in this book) with most opinions and evaluations prac-

tically stated as facts, which, however, are usefully backed up by relevant references. The publishing of this book is indeed a perfect overview of her past few decades of focused research into Chuvash and the West Old Turkic languages. An inspiring list of contents is given (after the Foreword): 1. The predecessors of the Chuvash in the Volga region, 2. Oppositions in the Oguric consonant system (Proto-Turkic and Old Turkic period). 3. Oppositions in the WOT/VB vowel system. 4. Changes in the Middle Chuvash period, followed by: Summary, Appendix, Literature, Abbreviations, and Indices.

The Chuvash language itself is the last, very much alive, remnant of what used to be the Bulgarian branch of the Turkic languages. This branch is also known as *lir-Turkic* (due to phonological peculiarities), Oguric Turkic or, West Old Turkic (a geographic term, this last one being the currently most sensible and informative term humbly suggested to me for use by the most adept Turkologist András RÓNA-TAS himself). While the chronology of Proto-Turkic > West Old Turkic (> Chuvash) + East Old Turkic is clear, the stated division of the Turkic linguistic history (on p. 11) into Proto-Turkic, Old Turkic, Middle Turkic, New Turkic and Modern Turkic periods - with each one except for the last category further having an early and a late sub period - was actually new to me, and while accuracy is required and admirable, this seems needlessly complex to me, but this is only my own personal opinion. In any case, AGYAGÁSI presents her findings according to this chronological scale consistently in a fairly convincing and structured fashion.

In the beginning, AGYAGÁSI well presents the many questions, and even mysteries, of the possible origins of the Chuvash ethnicity. From where exactly does the word and tribal name of Chuvash originate, as well as the language? Many works, including archaeological and linguistic sources, are referenced, and the most common errors and alternative interpretations of analyses of earlier research are pointed out. Even data created by ideological or political motifs are discussed and fairly convincingly presented (such as the possibly conscious misreading of the tribal name of *suwar* as *suvaz* > *chuvash*, or the linguistically completely inaccurate suggestion of the possible tribal name change: *savar* > *savir* > *sabir* > *suvar* > *suvas* > *suvash* > *šävăș* > *cävăș*; p. 3-4). More convincing suggestions

are given as quite the excursion (including the probably accurate historical form of *śawaś > modern Chuvash (as it was first recorded in the year 1502; Fedotov 1996: 394), and the final argument is relatively convincing (and the original meaning would have been ‘from the opposite bank’), although I believe more remains to be said on this subject, and one gets the impression that AGYAGÁSI herself is not fully convinced of the explanation given either even as she rounds up the facts. It is wisely suggested that the study of West Old Turkic loanwords into Hungarian could be a primary source for understanding the historical development of the languages and tribal fragments of the 9-10th centuries, which also led to the Chuvash language (p. 10, 16, etc.), but then the nooks and crannies of historical phonology of Hungarian itself are very complex and will require lots of additional work for a complete understanding even if the solid groundwork has already been done.

A (short) chapter whose contents particularly struck a chord of curiosity in me was: 1.2.1.1 *Loans from Proto-Turkic in Mongolian, loans from Proto-Mongolian in Proto-Turkic* (p. 12-13). Would not Proto-Mongolic borrowings into Proto-Turkic be chronologically impossible since Proto-Turkic (generally believed to be from around 4000 years before the present (and contemporary with Proto-Samoyed); Piispanen 2018) predates Proto-Mongolic (from around the 13th century) by several millennia? Therein she correctly states that current research indeed has started to reconstruct proto-forms from before the times of the first Mongol invasions in the 13th century. I believe that these should by current definition be termed Pre-Proto-Mongolic forms, but it seems both possible and likely that the terminology of historical Mongolic languages and proto-forms may be redefined in the future. Therewith, I believe that the title ‘loans from Proto-Mongolian in Proto-Turkic’ is just a misleading misprint and should instead just read ‘loans from Proto-Mongolian in Turkic’ or just ‘loans from Mongolian in Turkic’ because Proto-Mongolian and Proto-Turkic as currently defined are simply not contemporary. Indeed, the whole Altaic theory (suggesting a genetic language relationship between the Turkic, Mongolic, Turkic, and, according to some, also Korean and Japanese languages) debate is again becoming a hot topic in linguistics, and without doubt lots of related findings will be found in the coming years.

Then, as for Turkic loans into the Samoyedic languages (discussed on p. 14), more recent references (beyond RÓNA-TAS's excellent paper from 1988) could be Helinski 1995; Dybo-Normanskaja 2012; Dybo 2014 as well as my own meager account of the topic in Piispanen 2018. Another fascinating topic are the possible Chinese borrowings in West Old Turkic (briefly mentioned and referenced on p. 15, and which then show up at different places throughout the book), a line of research that no doubt deserves to be continued at a later time by those with the fairly unique required linguistic skill-sets.

