

On Mongolian *asara*- “to nourish” and Turkish *aşa*- “to eat” From Middle Mongolian to Modern Turkic Languages

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The lexical similarities between Turkic and Mongolian languages have always been exciting and were the topic of ardent discussions. These languages and borrowings that occurred between them at different times have been notably gripping especially for the young researchers who have just started to learn and study both languages. This topic provides an opportunity for leading researchers of this field for comparing the phonetical and lexical equivalences. General studies on this topic can be found in the bibliography section of the study I compiled on the phonic **d-* of Altaic languages in 1991. In particular, discussions among Poppe, Clauson, Doerfer and Tekin are relevant to what I mentioned above. The correspondence studies between these languages had been carried out until the early 20th century. The works of Clauson (1962), Poppe (1965) and Tekin (1976) provide ample relevant information on this topic.

The first significant and frequent lexical exchanges started to be seen in the mid-13th century when Genggis Kagan gained hegemony in Central Asia. The borrowings between these two languages were reviewed at three stages in Clauson’s work. (For details, see *Studies*, p. 217, 220 and 221.)

The Turkish borrowings in Middle Mongolian were listed by Poppe in 1955. The two subsequent studies on this topic belong to Clauson (*CAJ* IV and *CAJ* V). In particular, the study of Clauson, entitled “The Turkish Elements in the 14th Century Mongolian” includes the phonetic equivalences substitutions in these borrowings.

In this article I will deal with the Turk. verb *aşa*- “essen, speisen,” which was discussed in some of the studies mentioned above. But it has not even been mentioned in some of these studies which was first divergently handled by Ramstedt in 1957 (*Einführung*, I, 109). Ramstedt compared that verb to *ali-sun* “Spreu” (*Einführung*, I, 109; II, 139 Turk. *aş* “Speise”, Mo. *ali-sun*

‘Spreu’, Ko. *al* ‘Samen, Getreide, Korn’, *Einführung*, II, 201). I presume Ramstedt’s comparison did not get wide ranging acceptance by scholars because Poppe did not mention the verb *aşa-* in his study of the comparative phonetics of the Altaic languages (cf. *Vergleichende Grammatik*).

In parallel with the OT verb *aşa-*, in the Middle Mongolian, we observe the verb *asara-* ‘to protect; to raise, bring up’: SHM *asaraḥu* ‘besorgen, in Obhut nehmen, aufziehen’ (MNT, II, 9).

Turk. *aşa-* and Mo. *asara-* sometimes are seen as interrelated with each other (details are below). In EDAL, which appeared nearly 40 years after Ramstedt’s studies, the Proto Altaic *ēs[i]* ‘to take care’ was mentioned as well as the lexis such as **ēske-* in Tung, **asara-* in Mo., **es* in Turk, **isàma-* in Ja, and **às-kàb*, **às-kí-* in Ko. (for details for each language, see EDAL, p. 521-522). I am going to focus on Mo. *asara* and Turk. *es* examples from EDAL.

The authors of EDAL, after giving place to Mo. morphos related with the verb *asara-* in historical and modern resources, state that it was combined with Turk. *aşa-* by Róna-Tas and Clark, and it means ‘quite improbable’ (EDAL p. 521).

At first, I want to indicate that the base *es* mentioned by the writers of EDAL has not been encountered in the Old and Middle Turkic sources.¹ *Es* only occurs in modern Turkic languages. *Es* that appears in a shared Proto Altaic base is not included in a text from ancient times. We do not have examples that equate Turk. *e* and Mo. *a* either (all of *Vergleichende* can be reviewed for this matter.) For that matter, at the end of the paragraph devoted to this equation, Dybo, one of the authors of the dictionary, expressed a different opinion: “Дыбо 14. Vocalism is not quite certain (in Mong. one would rather expect a front **e-*)” (EDAL p. 522).

¹ Clauson 252 b: “D **esirge:-** Den. V.(?) but not semantically connected with any known word ***es**; the basic meaning was apparently ‘to regret’ which evolved in two opposite directions; (1) ‘to be sorry for (someone)’ (2) ‘to regret parting with (something); to grudge’. Survives in NC Kır., Kzx., and SW Osm. Uyğ. viii ff. Bud. **yırıḡ taḡlayu ésirgeyü iḡlayu** ‘admiring the song, pitying him and weeping’ pp. 71, 3-4: **Xak.** xı **ol esirge:di: ne:ḡni: taḡassara** ‘alā fawti’l-ṣay’ wa ta’assafa ‘he regretted the loss of the thing and was distressed’ *Kaş.* I 306 (**esirge:r**, **esirge:me:k**): **Çağ.** xv ff. **ésirge- dirīḡ dāştan** ‘to grudge, withhold’ *San.* 103r. 16 (quotns.): **Xwar.** xiv **esirge-** ‘to pity (someone Acc.)’ *Qutb* 22: **Kom.** xiv ditto *CCG*; *Gr.* 94 (quotn.): **Kıp.** xiv **esirge- raḥima** ‘to pity’ *İd.* 13: xv ditto *Tuh.* 17b. 3: **Osm.** xiv ff. **esirge-** ‘to pity’; c.i.a.p.; the second translation ‘to protect’ is less common *TTS* I 278; II 400; III 266; IV 310: xviii after Çağ. entry; ‘and in *Rūmī raḥm kardan San.* 103r. 16”

The relationship between Mo. *asara*- “to nourish, take care of” and Turk. *aşa*- “to feed” was dealt with extensively by Róna-Tas. It seems that the first scholar who noticed the affinity between the bases of these verbs was Róna-Tas. Róna-Tas put forward his ideas on that affinity while examining and criticizing the theory of Altaic Languages through such items as Chuv. *usra*-, GT *asra*-, *asira*-, and Mo. *asara*-: MMo. *as(a)ra*- “to nourish, take care of” → **asra*- > Chuv. *usra*- (cf. Tat. *asra*-, Bashk *asira*-, Kirg., Kazk., Nog., Kklp., Kum, Krč., Alt., Hak., Tuv., Uzb., NUig., Turki, Salar, Yellow Uig.) ← Mong *asa* + *ra*- → Manchu; See Turkic *aş* “food”, *aşa*- “to feed” (Róna-Tas, p. 202).²

As we will mention subsequently, Róna-Tas correctly compares Mo. *asa* with Turk. *aş* and shows the second vowel in Mo. (). Now let us look at the information related with these two verbs collected from Mo. and Turk. sources before returning to Róna-Tas’s work.

The earliest occurrence of the word *aş* and its derivative forms come from the Old Turkic Inscriptions which date from 720 (or later). However, we have only *aş* (? T 8) and *aşsız* (KT East side 26, BK East side 21) in the Orkhon Inscriptions. We do not see the verb *aşa*- “to eat”; the only verb attested for the meaning “to eat” is *ye-* in these inscriptions.

Aş and *aşa*- occur in Old Uighur texts, which date to mostly after the 9th century or later: *künkä aşadukımız beş täñri yarokı* “What everyday we eat is the light of ‘Five Gods’” (according to *Chuastuanift* line 328, cf. also *UigWb* 240 b). Here and after that, in Old Uighur *aşa*- means not only “to eat”, but also “empfangen; genießen; erleiden [to receive; to enjoy; to suffer]”: *adın kişi aşamak törösi yok* “es gibt kein Gesetz dem, nach dem ein anderer [die Tatenfrucht] empfangen würde” (*UigWb* 241a). For more examples and details, see *UigWb* 240 b-241b.

In addition to the Uighur texts, DLT also has the same word: “*ür aş aşadı* the man ate (*akala*) the food. The Khāqāniyya use this word only of nobility; the other Turks use it without distinction, and this is according to rule.” *CTD*, II, 281.