As to phonetics, we learn most useful tidbits such as the inventory of the reconstructible phonemes of West Old Turkic (by help of the old Hungarian borrowings) being: *p t k b d g n ŋ ń m č j̣ s z š h χ γ* (p. 16). Only some of these are direct continuations of Proto-Turkic phonemes, with the others having either been created under specific phonological conditioning factors, or having been created specifically in West Old Turkic as time went on. The West Old Turkic vowel inventory, then, consists of: /a/, /o/, /u/, /e/, /ö/, /ü/, and /i/ (p. 16). Furthermore, no less than 185 affixed West Old Turkic loanwords found in Hungarian are known, 80 % of the affixes which are also found in East Old Turkic, allow us to build up a plausible history of the Chuvash language.

Then, very early Slavic borrowings, likely from before the middle of the 10th century, are discussed (p. 20-21), and these are very interesting, particularly when one compares to the earliest Slavic borrowings into the Finnic languages which also are now assumed to be quite a bit older than previously assumed; these were earlier assumed to have been borrowed around 1000 AD, but Finnish linguist Petri KALLIO suggests convincingly in his excellent paper from 2006 a possible dating to already before 500 AD. These early Russian, or rather Slavic, borrowings into Chuvash and Finnic, respectively, could thus have originated in the so-called first (500 AD) and second (800 AD) Slavic migration waves. The news of some forthcoming volumes of the new Russian etymological dictionary (edited by the dialectologist ANIKIN) is inspiring (p. 22).

The very important Turkic questions of rhotacism (Proto-Turkic *z > West Old Turkic *r, but retained in East Old Turkic) and lambdacism (the non-universal change of Proto-Turkic *š (> *ś) > West Old Turkic *l) are well presented by numerous lexical examples including borrowings (p. 37-40 and 41-43, respectively). AGYAGÁSI's assumption is therewith that West Old Turkic changed the most and, therefore, that the phonology of East Old Turkic more closely resembles that of Proto-Turkic. The book proceeds with listing numerous other sound changes found in Chuvash, with the appropriate Turkic or other comparisons. An oddity that struck me was that the lexical meanings in Russian were transcribed in Roman letters, and not in Cyrillic, but this must be considered a personal choice of the author.

It is probably the second and third chapters, which focuses on West Old Turkic phonetics, consonants and vowels, respectively, that are the gem of this book. The consonants take up 62 pages in total, and is filled with numerous lexical examples, while the complicated issue of vowels takes up 87 pages. These can, in theory, be used through the index to both etymologize additional Chuvash words as being either originally Turkic, or given new loanword etymologies as borrowings from various sources (likely mostly from Russian, Tatar and Mari). The table summarizing the consonant changes in going from Proto-Turkic into West Old Turkic on page 94 is of particular importance and use, while the complex phonologically conditioned descriptions of vocalism do not seem to lend themselves for such a summary. Even insights into dialectology is given through external sources. The fourth chapter deals with changes specific to Middle Chuvash, and this then takes the study to a new chronological level of detail. Actually, for example, by studying the vocalism, etc. of words borrowed into Chuvash, it should be possible to precisely determine the age of borrowing through the presented sound laws, and that is what AGYAGÁSI does.

At the end of reading the book, considering the “Altaic” theory, which permeates so much of the study of Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic, I must add both my surprise and dismay at the non-inclusion of most Mongolic correspondences to the various Turkic comparisons at hand. How exactly can we tell if the phonetic features of West Old Turkic or East Old Turkic represent the most retained

form of Proto-Turkic? Allow me to offer my own meager reflections in this field, by citing an earlier paper of mine:

“It would seem to me, fairly conclusively actually, as if Chuvash (of Oghur Turkic) is lexically closer to the corresponding forms found in Tungusic and Mongolic, respectively, which should by absolute necessity and logic suggest that Chuvash (and the other extinct Oghur languages) represents the earliest Turkic branch splitting off before the rest turning into the Common Turkic languages.” (Piispanen 2019: 58)