Aşa- is mostly a synonym with *ye-* in most historical and some modern languages. (See OTWF § 5.11, s. 418.)³

² Except direct and compiled citations, I have changed *č* to *ç*, *γ* to *ğ*, *ǰ* to *c*, *ng* to *η*, *š* to *ş*.

³ “5.11 +A- *aş+a-* ‘to eat’. In this sense practically a synonym with *ye-*; except that *ye-* is sometimes used to signify ‘to devour’, or in some other negative senses,

For historical examples on *aşa-*, see Clauson.⁴ More examples from Old Uighur in the publications appeared after 1988 will be discussed in the new edition of *UigWb* (Verbs) in detail (forthcoming).

In Middle Mongolian we have the following form: *asara-* “besorgen, in Obhut nehmen; aufziehen”, MNT II, S. 9.

In Classical Mongolian, we also have *asara-* meaning “to be compassionate; to take care, raise, foster, nourish, or support by charity; to be a benefactor or philanthropist; to love” (Lessing 56b). For more derivations, see Lessing.

In modern Mongolian, we have *asra-* (*asrax*) “uhajivat, zabotitsya (nurse, look after; take care of)” MonOrT 46 a.

Now we can turn back our attention to the problem and discuss the relationship between *aş*, *aşa-* and *asara-*: First of all, Mo. *asara-* is related to a never attested **asa* which goes to Turkish *aş*. It is well known that if

whereas *aşa-* is positive. This fits well with Kāšgari’s statement that the Xākānī Turks use *aşa-* only of the nobility, and accords with the fact that *aşa-* is derived, i.e. secondary: It may have arisen as a euphemism. Nevertheless, cf. the biverb *aşa- ye-* in TT V B 53 and elsewhere. Also signifies ‘to enjoy (something, not just food)’, ‘to enjoy, sc. life’, rarely even ‘to suffer something’. See the *UW* entry for exs. A further instance from Schwitz 32 should be added to par. 2 of that entry; cf. the runic ex. in the *EDPT*.”

⁴ ED p. 256 b: “D **aşa:-** Den. V. fr. **1 a:s**; properly ‘to eat’ in a physical sense; sometimes metaph. ‘to eat up, destroy’ or ‘to enjoy, experience (something)’. S.i.a.m.l.g. Cf. **yé:-**. **Türkü** VIII ff. (or, if it is savoury food) **a:şa:yı:n** ‘may I eat it’ *Toyok III* 1r. 7 (*ETY II* 179): Man. **künke aşadukumuz bés tegri yarukı** ‘the light of the five gods which we have enjoyed daily’ *Chuas.* 300-1: **Uyğ.** VIII ff. Bud. **kértgünç erser nomluğ tatığğ aşaguluk élig erür** ‘as for faith, it is the hand with which one consumes the sweet (food) of the doctrine’ *TT V* 22, 45; o.o. *PP* 50, 3-5 (**uduğ**); *TT V* 24, 53 (**yé- aşa-**) *Suv.* 529, 13 (ditto); in Buddhist terminology the *skandha* of *vedanā* ‘perception’, usually translated **teginmek**, is sometimes translated **aşamak** *TT VI*, p. 66, note 157: **Xak.** XI **er aş aşadı:** ‘the man eat (*akala*) the food’; the Xākānī Turks use this word only of the nobility (*al-akābira*), but other Turks use it indiscriminately *Kaş. III* 253 (**aşa:r, aşā:ma:k**); it is pointed out in *III* 261, 7-11 that **aşa:r** is the Aor. of both **1 a:s-** and **aşa:-**: **KB sevinçin avınçm küvençin éli aşasu** ‘may he enjoy his realm in joy, happiness and pride’ 123; o.o. 836, 1480: **Çağ.** XV ff. **aşa-** (spelt) *xwurdan wa āšāmīdan* ‘to eat and drink’ *San.* 41r. 14: **Xwar.** XIII(?) **aşa- iç-** ‘to eat and drink’ *Oğ.* 94, 364: XIV **aşa-** *Qutb* 13, *MN* 96: **Kom.** XIV ‘to eat’ **aşa-** *CCI*; *Gr.:* **Kıp.** XIII *akala-* (**ye:-** and) **aşa-** *Hou.* 43, 9.”

Mongolian borrows a word from Turkish that ends in a consonant, the loanword ends with an added vowel.⁵

Mo. *aba* “chase, hunt” Lessing 2 b <= OT *ab*

Mo. *agta* “gelding; castrated” Lessing 15 b <= OT *at*

Mo. *araga* “molar; tooth of a cogwheel” Lessing 47 b <= OT *azığ*

⁵ Such vowels appear just in the first and second period loans. Some scholars accept or believe that those word correspondences/equivalences are good evidence for the genetic relationship between Mongolian and Turkish. But at this point my aim is not to argue this problem; I have already discussed this matter in a paper read in 2002 in Beijing. Of course, examples I mentioned here are just a selection on the topic. Some of these examples belong to the first period and some to the second period loans in Mongolian (see *Studies* p. 217). In my opinion, an important difference between the first and the second period (also the third period) is the Old Turkic *ş* and its representations in Mongolian: In the first period Turkish loans in Mongolian we find *-lb-*, *-lc-* or *-lç-* = *ş*: *kalbaga* (< Tu. *kaşık*), in the second and third period loans we have mainly *s* = *ş*: *ulus* (< Tu. *uluş*).

After I had prepared the above-mentioned list, I saw U. Posch’s compilation at *Altaistik* (pp. 23-25). I have checked his list in relations to our topic. Some of the items in the list are not suitable for our comparison: Tu. *āb*, *āv* / Mo. *egüden* “Hüte”; Tu. *barq* / Mo. *baraga* “Objekt”; Tu. *bızağ(ı)* / Mo. *birägu* “Kalb”; Tu. *çab* / Mo. *çabi* “Lenden”; Tu. *çaq-* / Mo. *çaqi-* “reiben”; Tu. *çoq-* / Mo. *çoqi-* “klopfen”; Tu. *ög* / Mo. *eke* “Mutter / Mo. mother”; Tu. *oy* ? *ög* / Mo. *oyun* “verstanden”; Tu. *qır* / Mo. *kira* “gesicht /”; Tu. *saq-* / Mo. *saqi-* “verteidigen, bewachen”; Tu. *suç-* / Mo. *suçu-* “rennen in gebeugter Haltung”; Tu. *sür* / Mo. *süri* “Titel”; Tu. *tart-* / Mo. *tata-* “schlappen”; Tu. *tün* / Mo. *tündür* “Nacht / Night”; Tu. *yos* / Mo. *yosun* “Gesetz”.

For example, the correspondence of Tu. *bızağ(ı)* / Mo. *birägu* “Kalb” is not of the type I mentioned above. The Turkish word always had three syllables in Old Turkic and developed into a two- syllable word later on. Therefore, it is not possible to put forward a correspondence of Tu. two syllables = Mo. three syllables here. *küs-* “wollen” (the correct form is *küse-* as in Mo.), *saq-*, *suç-*, and *yos* forms mentioned here are not attested in Old Turkic.

Although they may seem relevant, some of the connections made in that list are not directly related to the topic discussed above: Tu. *bäk* / Mo. *beki* “stark”; Tu. *bay* / Mo. *bayan* “Reich”; Tu. *omuz* / Mo. *omuruğun* “Pferdebrust”; Tu. *ot* / Mo. *oçin* “Feuer”; Tu. *qadaq* / Mo. *qadağasun* “Nagel”; Tu. *qatığ* / Mo. *qatağu* “hart”; Tu. *qoy* ~ *qony* / Mo. *qonin* “Schaf”; Tu. *qulaq* / Mo. *qulağu* “Ohr”; Tu. *qut* / Mo. *qutuğ* “Glück”; Tu. *sag* / Mo. *sayin* < **sağın* “gut”; Tu. *yüräk* / Mo. *cirüken* “Herz”. In addition, the form *omuz* is a very late form and is not attested in Old Turkic, therefore, it has to be taken out from the list. Another word that has to be taken out of the list is the word *tavuk* which was paired with Mo. *takiya(n)* “chicken”. Because the Old Turkic form of this word is *takıgu*.