Yes, certainly there are Mongolic borrowings in Chuvash to be found, but there are also numerous roots showing great phonological and semantic similarities between the two which are not borrowings. For example, the following comparison comes to mind: Proto-Turkic **(i)al(č)uk* ‘ankle joint, knucklebone; die’ (Starostin et al. 2003: 292, based on the Clauson 1972: 259, Räsänen 1969: 30, Sevortjan 1974: 216-217, Doerfer 1963-1975/2: 64-65, Tenišev 1997: 288). Sevortjan 1974 reconstructs this as Proto-Turkic **ašyq* ‘ankle joint, knucklebone, arm bone’, while the Tenišev 1997 gives this as Proto-Turkic **ašuk* ‘бабка’, wherein it is also compared to Mongolic **alču* ‘knucklebone; depression on the side of an anklebone’ and Tungusic **alču-xan* ‘knucklebone’ (given as **(x)ajū* ‘knucklebone’ in the Cincus 1975: 23). East Old Turkic has *ašuk* ‘ankle joint’ (Clauson 1972: 259). The Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic forms are astoundingly similar, but there is little reason to believe borrowings in these cases (except perhaps into Tungusic where it is less well-attested). Unfortunately, in this case, the Chuvash cognate of the Turkic root is missing altogether since the language has opted to instead start using other descriptive words for these functions. If it had existed in Chuvash, one could argue for Proto-Turkic **al(č)uk* > Volga Bulghar **alčuq* > Chuvash *ošâx* (Viryal dialect) ~ *ušâx* (Anatri and standard language), but these are only tentative Chuvash forms, reconstructed by request by my capable colleague A. SAVELYEV. Perhaps they can be found borrowed into other language in the Volga area before the root was lost in Chuvash? Comparisons such as these – and there are quite a few of them to be made some being much better than the root discussed above – strongly suggest that West Old Turkic has some sort of close correspondences to be found in Mongolic and Tungusic, while East Old Turkic are instead potentially the aberrant, most changed forms from Proto-Turkic, contrary to the thesis of AGYAGÁSI’s book. However, being a mere layman in the field

of “Altaic” studies, I may be entirely wrong in this regard, but still I must pose this valid question.

Indeed, it would have been most fulfilling to have been able to read about AGYAGÁSI’s thoughts about the “Altaic” theory in this book, which is filled with Chuvash goodness, but while she seemingly marks her anti-Altaist stance by noting that some of the similarities between the Turkic and Mongolic languages originated in very early language contacts of two genetically non-affiliated languages, she later also sensibly notes that she will not touch upon the “Altaic” question because she is not familiar with various aspects of the study (p. 36). Earlier, on p. 12, she briefly touches on various Altaist theorists, probably quoting it all correctly, but yet here it may perhaps be useful to warn all new reader, i.e. those new to the “Altaic” theory debate: it has become quite well known by now that a fair deal of the materials being quoted by both camps are in error regarding the early details of the Altaic theory and who stood for what, who presented what, and so on, with old errors propagating in the scientific literature. Quoting the early literature will require reading it all through carefully, and that is a major undertaking to say the least. Still, some insights into at least quoting it all correctly, which AGYAGÁSI may have done, is found elsewhere (Georg et al. 1998; Jankowski 2013), and these are useful starting resources in this debate. Perhaps other future researchers will be able to use her vast data on West Old Turkic to further analyse these questions in new detail.

All in all, this anthological research book is concisely and methodically written. In addition to the informed main topic of this book – Chuvash historical phonetics – I am particularly pleased by the extensive referencing throughout the book, numerous explicit and interesting tangentially informative footnotes, and the vast number of lexical examples. The details pertaining to the neighbouring languages, and likely connections and historical contacts are also fascinating and of great use. In the initial pages, AGYAGÁSI states the goal of determining, describing and setting up processes in chronological order which describe a language from an earlier point of departure into becoming the present state of the language. Another goal is to let linguistics act as an auxiliary science corre-

lating with ethnicity and history to provide arguments for historical conclusions. The layout of the book, which main focus is phonetic processes and systems, clearly pursues these goals, and with the addition of the spread out notes on other languages and the very extensive Appendix on the Mari language, it would seem clear that the goals have been reached. The 51-page long Mari Appendix in itself is very ambitious, and offers a lot to the study of Mari phonetics, which should benefit current researchers into such directly or peripherally, like for example Ante AIKIO, Jussi YLIKOSKI, Mikhail ZHIVLOV, Christopher CULVER, Alexander SAVELYEV, Alexander PUSTYAKOV and several others. Further, local ethnohistories and substratum effects are discussed, as are hydronyms derived from earlier assimilated Baltic populations in the area (p. 265), and other fascinating tidbits are mentioned. Thus, the volume is a valuable resource for anyone involved in the study of the Chuvash language in particular as well as in general linguistic studies of the Volga area. The verdict will be that this extensive work is a most valuable addition exactly to the research of Chuvash historical phonetics, a field long having been in great need of more insightful research results for understanding its complete picture. While long-time followers of AGYAGÁSI's research – which is well-cited nowadays – will recognize most of the materials presented in this book, it is still a chronologically presented and well summarizing compendium belonging to the *Turcologica* series (established in 1985 by Turcologist Lars JOHANSON) offering a more complete picture than any single paper or smaller groups of papers. Indeed, Chuvash is a key language for understanding Proto-Turkic itself, and understanding it fully, will likely provide extensive breakthroughs not only in Proto-Turkic studies, but also for the Altaic language hypothesis itself.

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