- Mo. *asa-* “to stick, cling to” Lessing 55 b3, *Vergleichende* 65 <= OT *as-*
 Mo. *berke* “difficult, hard” Lessing 99 b <= OT *bärk*
 Mo. *boda* “substance, matter; body” Lessing 108 b2 <= OT *bod*
 Mo. *boro* “grey, brown; dark” Lessing 121 a-b <= OT *boz*
 Mo. *bütü-* “to be(come) formed or fulfilled” Lessing 152 a <= OT *büt-*
 Mo. *çida-* “to be able, be capable” Lessing 176 a <= OT *tid-*
 Mo. *çilağun*⁶ “stone, rock” Lessing 182 a <= OT *taş*
 Mo. *düri-* “shape, form, figure; appearance” Lessing 282 a <= OT *yüz*
 Mo. *ere* “man, male” Lessing 321 a <= OT *är*
 Mo. *erke* “right, power” Lessing 328 b <= OT *ärk*
 Mo. *ikire, ikere* “twins” Lessing 401 b <= OT *ikiz*
 Mo. *qağa-* “to close; to block” Lessing 905 a < cf. OT *kapgak, kapıg,*
kapa- etc.
 Mo. *qalbağ(n)* “spoon” Lessing 97 b <= OT *kaşık*
 Mo. *kerçi-* “to cut, mince” Lessing 905 a <= OT *kärt-*
 Mo. *kirğa-* “to cut off, sheer” Lessing 471 b <= OT *kırk-*
 Mo. *kisa-* “to hamper, impede” Lessing 473 b <= OT *kıs-*
 Mo. *kögürge, kögerge* “bridge” Lessing 480 a2 <= OT *köprüg*
 Mo. *köke* “blue, sky-blue” Lessing 482 a <= OT *kök*
 Mo. *quça(n)* “ram” Lessing 979 a <= OT *koç*⁷
 Mo. *quçi-, quça-* “to cover, cover up” Lessing 979 a <= OT *kuç-*
 Mo. *küçü(n)* “power” Lessing 496 a <= OT *küç*
 Mo. *nidurğa* “fist” Lessing 578 a <= OT *yudruk, yidruk*
 Mo. *önge*⁸ “color” Lessing 637 b <= OT *ön*
 Mo. *saga-* “to milk” Lessing 656 a <= OT *sag-*
 Mo. *sere-* “to awaken” Lessing 689 a <= OT *sez-*
 Mo. *söge-* “to become hoarse or husky” Lessing 730 b <= cf. OT *sökäl*
 “ill, sick” ED 820 b⁹
 Mo. *uçra-* “to meet, come across” Lessing 859 b <= cf. OT *utru*
 “opposite, facing” (< **utur-*)

⁶ In general, Mo. *çilağun* compared with Tu. *taş* (**tāš*) by both altaists and contra-altaists, but there is not a satisfactory explanation for a +*ğun* suffix anywhere (cf. Mongolistik and other works). An older, reconstructed form “Pre-Mongolian *ılağun*” is included in *Comparative* (p. 114); there is only a deverbal -*ğun* in Mongolian, see TMEN II, § 855, especially p. 438; ED 557 a2.

⁷ For another example Mo. *u* = Tü. *o*, cf. Mo. *huriyan* = Tü. *kozi*.

⁸ I will deal with *önge, miñgan* and similar words in another article.

⁹ Clauson thinks that *sökäl* perhaps goes back to *sök-* “to kneel down” ED 819 a2.

Mo. *uka-* “to understand, know” Lessing 890 b <= OT *uk-* “to understand (something Acc.)” ED 77 b¹⁰

Mo. *uran* “artist, craftsman” Lessing 879 b <= OT *uz* “a skilled craftsman” ED 277 b

Secondly, the suffix in *asara-* is not a deverbal medial or simulative like in some OT examples (cf. for medial *-r-* UigWb *alañur-* from *alañu-*, *ägir-*, *köpir-* etc. OTWF II p. 535-538). On the contrary, this is a denominal verb like **asa+ra-*:

Mo. *köke* “blue” > *köke+re-* “to become blue”

Mo. *kögşin* “old” > *kögşire-* “to become old”¹¹

Mo. *ügei* “poor” > *ügeyire-* “to become poor”

Mo. *şira* “yellow” > *şirayira-* “to become yellow”¹²

The same suffix occurs also in Chaghatay Turkic with a similar function:

gandra- “to stink, smell badly” < Persian *gand* “stink, stench, foul smell”

muñra- “to be worried or sad” < *muñ* “sadness, sorrow”

têlbere- “to go mad, become insane” < *têlbe* “mad, insane, crazy”¹³

Mongolian *asara-* comes back to Turkic after the first half of 13th century. For Uighur *asıra-*, see UigWb 232-233: and also VEWT p. 29. For other examples from modern Turkic languages, see ESTYa I p. 173. Turkic forms are mostly with *-ı-* instead of *-a-*, as in Old Uighur and in some modern languages (like Tuvinian *azıra-* TuwW p. 83 a).

¹⁰ For *utur-* “to oppose one another” cf. Middle Turkic work *Muqaddimat al-adab* (according to Yong-Söng Li, p. 512, footnote 512) and ED: **utur-* (...) “became an early l.-w. in Mong. as *uçıra-* ‘to meet’” 67 b.

¹¹ For *köke* “blue” to *kögşin* “old” need to think “*grey > old”; compare it semantically to Tuv. *kök* “blue; grey” and *kökpeş* (TuwW 206-207), Mo. *köke(n)* “blue; ash-colored, dark (of face)” Lessing 482 a.

¹² For examples, see Poppe, *Written* § 246, p. 65;

¹³ János Eckmann, *Chagatay Manual*, Bloomington 1966, p. 70. What Eckmann mentions here *ög+re-n-* “to get used to, learn” from Old Uighur *ög* “reason, sense, comprehension” is not an acceptable etymology any more. For a more plausible etymology for *ögrän-* from *ögür* “herd” as **ögür+ä-n-*, see OTWF p. 609-610. What Ramstedt mentions in his comparative study of Mongolian and Turkic, denominal verbs have different suffixes, there is only *asra-* related to our topic (see p. 34).

What I dissent from Róna-Tas's explanation is about the etymology of **asa*±. Róna-Tas accepts that *asara*- is a verbal derivation and he compares it with Mongolian *ebdere*- meaning "to break down" < *ebde*- "to destroy", *dabara*- "to exceed" < *daba*- "to climb over", *bulgara*- "to be uprooted".¹⁴ Many examples in different studies formed with *-ra/-re-* or *+ra-/+re-* are mostly reflexive, intransitive or onomatopoetic verbs;¹⁵ but *asara*- is a transitive verb and for that reason we can compare the denominal suffix *+rA-* with Turkic *+lA-*; for *r ~ l* alternation, see Poppe, *Comparative Studies*, p. 160-161.¹⁶ On this topic, see also TMEN I § 20, TMEN IV, N 11 = 1956.

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¹⁴ For the same conclusion, see also L. Clark 1980, p. 42.

¹⁵ For such examples, see above *kökere-* etc.

¹⁶ The weak aspect of my comparison of *+lA-* > *+rA-* is that such alternations or dissimilation related mostly with an *-r-* consonant at a word root. Secondly, the suffix *+lA-* may be a late borrowing in Mongolian during the Chagatay period. But we have *asara-* in Mongolian from earliest texts.

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- Mo: Mongolian
- MonOrT: LUVSANDENDEV, A., 1957: *Mongol Oros Tol'*, Moskva.
- OT: Old Turkic
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